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# Domestic Spaces in Transition: Modern Representations of Dwelling in the Texts of Elizabeth Bowen

Shannon Tivnan

*University of South Florida*, [stivnan@mail.usf.edu](mailto:stivnan@mail.usf.edu)

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Domestic Spaces in Transition: Modern Representations of Dwelling in the Texts of

Elizabeth Bowen

by

Shannon L. Tivnan

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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Major Professor: Phillip Sipiora, Ph.D.  
Pat Rogers, Ph.D.  
Victor Peppard, Ph.D.  
Marty Gould, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

In much of the writing of twentieth century Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen, houses, and in particular family homes, often reflect the psychological and social status of their inhabitants. They can be understood as the structural embodiments of the vast cultural and economic network taking shape as the forces of urbanization and industrialization changed the landscape. Yet, even as these domestic spaces represent the predominant social relations characterizing the first half of the twentieth century, the family homes also can play a key role in character development and gender identity, defining the lives of those who inhabit them, by perpetuating these same previously established and codified social roles and relationships. The family home in Bowen is often characterized by the furniture and objects that fill and structure its interior space, and the resulting pattern of experience functions to confine and represent the lives and expectations of its residents. As a result, for each of these families, this domestic space and the memories with which it is associated exert a strong and compelling force on the family members' present psychological and emotional states, as well as their expectations for the future. Although the social conventions of the family home can be suffocating in their definition of these expectations, especially for the women of the house, these conventions also supply a stability and constancy that is perhaps conducive to the very formation of a stable identity. The security promised by the inner order of the home comes to determine the psychological stability of the inhabitants' subjective reality, though the many upheavals that inundated the first half of the twentieth century succeeded in revealing that spatial security as an illusion. If Bowen's

characters are to succeed in achieving a self-determined identity in the new, precarious reality of the modern century, they must not only reconcile themselves to the legacy of the family home and the past traditions that it embodies, but also determine a new basis for self-realization as a twentieth century subject outside of the prescribed roles defined and perpetuated by a more traditional domestic space.

In order to determine the extent to which these modern family homes reflect the dominant social discourses of the period and perpetuate their codes of identity and behavior, it will be necessary to acknowledge and take into consideration the political and cultural environment in which Bowen's representations of domestic space exist. For example, Bowen's depiction of the Anglo-Irish Big House Danielstown in *The Last September* must be understood in light of the declining political and economic power of the Ascendancy that occurred throughout the early twentieth century. In a further effort to examine the significance of homes in Elizabeth Bowen, I will also focus on selected texts from her short fiction. The moments of dispossession that are scattered throughout Bowen's texts appear to suggest the possibility of the fictions that lie behind the stability of both the family home and the identities of family members attached to that space.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In much of the writing of twentieth century Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen, houses, and in particular family homes, often reflect the psychological and social status of their inhabitants. They can be understood as the structural embodiments of the vast cultural and economic network taking shape as the forces of urbanization and industrialization changed the landscape. Yet, even as these domestic spaces represent the predominant social relations characterizing the first half of the twentieth century, the family homes also can play a key role in character development and gender identity, defining the lives of those who inhabit them, by perpetuating these same previously established and codified social roles and relationships.

### **Elizabeth Bowen and the Family Home**

The family home in Bowen is often characterized by the furniture and objects that fill and structure its interior space, and the resulting pattern of experience functions to confine and represent the lives and expectations of its residents. As a result, for each of these families, this domestic space and the memories with which it is associated exert a strong and compelling force on the family members' present psychological and emotional states, as well as their expectations for the future. Although the social conventions of the family home can be suffocating in their definition of these expectations, especially for the women of the house, these conventions also supply a stability and constancy that is perhaps conducive to the very formation of a stable identity. The security promised by the inner order of the home comes to determine the psychological stability of the inhabitants' subjective reality, though the many upheavals that inundated the first half of the twentieth century succeeded in revealing that spatial security as an

illusion. If Bowen's characters are to succeed in achieving a self-determined identity in the new, precarious reality of the modern century, they must not only reconcile themselves to the legacy of the family home and the past traditions that it embodies, but also determine a new basis for self-realization as a twentieth century subject outside of the prescribed roles defined and perpetuated by a more traditional domestic space.

Bowen herself expressed an interest in exploring characters in transition in her last published work, the posthumous nonfiction collection *Pictures and Conversations*, and in much of her fiction this transition is not only one toward self-recognition, but also one of physical movement from the family home (41).<sup>1</sup> The devastating physical destruction of two World Wars, as well as the rapidly advancing industrialization and urbanization in modern society, led to a growing homelessness, both literally and psychologically. In her fiction, Bowen's characters' various responses to this dispossession hint at the extent to which they have previously defined themselves through the intimate place of the home and the extent to which they are spiritually homesick when they are dispossessed of that influential experience of dwelling. In both her interest in places and in her fiction, Bowen explores the relationships between subjects and their constructed surroundings, including the buildings in which they dwell and even the objects within them, and in doing so, I would argue, Bowen seeks to reveal the historical and psychological meanings that these places have accumulated. These meanings appear to originate in both man's practical and imaginative experience in these various environments, though the meanings that result function to create and reinforce social conventions and define expectations as to class and gender. These expectations, in turn, seek to create stable patterns of behavior and

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<sup>1</sup> In *Pictures and Conversations* Bowen expressed the idea that with these various transitions, her characters always brought a keen awareness of the experience as experience: "Someone remarked, Bowen characters are almost perpetually in transit. Arguably: if you are to include transitions from room to room or floor to floor of the same house, or one to another portion of its surroundings. I agree, Bowen characters are in transit *consciously*...An arrival, even into another room, is an event to be registered in some way" (41-2).

identity. Thus, the stability of any perceived subjectivity is inevitably connected to the stability of the experience of home as a relative permanent place of dwelling. This apparent spatial stability of place is a security and discreteness promised and maintained by the secure boundary of the family home, establishing a clearly marked “inside” and “outside.” However, once this secure sense of place is called into question by the social and technological changes of the twentieth century, which transformed our experience of space and time by compressing distances traversed and blurring boundaries that had previously separated self from other, both the meanings and the conventions that resulted from them are also challenged. In other words, by focusing on the moment of loss and displacement, Bowen reveals the changing nature of twentieth century spatial relations and its connection to the simultaneous transformation taking place in our understanding of individual subjectivity and identity formation.

Furthermore, Bowen provides numerous indications as to why so many of these characters who struggle with, and are eventually liberated by, the psychological, and even at times physical, destruction of the family home are women by showing these characters in states of domestic displacement or homelessness. If women are to remain in their traditional roles at home without any chance of defining themselves through any other activity, then the physical destruction or cultural abandonment of the family home has the potential to displace the identities of the female members of the household upon whom it is interdependent. If houses become homes through the accumulation of traditions and the stability provided by a fixed arrangement of furniture and objects, it is perhaps an effort on the part of the family members themselves to impose order in a world that is constantly changing and disrupting plans and expectations.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, products of material culture, from interior furnishings to the fashions of

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<sup>2</sup> In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, humanist geographer Yi Fu Tuan distinguishes between the house as a typical place of temporary pause (in the open freedom of space) and the home as a special type of place



clothing, can be understood as culturally significant in that they reveal the various conventions, beliefs and priorities of the society from which they emerge. In the destruction of the domestic nucleus of order that is the family home, which characterizes the modern society of the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the forces of industrialization, urbanization and war, the world again asserts its unpredictability. For a few characters, this dispossession can prove liberating if they possess the imagination necessary to redefine their feminine and masculine identities outside of the traditional binary oppositions that characterized nineteenth century domestic space. For as the Anglo-Irish Big Houses are burned to the ground and the London townhouses are devastated in the bombardment of WWII, the gendered identities that existed in these spaces are also rendered open to transformative change. For those who lack the imagination or the courage to envision their roles anew in the twentieth century, this disruption of space and identity becomes a source of melancholy and anxiety. Bowen highlights this fundamental role of the home in psychological development and gender definition through depictions of traumatic displacement, which serve to bring into focus connections and dependencies by disrupting memory. Whether it is from the dispossession or abandonment of the family home, as in the case of the Anglo-Irish, or the violence of war that destroys all sense of stability with regards to place and identity, this traumatic loss of the family structure succeeds in revealing the structure of the family and individuals who live within its walls.

Bowen often focuses on those individuals who are in a state of transition from earlier and more traditional patterns of existence: for example, in her depiction of characters struggle against the often oppressive sterility of Anglo-Irish society in several of the novels and short stories.

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characterized by intimate familiarity: “Home is an intimate place. We *think* of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well” (144). Tuan suggests that our experience of a house becomes an experience of home with the accumulation of memories that connect us to the objects that exist within this particular place.

Patterns of domesticity and social convention frame the lives of those Bowen characters who exist in this polite, structured society, though the extent of the influence is often not clearly understood until those same patterns are challenged or disrupted. The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy have lost their power and influence and the symbols of that power, the Big Houses, are being burned through Ireland in an effort to break their mythic hold on the land itself as well as the cultural imagination of the native Irish Catholics by the time Bowen is writing her first collection of short stories *Encounters*, which is published in 1923. Though her own family home Bowen's Court did not burn during the Irish Civil War of the early 1920s, many Anglo-Irish Big Houses were destroyed as the native Irish sought to reestablish physical and cultural control of the country's landscape.<sup>3</sup> This final Ascendancy dispossession formed part of Bowen's early formative experience and so it is with her non-fiction accounts of her family history and the resulting significance of place in her own writing that we will begin our exploration of domestic places in Bowen's texts. Yet, even prior to engaging these texts, it is necessary to have an understanding of our basic connection to the concepts of space and place. Before we can determine how the twentieth century individual's experience of space was altered by the often chaotic changes in modern life, we must first apprehend the origins of our connection to and need for the experience of dwelling in life.

### **Foundation in Space and Place: Place as Essential Experience**

All human experience of space begins with a sensory perception of environment. Through visual and tactile cues, we begin to understand and explore our environment. Interpretation of those sensory cues accumulates, both in retrospect by looking back and in expectation from looking forward, and the resulting comprehension becomes our experience of

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<sup>3</sup> In *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*, Terence Brown quantifies the destruction that took place during this time period: "Between 6 December 1921 and 22 March 1923 192 Big Houses were burned by incendiaries as reported in the *Morning Post* of 9 April 1923" (86).

our spatial surroundings. Thus, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains man's gradual realization of his location in space in his examination of our intimate psychological connection to and organization of spatial reality in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. For, our experience of space becomes our reality of it as we construct a "network of places" in which to exist: thus, space becomes organized around areas of pause, which we experience as "place." These places accumulate value and meaning from these moments of pause (Tuan 12).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the openness of space, while offering the experience of freedom, serves to highlight the relative isolation and helplessness of the individual due to its lack of accrued meaning and value. Tuan begins to establish the concepts of space place in dynamic opposition: "To be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern or established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place" (54). It is the individual that imposes the pattern on space by constructing a network of places, and this "built environment clarifies social roles and relations" (102). In other words, our social place in a community becomes stabilized and codified as we organize our surrounding space with fixed and stable places, which in turn demarcate who or what is "inside" and "outside" of the place and community through their physical form. Our growing experience with these places leads to familiarity and a sense of security. For humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan, it is from this place of stability that the production of human identity becomes possible.

These sites of pause in the open movement of space, as Tuan would characterize "place," become essential and necessary to man's very existence in space. Indeed, in his *Place: A Short Introduction*, Tim Cresswell suggests that Tuan's emphasis on place functioned to highlight the

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<sup>4</sup> Tuan distinguishes between man's experience of space as movement and freedom and the experience of places as areas of pause that provide stability.

concept as a fundamental experience of existence, as a “way of being-in-the-world” rather than the more abstract, rational idea of place previously common to the spatial science of geography or the more contemporary idea of place as a social construct in its meaning and in its materiality (20, 30).<sup>5</sup> Cresswell further clarifies Tuan’s emphasis by defining place as a way of engaging and comprehending the world around us, rendering it both ontological object (of pause) and epistemological process (of knowing). Perhaps no other place embodies this duality more than the place called home. Indeed, home can often become representative of the function of place in general, according to Cresswell: “Home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care” (24). This understanding of place suggests the fundamental essence of being and belonging that is attached to the idea of home, which in turn hints at the phenomenological foundation of twentieth century humanist geography as espoused by Yi-Fu Tuan. The phenomenologists’ examination of essences and their discovery through experience informs the growing recognition of place as an essential element of being. Being is always and already being-in-place. Thus, for humans, to exist is to exist in place. Such an essential and irreducible concept of place formed the philosophical base of the humanist geographers that rose to prominence in the 1970s, including Y-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, whose work was in many ways a more geographically focused extension of the much earlier seminal phenomenological study *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger.

With its focus on discovering the essence of human existence through experience, phenomenology offered an understanding of place as fundamental. Thus, Heidegger’s later 1951 essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” offers a much more universal and expansive view of what it

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<sup>5</sup> The socially constructed understanding of place is most notably outlined by David Harvey in his paper “From Space to Place and Back Again.”

is for humans to exist in space. The expressed objective of the essay is to understand how dwelling itself exists within the realm of being. Heidegger begins by arguing that to build is to dwell, since the German verb for “to build” is *bauen*, which can be traced back to the Old High German word *baun*, meaning “to dwell.” This idea of dwelling has become lost to the current understanding of building, but Heidegger suggests that it is essential if we are to understand what it is we do when we build. To build is to create a locale, which in turn creates a space for the existence of earth, sky, divinities and mortal, which Heidegger refers to as the Fourfold. Therefore, if to build is to dwell as language shows us, then dwelling is “*the basic character of Being*” in that to dwell is to exist freely in the Fourfold. Heidegger develops an idea of space and place that is inescapable from our experience of it and existence within it. Furthering Heidegger’s phenomenological theory of the essence of human’s experience of place, Gaston Bachelard, would later develop a philosophy of human dwelling that explores the concept of place as a primal and essentially intimate experience.

With its particular exploration of the experience of home along with the images and values that have become attached to that experience, Gaston Bachelard’s 1964 *The Poetics of Space* has proven to be a defining and influential text in the phenomenological study of domestic space. Characterizing the interior space of the dwelling as “intimate,” Bachelard claims that it is the imagination that increases the very real value of inside space. Inhabited space possesses practical value because of its ability to shelter and protect its inhabitants; however, the residents of a house experience that value through their imagination. The solid walls of the residence itself are reinforced by walls built in the dreams of those who inhabit the family home. As a result, the experience of shelter and protection in the home is for the dweller based in reality and created in the mind. Throughout the lives of those who have inhabited a family home, dreams of security

and intimacy form and return, and resulting in a harmony of recalled experience and imagined experience. Bachelard suggests a creative engagement that is later echoed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated from volume 1 of the French *L'invention du quotidien*, published in 1980, in which Certeau explores the process by which people can re-imagine, and thus reclaim, public spaces and objects whose meanings have always been decided and outlined for these consumers. Such imaginative redefinition (or the devastating lack thereof) becomes crucial to the female protagonists of both Elizabeth Bowen, and so many are left homeless when they find themselves disconnected from the family home and unable (or unwilling) to establish a stable harmony with the fragile houses of the twentieth century. One could argue there exists a disconnect in these modern dwellings devoid of a past and the persistent memories that dwell in the minds of their inhabitants – memories that return to create an uncanny sense of homelessness.

As a further reinforcement of the existence of this modern experience of homelessness, Yi Fu Tuan will later suggest in his 1977 *Space and Place* that the places with which we are the most intimately familiar, and so may be more closely associated with the core of our “being,” may not realize that meaning until seen from a distance of time or space: their “image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience” (18). Thus, it is in moments of transition, such as from home to another or from the experience of home to one of homelessness, that we gain such “outside” perspective and so are able to fully realize this experience which forms the meaning of home only as we move beyond it in space and time. This could possibly account for the rise of place as a privileged entity in theoretical and philosophical inquiry in the mid-twentieth century: even as the material and psychological security of “home” as a bounded, discrete place was under near-constant attack from either the destruction of WWI

and WWII or the growing crowded population in major European metropolitan centers, there existed a strong desire to maintain the old stability of these places, in particular that most familiar of places, the family home. The significance of this domestic site was not fully realized until it was threatened from without by the transformations taking place in our experience of space and time. While there are post-modern Marxist and Feminist geographers who understand these changes as revealing the inherently social nature of constructed places, for many literary figures, including Elizabeth Bowen, the spatial evolution of the twentieth century figured as both a threat and an opportunity: so many of her characters struggle to maintain the old discrete boundaries of place, including the lines of “inside” and “outside” that these demarcate, and yet they are constantly confronted with the inevitable changes to dwelling that the modern spatial experience has wrought.

A critical concern with the artistic representation and cultural impact of modern changes in domestic space has also emerged in the twenty-first century with the publication of numerous studies that focus on depictions of houses and homes in literature, as well as in popular culture in general. In one such collection from 2006, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft draw inspiration from Bachelard’s phenomenological understanding of the house as domestic space as well as Martin Heidegger’s argument that an understanding of human consciousness and reality is inevitably linked to an understanding of the house as both concrete dwelling and conceptual experience. The multi-disciplinary collection is centered on the fundamental idea that within the scholarly and cultural discourse on space, the house is located on a site of privileged significance. However, it is not long in this examination of domestic representations before this idea has developed into an awareness of the house as a site that offers physical protection and stability as well as a space that reflects the identity of its

inhabitants and their cultural environment. Thus, Heidegger's concept of home becomes a concept of self in relation to the outside world. For many of the scholars in the collection, whether they are focused on literary, architectural or historical representations of home, there exists a tension between this construction of self through the physical and imaginative reality of the home (as suggested in Bachelard and Heidegger) and the construction of the home via the political and social realities of the culture in which the house exists.

Indeed, Bachelard, by emphasizing the experience of home as one of remembering (and so re-imagining) a retrievable history, actually offers a rejection of modern houses, which provide limited physical and imaginative space for the kind of daydreaming so essential to Bachelard's understanding of how one lives in a home. This growing inadequacy of modern domestic space is explored by Joe Moran in "Houses, Habit and Memory," the first essay in *Our House*, which argues that the realities of the twentieth century, such as increasing urbanization and the growing mass production of goods, resulted in domestic spaces devoid of the attics and closed nooks so conducive to the recovery of past experience and the creation of dreams. Thus, for Moran, one cannot deny the importance of economic and social forces in defining domestic experience, and these forces always exist in relation to Bachelard's "poetic" forces of memory and imagination. The resulting tension in such a relationship becomes manifest in artistic representations of domestic space when the various scholars in the collection examine the nature of the discourses through which these representations exist. For example, Scott Brewster's essay "Building, Dwelling, Moving: Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and the Reverse Aesthetic," proposes that Irish houses in particular are caught in the midst of a conflict between a traditional discourse that would situate them at the heart of the cultural memory of the new Free State and a modern discourse that understands these houses as sites of violent conflict and unsettling



progress. Bowen's fictional and nonfictional representations of such conflicted spaces of Irish domesticity, including the Big Houses of the historical *Bowen's Court* and the fictional Danielstown of *The Last September*, reveal them as haunted places where the colonial past lingers to trouble the present and limit the future. However, this past exists as an uncanny absence in the houses themselves since only the material remnants of their British imperial foundation remain without the necessary power and authority to justify their continued existence.

### **Foundation in Space and Place: Place as Social Construct**

In 1929, Henri Lefebvre attempted to articulate the more social connection between our mental and practical experience of space in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre begins his study by detailing the existing division that he sees between mental space (the realm of philosophers and to some extent mathematicians) and “real” space as it we experience it in our practical everyday lives. Rather than simply accepting these as separate realms of experience, Lefebvre suggests that a spatial theory can be developed that encompasses both and bridges the divide: namely, a theory based on Marxist concepts of production. If social space is fundamentally a social product, as Lefebvre argues, then that social space is a product of the existing social relations at that particular point in time. Thus, whatever principle defines the material nature of those relations – industrial capitalism in the case of Western civilization since the nineteenth century – will in turn define the nature of the social space that those relations exist within. The space itself will then serve to perpetuate the dominant material pattern of production. Lefebvre often describes this space in terms of code that can be read: the form of the space itself is as a pattern of signifiers that ultimately point to the underlying content of social relations, or that which is signified. For Lefebvre, it is the transformation of this signified that inevitably results in the evolution of social space.

Also interested in the social relations that result from our construction and experience of places in society, Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" was originally published in 1984, though it formed the basis of a lecture that dates back to March 1967. In this essay, Foucault identifies space as the defining "horizon" of our cultural moment: "We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). This has not always been the case, as Foucault offers a brief history of space that locates our current understanding of spatial relations in the context of a broader Western experience. For example, in the Middle Ages, space was a "hierarchic ensemble of places" that distinguished between sacred and profane spaces as well as protected and open spaces (22). These oppositions were challenged and literally opened up to scrutiny by Galileo's rediscovery of the fact that the earth revolved around the sun and even more so, in his realization of an "infinitely open space." The extensive nature of space meant that the place of a thing was simply "a point in its movement" through space, and any kind of stability of place was just an indefinite slowing of this movement. However, today we have a conception of space based on sites. "The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements: formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees or grids...Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (23). Just as Lefebvre understood space as a social product of the material relations of those who organized the space itself, Foucault suggests that the organization and definition of these sites is the work of those who hold power in the society. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault outlines the State's imposition and management of space: institutions place limits on certain spaces for certain activities, different groups are deposited in different sites and these sites are separated from each other. Space becomes solidified and striated instead of fluid and flexible. There is a clearer marked division

between inside and outside, which according to Kathleen Kirby in *Indifferent Boundaries*, strips the individual of the potential power to define the relationship between his or her own internal subjective space to the external space of “reality” (104). Thus, what results is a network of discrete sites that exist in a relation of power and authority to reinforce one’s “place” in the network.

This social basis to both domestic and economic spatial arrangements and the connection that such arrangements have with socially constructed concepts of gender has come to dominate postmodern interpretations of spatial experience. However, unlike Foucault, this more contemporary interpretation of the postmodern spatial model incorporates a more permeable and dynamic understanding of place. In the 1990s, two influential studies appeared that argued for such an updated model. In the first of these, Daphne Spain’s 1992 work *Gendered Spaces*, both sociological and architectural theoretical frameworks are employed to examine the influence of social systems of ranking on specific spatial arrangements as well as the resulting influence that such arrangements can often exert on the social status of those who exist within these spaces. Spain begins by recognizing that women and men have different levels of status in society, specifically in relation to means of production and ownership of property: she refers to such social ranking as gender stratification. She acknowledges that the existence of gender stratification has various theoretical origins that seek to explain its persistence in society, and while she does briefly review such theories in her introduction, including both familial –based and economic interpretation, Spain’s main area of interest lies not in the relative validity of these alternatives, but in the interplay between gender stratification and the spatial arrangements in which these status differences exist. She argues that these spatial realities are social constructions, but even as the social creates the spatial, the opposite is also possible: the spatial

arrangements seen in the social institutions of the family, education and labor perpetuate the gender stratification by physically limiting the access of women to knowledge of value: such knowledge provides power and access to the means of production in society. Spain devotes the first half of her study to examining spatial organizations of the family, of education and of labor in non-industrial societies, and then later turns her attention to the history of space in the United States since the nineteenth century. In both non-industrial tribal and village societies and the capitalist society of America, Spain seeks to find “evidence of geographic and architectural segregation of the sexes and for the relationship of this segregation to status differences” (33). Specifically, her examination of gender stratification in capitalist society concludes that the primary spatial arrangement was a separation of home and workplace, resulting in a feminine domestic space and a masculine workspace. Spain’s thorough description of the physical space of British and American nineteenth century homes, particularly the ideal of the English country house and the American cottage, has proved invaluable in my effort to trace the development of domestic space and its impact of social constructions of gender identity.

While Spain lays the evidentiary foundation for understanding the social basis for spatial organization of the family, the theoretical implications for a new postmodern spatial model were yet to be fully recognized. The second of the studies of the 1990s was Doreen Massey’s 1994 *Space, Place, and Gender*, which effectively revealed an updated theory of spatial experience: a theory for which Spain’s work had paved the way two years earlier. In her work, Massey seeks to argue against particular conceptualizations of space that exist outside of modern social and economic realities. She especially challenges those theories that understand space as a lack: this lack of process is often theoretically opposed to the dynamic process of the temporal. Indeed, Massey suggests an idea of space that is both simultaneous and characterized by multiplicity.

Since we are conceptualizing space even as we exist in space, our conceptualizations of the spatial itself result in a “simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (3). Based on our location or status in the network of social relations, we create our own “now” and specific spatial reality. For Massey, as for Daphne Spain, this connection between the social and the spatial is fundamentally inevitable, and one reason that Massey chooses to argue this particular understanding of space in her own work, though she acknowledges that there are other theories of spatial reality that focus on different aspects of the spatial dynamic which could also prove equally suggestive and valuable. Nevertheless, in her focus on its interconnectedness with social relations, Massey’s concept of space also becomes implicated in the relationships of power that characterize the social. Any spatiality is constructed from the various social networks that span experience, but the resulting spatial arrangements can then produce further social implications and developments.

This network model of spatial experience also has implications for the contemporary understanding of place in a postmodern world. Massey explores examples of this connection between the social and the spatial in her discussion of the changing concept of “place” in theories of space. She suggests that the desire for a stabilized “place” with boundaries and a fixed identity that so often characterizes both political and academic concepts of place is actually a nostalgic longing for stasis and security in the face of the dynamic process of space-time. Massey expands this nostalgic longing to include the identity of the subjects who exist within these places. If men have traditionally been allowed a mobility to move between such defined places – domestic place to work place – then women have been constructed through that place called home, which for Massey is the ideal site of nostalgia. Thus, the desire to fix a local space as a definitive place is connected with the desire to fix identity, particularly, in this example, feminine identity. To

challenge such stable definitions of place, Massey suggests that both place and identity are a result of “a particular moment in [the] networks of social relations and understandings” (5) that construct the spatial reality. These are networks that cannot be contained or bounded, and they inevitably stretch beyond the particular place identified: these networks thus link this place to the outside. As a result of the technological and industrial advances of the twentieth century, we have a growing global existence in which these secure boundaries of “place” are increasingly challenged by the disappearing distinction between inside and outside – between self and other. For my own study of domestic space in the fiction of Elizabeth Bowen, it will be necessary to consider the implications of these changes for the twentieth century understanding and experience of the place called home as well as Massey’s theory of the widespread social networks that render any idea of place “open and porous” (5). In her novels and short stories, Bowen’s characters, especially her women, are inescapably confronted by this erosion of boundaries and distinctions, both in place and subjectivity, the conflicts that result suggest that a new way of “being” and defining one’s identity are inevitable in the twentieth century.

There would be continue to be later studies that reinforced this more socially aware and gendered interpretation of spatial experience. For example, the collection *Transformations of Domesticity in Modern Women’s Writing: Homelessness at Home*, written by Thomas Foster, was published in 2002, and specifically explores the evolution of representations of the family home in the writing of women from the first half of the twentieth century. Foster argues that modern women writers effectively destabilize the binary oppositions that were so central to nineteenth century concepts of space and gender. These writers inherited the ideology of the separate spheres that characterized the domestic fiction of Victorian literature and then proceeded to offer their own critique of the assumptions that existed at its foundation. According

to Foster, these assumptions included the belief in a clearly defined inner and outer space that existed with unmistakable boundaries. The resulting binary opposition operated as a metaphor for the gender binaries that characterized masculine and feminine categories as existing with equally unmistakable boundaries. However, Foster questions the extent to which modern women writers accepted these oppositions and, in fact, suggests that these women attempted to deconstruct the nineteenth century's binary ideology through their depiction of homelessness at home. If home existed as the inviolable container of feminine identity, then homelessness was accepted, and perhaps even embraced, as the space of opportunities and alternatives as well as a metaphor for a feminine self that is "neither completely determined and essentialized nor inherently spatialized" (11). To support his argument, Foster turns to the oppositions that are present in modern poetry and fiction, such as that which is often depicts the individual self against the society in which it exists. Ultimately, this modern challenge to traditional binary ideologies foregrounds the postmodern understanding of spatial relations as a permeable network of connections and definitions.

### **The Uncanny Evolution of Spatial Experience**

One of the most important figures in the twentieth century evolution of spatial theory has proven to be Sigmund Freud with his understanding of the uncanny as represented in literature as well as in practical experience. Though Freud's main concern in his 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" is to investigate the nature and origin of that aspect of the frightening that is called "uncanny," his examination of the word's German definition along with the definition of its opposite, "heimlich," has important implications for modern concepts of space, and domestic space in particular. Freud's review of both contemporary and past meanings of the word "heimlich" reveal that that word encompasses both the sense of "belonging to the house, not

strange, familiar” and the sense of that which is “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it” (196, 198). Thus, “heimlich” or “homely” contains within itself the suggestion of that which is “unheimlich” or unfamiliar. Freud then offers a psychoanalytic explanation of the emotional effect of the “unheimlich” by proposing that the uncanny is produced by the return (or recurrence) of something that was once familiar but has since been repressed. For Freud, that “something” familiar can be anything that we once comfortably accepted as part of our reality, such as the fact that our dolls or toys could have life just as we did, though the language of the definition that he provides in the essay explicitly relates this familiarity with the domestic space of the house.

Indeed, Anthony Vidler in his 1992 *The Architectural Uncanny* focuses his critical attention on the uncanny as a type of pathological metaphor in modern architecture and our experience of it in reality as well as in literature. Vidler locates the first literary manifestation of the uncanny in the fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe, where “the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence” rendered the domestic place of the family home at once both familiar and unfamiliar (3). However, Vidler argues, the uncanny soon crossed over from the realm of fictional effect to modern pathological reality. By the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, the growing population density in urban areas as a result of the sweeping force of industrialization had led to a growing sense of alienation and estrangement, which in turn led to previously unseen forms of spatial disorders. Vidler identifies the source of these new afflictions as the individual’s experience of the uncanny in the modern city:

Gradually generalized as a condition of modern anxiety, an alienation linked to its individual and poetic origins in romanticism, the uncanny finally became public in metropolis. As a sensation it was no longer easily confined to



the bourgeois interior...from the 1870s on, the metropolitan uncanny was increasingly conflated with metropolitan illness, a pathological condition that potentially afflicted the inhabitants of all great cities: a condition that had, through force of environment, escaped the overprotected domain of the short story. (6)

By the first half of the twentieth century the new spatial disorders that were the physical manifestation of this metropolitan uncanny were increasingly prevalent, and even began to find their way into literature as quite visceral representations of the modern “unhomely.” Indeed, many spatial theorists are now linking such disorders, including agoraphobia, claustrophobia and even vertigo, directly with our cultural experience of modernity.

As the boundary between public and private spaces became increasingly complicated by modern life and architecture, the boundary between public and private self becomes confused. Freud would argue that the agoraphobe suffers from boundary confusion as Joshua Holmes reminds us in his article “Building Bridges and Breaking Boundaries: Modernity and Agoraphobia,” in which he suggests that agoraphobia as a spatial disorder is a “side effect” of modernity. But the root of agoraphobia is the Greek “agora” meaning marketplace or place of assembly. For Kathleen Kirby in *Indifferent Boundaries*, this suggests that the fear of agoraphobia is not simply a fear of open spaces, but open spaces that are defined primarily by the people existing in them, constituting them, defining them. Thus, for example, I would argue that vertigo as a spatial disorder is similar in that a fear or dissonance results when our subjective understanding of space is confronted with how that space has been defined for us by cultural or institutional forces. As that definition of the modern spatial environment became increasingly unfamiliar in the first half of the twentieth century, these moments of uncanny dissonance became more frequent as boundaries – between inside and outside, subject and object, and even

life and death – became distorted and blurred. Perhaps not surprisingly, Freud’s essay emerged at time when, according to Anthony Vidler, “the territorial security that had fostered the notion of a unified culture was broken” (7). As a result, the lines of discrete demarcation that had previously suggested the possibility of contained and clearly oriented “places,” along with the promise of a similarly established subjectivity, were rendered progressively more unstable. The loss of home as a secure locus of place and identity led to a perpetual feeling of homesickness that drove some authors, including Elizabeth Bowen at times, to constantly return with nostalgia to an earlier time when geographical and psychological security were more assured.

Nevertheless, such returns are consistently rebuffed and denied for her characters. Thus, the Naylor in *The Last September* and the Quaynes in *The Death of the Heart* are forced to acknowledge the intruder that exposes the stability of their family home what it in fact now is and perhaps has always been: an illusion. Though, unlike many earlier Bowen critics who understand her basic modernist sensibility as conservative and inherently nostalgic, I would argue that her exposure of the illusion cannot simply be reduced to the act of lamenting its loss, but can also be seen as celebrating the freedom that results for many of the women in her fiction. Bowen will often expose the uncanny quality of domestic space by focusing on those people or events that have been repressed or subsumed into these familiar spaces, most notably often women, and who then return in unexpected ways, or by highlighting the experience of homelessness in which that familiar space has been lost but still returns to exert emotional and psychological influence.

### **Representation of Contested Domestic Space in Elizabeth Bowen**

In her 1964 nonfiction account of her ancestral home, *Bowen’s Court*, Elizabeth Bowen examines the influence of architecture and interior spaces through her exploration of the Big

House in Ireland and its intimate connection to the formation of Anglo-Irish identity. Like many of the Big Houses that were constructed in Ireland following Cromwell's appropriation of Irish lands in the second half of the seventeenth century, Bowen's Court represented stability and permanency for its inhabitants, who ironically had been dispossessed of their land in Wales by Flemings. Bowen's family was descended from the Welsh apOwen, who left their home for Ireland in the seventeenth century following Cromwell. Henry Bowen III constructed Bowen's Court, and it was completed in 1775 in the isolated country of southeast County Cork. Though their new estate removed the Bowens from the people of Ireland both physically and socially, the house served as a physical sign and justification for their right to remain in Ireland as landlords.

In *Literary Representations of the Irish Country House*, published in 2003, Malcolm Kelsall argues that the Anglo-Irish Big House that represented authority for Bowen's family and so oppressively embodied the past in *The Last September* also functioned to epitomize the light of order and culture that the English intended to spread across the wilds of Ireland (2). Indeed, the Anglo-Irish so identified the civilized order that they hoped to cultivate in Ireland with the Big Houses that the colonials themselves were bound to these structures and their political and social conventions. Elizabeth Bowen was to explore this influence by creating the fictional Big House Danielstown in *The Last September* and exploring its pervasive effect on the psychology on those who reside within its walls.

Elizabeth Bowen repeatedly returns to the influence of domestic spaces and the objects that populate them on her characters. Because Bowen's Court was the definitive home for Bowen throughout her life and perhaps because she suffered multiple dispossessions of home and family growing up, she specifically turns again and again in her work to the effects of abandonment of the family home on its inhabitants. It is in fact through this displacement that

Bowen proceeds to question the restrictive determination that the family home itself exerted in much of her later short fiction. In her *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*, published in 2003, Maud Ellmann suggests the Big House influence that she understands Bowen to be exploring actually indicates a more general fascination on the effects of constructed domestic space on those who dwell within. She argues that it is the individual experience that both forms and is formed by the particular space it inhabits that reveals character psychology. Ellmann combines this psychoanalytic approach with deconstructive techniques that examine the significance of domestic interiors, including the various pieces of furniture and objects that order this inescapably social space.

The details of Elizabeth Bowen's life and her family's history are significant in the relation to their impact on the psychology of her characters and her representation of the modern world, as Maud Ellman suggests, though she was not the first biographer to explore this connection. Both of Phyllis Lassner's studies of Elizabeth Bowen, her 1990 biography *Elizabeth Bowen* and her 1991 *Elizabeth Bowen: A Study of the Short Fiction*, provide necessary insights into Bowen's complicated history with her own family home, while also examining the social and psychological limitations imposed by the restrictive patterns of the domestic space in her fiction. In her biography, Lassner suggests that the fateful tradition of the Anglo-Irish themselves served to subjugate the lives of those who lived in the Big Houses that so embodied their authority and identity. However, Lassner also recognizes that the struggles of Bowen's female characters can be understood as a response to the feminine ideal that is so central to the literary tradition of domestic fiction. Indeed, Lassner specifically explores in the *Study of the Short Fiction* the psychological ramifications of both literary and social patterns of gender identification that for Bowen's protagonists are particularly evident in the family home.

As Danielstown in *The Last September* represents the extreme of man's desire to maintain civilized order as symbolized in the family home at the expense of individual identity, so Windsor Terrace in *The Death of the Heart* represents a similar desire on the part of Thomas and Anna Quayne, though the order established is more clearly artificial by design. In much of her longer fiction, Elizabeth Bowen implies an intimate relationship between a house's inhabitants and the walls and objects that order the family home. Windsor Terrace is not a family home in the sense that Thomas and Anna have no children, and perhaps, for Bowen, the frailty and unreality of the Quayne's modern house does not easily lend itself to the creation of familial traditions. The patterns of identity and existence that such traditions perpetuate are disrupted by the Quayne's self-conscious rejection of the past and the memories that it carries. It is only with the return of various figures from that past, such as Portia and Major Brutt, that the very constructed nature of these patterns is recognized and the artificiality of the Quayne's ordered reality is revealed.

In a further effort to examine the significance of homes in Elizabeth Bowen, I will also focus on selected texts from her short fiction. The moments of dispossession that are scattered throughout Bowen's texts appear to suggest the possibility of the fictions that lie behind the stability of both the family home and the identities of family members attached to that space. For many of Bowen's characters, the influence of these fictions results in a sense of entrapment in restrictive patterns of behavior that is only revealed when the family home is abandoned either voluntarily or through compulsion. Several of Bowen's short stories enact this process of displacement, such as "The New House," published in 1923 in *Encounters*, "The Last Night in the Old Home," published in 1934 in *The Cat Jumps*, and "Attractive Modern Homes," published in 1941 in the volume *Look at All Those Roses*.

In order to determine the extent to which these modern family homes reflect the dominant social discourses of the period and perpetuate their codes of identity and behavior, it will be necessary to acknowledge and take into consideration the political and cultural environment in which Bowen's representations of domestic space exist. For example, Bowen's depiction of the Anglo-Irish Big House Danielstown in *The Last September* must be understood in light of the declining political and economic power of the Ascendancy that occurred throughout the early twentieth century. Yet, one continues to see patterns of gendered identity in Bowen that are inherently connected to the domestic spaces of these Big Houses in which those patterns are absorbed and embedded. This discourse of gender (in a Foucaultian sense) establishes conventions and expectations that succeed in fashioning identity for the women who dwell in these fictional domestic spaces: the gendered self is in part defined through the space itself. Bowen will introduce challenges to the female characters of their texts, including voluntary relocation or forced dislocation from the family home, with the result that these challenges expose the contingent nature of female identity in their fiction as well as the extent to which this identity is constructed and confined by the patterns of discourse that exist in the family home.

## Chapter Two: Biographical Domestic Space

### “The Big House” and the Anglo-Irish Legacy

Before Elizabeth Bowen tackled her family’s long and complicated colonial history in Ireland in *Bowen’s Court*, she began on a somewhat smaller scale by focusing on the legacy of the Anglo-Irish Big House. The essay “The Big House” was originally written in 1940 and published in the first issue of Sean O’Faolain’s journal *The Bell* in 1942. In it, Bowen highlights both the physical and cultural isolation of the Big House in Ireland, ultimately expressing a desire to rehabilitate its place in society and its position as part of the Irish landscape. Her interpretation of the history of Bowen’s Court as well as her hope for its future in Ireland reveals Bowen’s understanding of place in modern spatial experience. Her evolving conception of space and place can in fact be understood as modern because of her Anglo-Irish history. The sense of psychological homelessness that came to characterize twentieth century spatial experience was already one familiar to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy<sup>6</sup> after centuries of living in a country not native to their race but one appropriated through armed conflict.

At the time she is writing “The Big House,” Bowen and her husband, Alan Cameron, were living in Regent’s Park, London, though she does spend extended periods of time at Bowen’s Court, particularly after she was able to partially modernize it upon the financial success of *Death of the Heart*.<sup>7</sup> Since the death of her father in 1930, upon which she became

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<sup>6</sup> Scott C. Breuninger in his essay “Berkeley and Ireland” in *Anglo-Irish Identities: 1571-1845* dates the origins of the label “Protestant Ascendancy” to February 1782 when it was first used by Sir Boyle Roche in the Irish House of Commons (107). The term has primarily been used to identify the social and political class in Ireland that acquired power in the seventeenth century following the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.

<sup>7</sup> In Victoria Glendinning’s biography *Elizabeth Bowen*, she states that though *The Death of the Heart* was one of Elizabeth’s least favorite of her novels, it was also the one that brought the most financial success: “*The Death of the Heart* is the novel of Elizabeth’s that many people like the best...It made her some money; and in the first autumn of

the first female inheritor of the estate, it had always been Bowen's wish to eventually retire there with her husband. When she stayed at Bowen's Court, she often entertained and it is the frequent visitors to the house who highlight for her its relative remoteness from neighboring society and commerce. She playfully recreates their frequent response on arrival to Bowen's Court in "The Big House": "'Well,' they exclaim, with a hint of denunciation, 'you are a long way from everywhere!'" (25). Yet, despite the suggestion of inconvenience in their greeting, this apparent isolation did not deter Bowen's friends from continuing to visit Bowen's Court and for Bowen herself, the isolation was only ever an outside impression and "more an effect than a reality" (25). It is arguably this impression of remoteness and separation that Bowen is attempting to dispel by writing "The Big House," for by the end of the essay, she is insisting on the possibility of re-integrating the Big House back into Irish society by eliminating the barriers that have effectively divided the Anglo-Irish from the land on which they settled.

For both the Anglo-Irish and for Elizabeth Bowen, there exists an attachment to the impersonal sociability of polite gatherings and mannered behavior. In *Bowen's Court*, Bowen traces the attempts on the part of the Ascendancy to impose that pattern on the country through the building of dwellings that embodied their idea of Society, and in the course of writing their history, she in effect creates a new narrative pattern that brings a sense of order and reason to a history marked by violence and injustice. The history of both the writer and the Anglo-Irish race is one of constructing an ordered pattern that can be held as an ideal to strive for, even if never fully attained. In his essay "Reading for the Plot," Peter Brooks emphasizes the importance of narrative order not only in literary texts, but in man's life in general. He begins his discussion with powerful assertion concerning the nature of narrative itself: "We live immersed in

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the war she was doing some modernising of Bowen's Court" (155). These modern updates included having the lamps wired for electricity.



narrative” (327). The patterns of narrative provide a way for us to understand and explain our experiences, and it is an activity that we engage in even in childhood. The relationship of plot to narrative as an organizing principle as well as narrative’s importance in giving meaning to man’s experience are connections that Elizabeth Bowen, as a writer and as a member of the Anglo-Irish class would have understood and embraced. According to biographer and critic Maud Ellmann, Bowen herself compared the ordering of a story to the ordering of a house in a course she taught at Vassar in 1960 on the short story (8). The idea of a connection between narrative and dwelling is also one that Brooks explores in his review of the standard definitions of the word “plot”:

“Common to the original sense of the word is the idea of boundedness, demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order...From the organized space, plot becomes the organizing line, demarcating and diagramming that which was previously undifferentiated” (334). Even as places, including family homes, are defined in space, or *plotted*, with clearly established boundaries that indicate an order of inside and outside, so sequences of events, including often family histories, are also given order in time through a similar act of plotting. If, as I will argue, Bowen looks to the ordered plot of the family home as an embodiment of security and stability, then she attempts to create a comparable stability for her own family history through the writing of *Bowen’s Court*. She provides a pattern to events and so also enables the linking of causes to effects, which allows Bowen to propose possible motivations for her ancestors’ settlement in Ireland and to even justify her own need to look back toward her family’s past.

The construction of the Big Houses and the creation of the text *Bowen’s Court* are creative acts of validation that attempt to justify the continued existence of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland. For that reason, the house and the text itself stand as monuments to the social ideals they seek to validate. The physical and cultural isolation from which these ideals emerged is a state

that Bowen as a child was all too familiar with, and thus as an adult, she could sympathize with the complicated position of the Anglo-Irish. According to biographer Phyllis Lassner, Bowen “came to identify the isolation of the Anglo-Irish with her own life...For Bowen, external isolation was exacerbated by a sense of personal isolation that was the consequence of being an only child to parents who seemed to live in a world of their own” (5). Yet, Bowen ultimately through her nonfictional account of her family home and her own personal history is able to acknowledge that isolation and recognize its creative implications and cultural significance. In her essay “The Big House” Elizabeth Bowen begins to explore that original idea behind the construction of the Big Houses in Ireland. This idea is defined as a fundamentally social one, though the resulting feeling and impression one gets from the physical construction of the Big House itself is a sense of distance and loneliness. This isolation is the “effect” that Bowen emphasizes as one of the primary characteristics of her own home Bowens Court (“The Big House”, 25). The physical impression of remoteness comes from both the demesne wall that surrounds the house and grounds as well as the screen of trees that stands just inside the wall. Together, they succeed in enclosing and separating the house and its society of family and servants from the outside world of the Irish countryside. This effective separation leaves each individual Big House “to live under its own spell,” which is the quality that Bowen suggests that all such Anglo-Irish homes share. They exist unto themselves and the household remains its own community, even at the time of Bowen’s writing her family history.

Although this independent and self-sustained existence of the contemporary Big Houses is the modern result, it was not the original idea behind the establishment of the Big Houses. Bowen proposes that the homes were originally built with an eye toward congenial society and “for hospitality above all” (26). As a result, in the construction of the house, much of the space

and money went toward those areas of the home considered most essential for hospitality and conducive to social gatherings, including the large entry hall and the main living rooms. However, in neither their physical structure nor the society they embodied and embraced were these houses an organic part of their environment. According to Bowen, their very existence was forced on the land such that “they have made no natural growth from the soil – the idea that begot them was a purely social one” (26). If the Ascendancy desired pleasant society in their homes, it was not a society into which the native Irish Catholics would have felt welcomed. At least initially, the act of dwelling for the Anglo-Irish arose from desire to impose and even normalize a certain social order through the very act of construction. The Big Houses that resulted were the manifestation of a vision of civilized society that the Anglo-Irish settlers wished to cultivate through their home and property. Though Bowen acknowledges the often violent and unjust methods used to achieve these demesnes, she also expresses some admiration for the Ascendancy’s attempt to live up to an honorable ideal: “The security that they had, by the eighteenth century, however ignobly gained, they did not use quite ignobly. They began to feel, and exert, the European idea – to seek what was humanistic, classic and disciplined” (27). The Big Houses would thus be not only a physical reminder of the political and economic status of the Anglo-Irish colonial class Ireland, but also a symbol of the civilized ideal they hoped to achieve in the country.

The idea that a home can fulfill multiple functions for the individual residents, both practical and symbolic, is not a new one to the theoretical foundations of dwelling. In their college textbook *Self, Space and Shelter*, Dr. Norma L. Newmark and Dr. Patricia J. Thompson begin their comprehensive examination of modern housing by reviewing the various human needs met by the erection of a dwelling. They understand any family home to exist as “part of an

intricate physical, social and economic network” (2). The construction of a house alters the physical landscape but in creating an enclosed household community that exists in some minimum distance (based on environment and type of building) from other household communities, the construction also forms “complex social environments that help to shape personality, mold character, and create a quality of life for ever larger groups of people” (2). The family home, thus, even in its most basic form can meet the physical needs of shelter from a harsh external environment, the social needs of community and companionship, and finally the psychological needs of the ego, which understands the home as a reflection of successful adaptation to the accepted norms of the particular community. The latter two needs, social and psychological, are of specific interest to Bowen in her family history. Throughout *Bowen’s Court*, she will continue to highlight the Big House as a representation of a societal ideal and an expression of class identity. As representative of social norms, houses, according to Newmark and Thompson, define the type of society that is possible and desirable for that community: “in every culture, the form of the house, the layout of space, and the arrangement of furnishings and equipment influences the nature of the activities that can take place within its walls” (11). The Anglo-Irish colonials could then design their Big Houses with an eye toward the type of social gatherings of family and peers they anticipated.

The houses themselves were often not large, despite what the name Big House suggests, but they did traditionally have large entry halls for informal groups and occasionally moderate-sized ballrooms for more formal functions. The life that the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy hoped to cultivate in Ireland was one that reflected their affection for outdoor pursuits such as hunting and horseback riding, as well as their love of amusing conversation and even games. These common interests and shared affections could succeed in binding a household together, but they ultimately

failed in bonding a class together for the long term. Newmark and Thompson suggest that the growth of a house into a home is a result of experiencing these shared affections over generations: “family homes reflect an underlying (and perhaps unconscious) commitment to a particular life-style over time” (19). This commitment has its foundations in the close physical and emotional connections occasioned by living together in close contact in one place over years. Houses are built, but homes grow as time passes. Although they may have existed initially as physical embodiments of the larger social ideal and symbols of class identity, the Big Houses were most successful, at least for Elizabeth Bowen, as family homes that offered tradition and history as part of their complicated inheritance.

The appreciation that Bowen expresses for the social ideal at the heart of this Anglo-Irish tradition is often one reason cited for her long-standing reputation as a conservative modernist author. For example, in her Preface to the collection of nonfiction essays and reviews *The Mulberry Tree*, Hermione Lee interprets Bowen’s frequent turns back to the past as a desire for lost traditions and stability. “Her fascination with the treacherous ‘bend back’ of memory is part of a political antipathy for the modern world, a Burkean conservatism which is most apparent when she is writing about the history of the Anglo-Irish or the wartime and post-war climate of feeling in England. At its crudest, this takes the form of a preference for stately homes and good manners” (4). While Bowen’s “political antipathy” is more complicated than Lee suggests, she is correct that the “good manners” of the Anglo-Irish, their devotion to a civilized order as achieved through civilized intercourse, appealed to Bowen. She admits as much later in “The Big House” when she defines the sacrifice entailed in maintaining such an ideal:

What is fine about the social idea is that it means the subjugation of the personal to the impersonal. In the interest of good manners and good behaviour people

learned to subdue their own feelings. The result was an easy and unsuspecting intercourse, to which everyone brought the best that they had – wit, knowledge, sympathy or personal beauty. Society – or, more simply, the getting-together of people – was meant to be at once a high pleasure and willing discipline, not just an occasion for self-display. (29)

It is just social easy social intercourse that Bowen appreciates and even attempts to offer in her own home. However, Lee and other critics often do not fully acknowledge the qualification that Bowen admits into her own admiration of Anglo-Ireland's social vision. In "The Big House," the same essay where she expresses what is "fine" about the about this ideal, Bowen also recognizes that as an organizing principle this social idea "although lofty, was at first rigid and narrow" (29). That idea must finally open itself up, as it failed to do for much of Anglo-Ireland's colonial dominance. By the time that Bowen is writing, some of the surviving Big Houses have willingly begun the process of reintegrating their isolated domestic place, physically and culturally, back into the Irish landscape. Bowen notes that "[s]ymbolically (though also matter-of-factly) the doors of the big houses stand open all day" but this is just one of the various obstacles that need to be overcome: "From inside many big houses (and these will be the survivors) barriers are being impatiently attacked" (29, 30). Bowen understands the necessity for such a revitalizing deconstruction of these barriers for the contemporary Anglo-Irish families still living in the country they once helped to conquer and settle. Having lost their political and economic hegemony in Ireland, the remaining colonial Ascendancy in the country have by the mid-twentieth century only their homes through which to assert what endures of their class identity. Unfortunately, those homes are at once a bitter reminder of what has been lost and a financial

burden on those who still struggle to maintain them, making these places at best a conflicted legacy for Elizabeth Bowen.

### **History and Bowen's Court**

In the opening chapter of *Bowen's Court* Bowen places her family's Big House in the contemporary Irish countryside for the reader, describing in detail its surroundings in order to emphasize its relative isolation. The house is "squared in by hills or mountains on three sides" (4), and even further accentuating its solitary remoteness, the northeast district in which it stands is dotted with decaying ruins. From the open shell of Kilcolman castle, Edmund Spenser's Irish demesne, to the burnt-out remains of the Fermoy barracks, Bowen depicts a landscape scarred and haunted by centuries of violent conflict. At the same time, however, she does not draw a landscape void of life, particularly on Sundays when the "roads converging on chapels teem with people going to mass" and afterwards, "the streets of the villages give out a static hum" (5). For much of the time, nevertheless, this swell of activity does little to dispel the sense of isolation surrounding Bowen's Court: "No, it is not lack of people that makes the country seem empty. It is an inherent emptiness of its own" (5). The land itself functions to create the feeling of remoteness and throughout that land, each individual Big House "is an island – and, like an island, a world" (19). As in her essay "The Big House," Bowen again emphasizes the self-contained community that exists within each contemporary Big House. She often looks to the beginnings of the Anglo-Irish as a colonial class for the reasons for the current state of cultural and social detachment: "Each of these house, 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" (20). It is from looking back toward the roots of her family history that we get Bowen's first attempt to fully trace the origin of this isolation. The physical distance between the

Big Houses themselves and between the house and neighboring towns has created an impression of loneliness, but for Bowen, the more significant and influential feeling of isolation arises from the complicated colonial origins of the Ascendancy class in Ireland.

The origins of Elizabeth Bowen's family can be traced back to Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Bowen who came to Ireland from Wales, serving in the Parliamentary forces of Oliver Cromwell. His son John, from the second of his three marriages, eventually followed Colonel Bowen to Ireland. Henry Bowen left behind his own lands, which lay along the southern area of the Gower peninsula. Initially, upon the outbreak of the English Civil War, Henry had joined the King's army, but following a disagreement he switched sides and joined the ranks of Cromwell's soldiers. Bowen suggests that Henry probably never "cared much for either King or Parliament" (39). Bowen highlights her ancestor's lack of affection and loyalty to the colonizing impulse of the Parliamentarians, and by doing so, she effectively distances the Bowens from the atrocities of Cromwell in the conquest of Ireland. This impulse to distinguish her family from the majority of early Anglo-Irish settlers is evident throughout *Bowen's Court* and is part of her complex relationship to her ancestors, which seems to reflect an ambiguous mixture of pride and guilt. It is in moments of distancing such as exist in Bowen's representation of the apathetic Colonel Bowen when the guilt is most clearly evident. Yet, at the same time, Bowen early on establishes the precedent of referring to her family using a system of regnal numbers, Roman numerals traditionally used to distinguish those members of a royal line with the same name. In *Bowen's Court* this system is used to help distinguish the many Henry's and Robert's through the generations. Thus, this first Bowen in Ireland becomes Henry I. The very act of appropriating this system of naming suggests a certain pride in the long line of Bowens that not only survived, but also thrived in their new land.



Although he may not have carried much affection for the colonial cause of Oliver Cromwell and his forces, Henry I did apparently love one thing throughout his life: his hawks. According to Bowen family lore, at least one pair of these birds made their way to Ireland with Henry I and was ultimately responsible for selecting the future site of the family's Big House. However, before recounting the legend of the hawks, Bowen briefly establishes the context of Cromwell's incursion into Ireland. By the seventeenth century, the situation in Ireland had deteriorated and the English attitude with regard to the native Irish Catholics had changed. Bowen suggests that prior to this shift, the English settlers in Ireland had exhibited a grudging respect for the native farmers who were simply trying to cultivate their land and feed their families. However, she claims the rising power of the English middle class brought with it a new perspective toward the Irish, and the "complete subjugation and the exploitation of Ireland became the object of the English burgess class" (49). Indeed, in contrast, from Bowen's perspective, before the King fell, "Charles I as a king of Ireland did not promise badly" due to his desire "that things should run as smoothly, and as fairly, as his egotism allowed" (51). To this end, Charles I had appointed Thomas Wentworth, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Strafford, as Lord Lieutenant in Ireland. Bowen argues that Strafford's impartiality to all factions and his intense focus to serve the best interests of the King led him to promote local industry and shipping. "In his own manner, and in the King's interest purely, he was on his way to do more for Ireland than any Englishman had" (53). When Bowen writes that the Parliamentarians "destroyed him [Strafford] and his work" one can see her sympathies with the traditional landed power structure, characterized as a type of aristocratic and patriarchal *noblesse oblige*, emerge (53). She goes on to attribute the "[f]resh persecution and penalization of Catholics" in the country to the Puritanical administration of the two Lords Justices in Ireland following the execution of

Wentworth in 1641 (54). Violence ensued and the 1641 uprising in Ulster by native Irish led to the “succeeding Cromwellian atrocities” (54). Throughout Bowen’s summary of the fighting that followed among the three main parties -- the Irish Confederates, the Royalists, and the Parliamentarians -- she often expresses sympathy in *Bowen’s Court* for both the Irish Catholics and the English Royalists. Nevertheless, the Cromwellians were eventually to defeat the armies of the Confederates and those of the James Butler, Marquess of Ormonde, who took command of Strafford’s men when the Lord Lieutenant was impeached and later executed. Cromwell himself landed in Dublin on August 14, 1649 and though it is not certain if Colonel Henry Bowen arrived with him or had arrived earlier with the advance forces, Bowen expresses some confidence that he was present with Cromwell by mid-December 1649 when Cromwell arrived in Cork. When Cromwell moved north again in January 1650, Henry Bowen stayed in Cork (64).

Elizabeth Bowen was not as certain of the actual date when her ancestor acquired the land on which Bowen’s Court would later be built, but the story of how the land was obtained is one that has been passed down through the succeeding generations of the family. According to family legend, Colonel Bowen brought with him from Gower a pair of his beloved hawks and he would occasionally enjoy the sport of hawking in his downtime, a pastime considered “ungodly and frivolous” by his fellow Cromwellian soldiers (67). Bowen speculates that perhaps Cromwell also feared that this sport would lead Henry I to “fraternization with the country people” since it offered a common ground of amusement (67). The story indicates that Henry I was called by Cromwell to receive new orders or for clarification of previous orders. Bowen, as always, arrived to the meeting with one of his hawks tied to his wrist and he was frustratingly inattentive to Cromwell’s directives, and instead gave his attention to the bird on his arm. Cromwell was insulted by the apparent slight and in a rage, he caught the bird from its owner

and broke its neck, leaving Colonel Bowen angry and distraught over the loss. Later, Cromwell again called Bowen to him and in an effort to appease his dark spirits, Cromwell promised him any and all land that the remaining hawk could fly over before finally landing. Since Colonel Bowen was allowed to choose the location from which to release the bird, Elizabeth Bowen assumes that he led the bird fly close to the base of the Ballyhouras, a mountain range in northern Cork, where it flew due south. This land would eventually be granted to Colonel Bowen and years later become the site of the Bowen's Court demesne.

The Irish forces surrendered at Galway and Cromwell's victory was complete by May 12, 1652. The remaining Irish army was disbanded and any native Irish gentry who still owned desirable land were dispossessed of their property and forced into Connaught in the West. A survey of the land followed, which had to be completed before parcels could be distributed to the soldiers and officers of Cromwell's army.<sup>8</sup> Colonel Bowen was granted the 600 acres of land around Farahy parish in County Cork, the same land over which his hawk is said to have flown. This Henry I initially settled into the partial ruins of Farahy castle, where his eldest son John eventually joined him. It was to this same son that Henry left his Irish land and so it is from John I that Elizabeth Bowen is descended.

In the years following Cromwell's securing of Ireland and her resources for the English government, the Parliamentary soldiers and officers who settled in Ireland were virtually "people of the ruins" according to Elizabeth Bowen (87). A few were able to immediately settle into the confiscated houses of former Irish gentry, but most lived among the ruins of old castles

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<sup>8</sup> According to Christine Kinealy in *A New History of Ireland*, "Catholics who had taken part in the rebellion [of 1641] lost their estates and their property rights. Catholics who had not been involved in the rebellion were also punished. Although they were allowed to retain a small portion of land, it was to be a different piece of land. Ireland was split into two parts. Six counties situated in Connacht and Clare, which included some of the poorest land in Ireland, were the location to which innocent Catholics were to be transplanted. Catholic land in the other twenty-six counties was used to reward soldiers who had fought for the Parliamentarians, and generally to raise capital for the government" (102). Kinealy goes on to explain the resulting drop in Catholic ownership by stating that "[i]n 1641 Catholics had owned 59 per cent of land in Ireland; by 1688 this had fallen to 22 per cent" (102).

and crumbling fortress towers. They were not welcomed either by the native Catholics or the previous English settlers. “They had as yet no position” in the country, Bowen argues, and they were to this point without an “idea of living to integrate them” (87). It is arguable the colonial Ascendancy settlers would remain without a guiding ideological principle around which to unite. In his essay “*Bowen’s Court and the Anglo-Irish World System*,” Matthew Eatough argues that “[w]hile the British and native Irish possessed clear ideological platforms — the empire and laissez- faire free trade for the one, home rule and tenants’ rights for the other — the absence of a guiding idea differentiates Bowen’s Anglo-Irish from these two potentially antagonistic classes” (86). This lack of a defining ideology means that the Anglo-Irish can alternate between identifying as Irish gentry and English colonials. They are never fully either because they cannot completely embrace one identity at the expense of the other. Eatough is particularly interested in the ambiguous economic position of the Ascendancy at the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, they were effectively “wedged between discrepant economic systems in a spatial, rather than a temporal, manner” (89). Embracing the country they had settled in the seventeenth century had always implied an acceptance of a landed authority based in the neo-feudal traditions of landlord and tenant. Claiming their Englishness, on the other hand, increasingly entailed an acceptance of the more modern professional identity commensurate with an industrialized society. Eatough points to Bowen’s father, Henry Cole Bowen, as a figure standing at the forefront of a transitional moment for the Anglo-Irish. Though his own father wanted Henry to become the master of Bowen’s Court full time with all of its attendant responsibilities, Elizabeth’s father chose a legal profession over his family obligation, creating a rift between father and son that never completely healed. Ultimately, Eatough concludes that it is up to modern Anglo-Irish such as Elizabeth Bowen to navigate the “dialectical movement between

neo-feudal institution building and individualistic professionalism” if the class is to survive in any form in the twentieth century (92).

From the time Henry I took possession of the County Cork land, it stayed in Bowen family, passed from father to son until Elizabeth’s inheritance in 1930, and occasionally gaining additional estates through advantageous marriages. Only twice in its history was the land leased away from the family line and during these periods, the Bowen family settled into Kilbolan Castle (and later Kilbolan House), situated to the northwest of Farahy. It was not until Colonel Bowen’s great-great grandson, Henry III, that we see the first true Irish Bowen. Even the native Irish, Elizabeth Bowen claims, had a fondness for this Henry: “he got from the country people the feeling they used to keep for their natural lords” (125). Yet, despite the goodwill Henry III may have acquired from being a fair landlord to his tenants, the distance between the Anglo-Irish gentry and the native Irish farmers continued to exist, partly Bowen admits because the Irish squire is “imposed” on the land he has settled (125). He is separated from the tenants by the “barrier of a different faith” and with the construction of Anglo-Irish Big Houses across the countryside in the eighteenth century, this barrier also became a physical one. In effect, the cultural and religious divide is reinforced and solidified by the growing number of these representative dwellings. Though not large in size as their name may suggest, these Big Houses were often Georgian in architectural style and according to Jacqueline Genet in *The Big House in Ireland*, they normally “would consist of three grand reception rooms, six principle bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a multiplicity of smaller rooms” (24-25). Many were built of native Irish limestone, including Bowen’s Court, which was completed in 1775 following ten years of construction. For Elizabeth Bowen, the creation of her family home occurred at the apex of Anglo-Irish society in the mid-eighteenth century. At this time, the class “enjoyed not only

material but real psychological dominance,” and in the years following 1760, they “became aware of themselves as a race” (*Bowen’s Court*, 130, 158). However much the Anglo-Irish felt themselves more fully Irish as they began to put down permanent roots in the form of the Big Houses, Bowen also suggests that their integration into the country was somewhat one-sided: “The grafting-on had been, at least where *they* were concerned, complete. If Ireland did not accept them, they did not know it – and it is in that unawareness of final rejection, unawareness of being looked out at from some secretive, opposed life, that the Anglo-Irish naïve dignity and, even, tragedy seems to me to stand” (160). Even as she reveals their apparent obliviousness to their status in Ireland and their inescapable separation from the native population, Bowen is able to express sympathy for their attempts to place themselves on the land by building their homes as “monuments” to their civilized ideal (132).

This ideal society that the Big Houses represented was very much connected to their identity as colonizers, a connection to which Elizabeth Bowen remains silent. Though she attempts to keep separate the social idea embodied in the Big Houses from their existence as symbols of English colonial hegemony, this is a separation that is continuously eroded by the force of history: by the mid-twentieth century, many of these homes had been destroyed in a final act of rejection of both English colonial power and Anglo-Irish cultural authority. In *Literary Representations of the Irish Country House*, Malcolm Kelsall argues that the Anglo-Irish Big House embodied the light of order and culture that the English intended to spread across the wilds of Ireland: an act of artificially constructing a place in the form of a domestic dwelling that was intended to represent a naturalization of the Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland. The frontier myth “in which the light endlessly advances upon darkness,” along with the English rural ideology that extolled the civilized countryside over the corrupt city, justified the

construction of the Big Houses as architectural monuments to the new order that was to be instilled in Ireland (2). In *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth herself characterizes Henry Bowen III's construction of Bowen's Court in such terms: "... he [Henry III] was a man of his century, esteeming reason, order and light. He believed in elevation, and he designed for his family... a house that should be certain to elevate" (31). However, Bowen suggests that in his construction of Bowen's Court, Henry built a "family myth" that was to hold sway for centuries. She implies the profound association between this myth of civilized order that Bowen's Court embodied and the formation of her family's identity: "A Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court. Since then, with a rather alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens" (32). The very identities of the Anglo-Irish were bound to these structures and their political and social conventions. In her choice of language, specifically in her use of the word "myth," Elizabeth Bowen hints at the nature of the Anglo-Irish spatial experience. Though their settlement in Ireland was an imposition on the land and their establishment of dwellings was not, according to Bowen, an organic act of "natural growth from the soil" ("The Big House," 26), their continued existence in these family homes, whether originally "natural" or not, came to be understood as part of their essential identities by the narratives they created from their lives.

### **Myth of the Family Home**

There is no doubt based on her essay "The Big House" and the later, more comprehensive *Bowen's Court* that Elizabeth Bowen admired the order and tradition that the Anglo-Irish created in their homes and the impersonality of their societal ideal appealed to her sense of civility. They emphasized a polite pattern of behavior that was lacking in felling because, she implies, the feelings that existed for them were at times too painful and conflicted. To admit feeling into everyday discourse would be to risk admitting the guilt and shame that lingered from their

complicit actions in the forced settlement of Ireland. Although the pattern of manners they embraced did not give way to feeling directly, the Big Houses they built do appear to have absorbed some of their more unconscious and “spontaneous” behavior. It is this long-standing existence in one place that led to what Bowen describes as the “continuous, semi-physical dream” of habitation of which the inhabitants are barely aware (451). This dream, as Gaston Bachelard suggests, is a combination of memory and imagination, and with each new generation, it begins to shape the experience of that place, turning a house into a home.

Elizabeth Bowen’s understanding of the power of her family home and its continued influence over the lives of its inhabitants often presages the later phenomenological study of space by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, originally published in France in 1958. Bachelard explores our experience of “inside space” in an effort to discover how our consciousness of that intimate space affects its value and in turn how that resulting shapes our lives. For Bachelard, “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” and that home becomes constituted from a combination of memory and imagination (5). The inhabitant “experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams” (5). These dreams carry with them the memories of past dwelling and the protection and stability that it offered. Each house in which we dwell becomes a new place of protection as we experience it imaginatively. Because the house in which we dwell at birth is “physically inscribed in us” by a pattern of functions and behavior which we internalize, we carry this original home with us through dreams even after it is physically left behind (14). This also means that this first childhood home becomes a “center of daydreams” that continues to exist through imagination and memories of this original dwelling.



Bachelard understands the experience of inhabiting a domestic space as a “primary function” in man, a function that is an imaginative response to the act of constructing a place (4, 18). Indeed, the process of inhabiting is fundamental to man’s being: Bachelard suggests that though man believes he exists time, this is only an impression born of a series of fixed spaces. Particularly when we turn to memories of our past, Bachelard explains, “we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability” (8). It is therefore arguable that when Bowen writes in *Bowen’s Court* of the “strong rule of the family myth” that dominated life in the Big Houses of the Anglo-Irish, including her own, she is identifying a primary experience of fixed dwelling in a space of stability (19). The fact that generations of Anglo-Irish families lived successively in these homes means that there is no “sequence of fixations” that exists in memory to give the impression of time passing, but rather one long, fixed experience of dwelling that results in a timeless myth. As a result, the exterior house Bowen’s Court physically exists in history, but the interior existence of the inhabitants is one in which time has ceased to move forward. Elizabeth Bowen suggests such timelessness when she asserts that she “[knows] of no house (no house that has not changed hands) in which, while the present seems to be there forever, the past is not pervadingly felt” (190). The continued presence of the past in Bowen’s Court does not result in a haunted environment where the presence of a ghost highlights what is absent or no longer there in life, but rather one where the absence has never been felt because the past continues to be sustained and kept alive by repeated patterns of myth.

Although Bowen’s Court came to influence Elizabeth Bowen’s relation to place in her life, she was not born on her family’s demesne. She was born at 15 Herbert Place in Dublin on June 7th, 1899 to Florence Colley Bowen and Henry Cole Bowen (404). From a young age, her

family divided their time between their Dublin residence and Bowen's Court in County Cork. The myth of the Big House had already had a significant influence on her family even before she was born. Her father had chosen a profession in Dublin law, instead of choosing to remain attached and dependent on Bowen's Court. Due to this decision there was at the time of Elizabeth's birth a rift between Henry Bowen and his father. In retaliation for his son's rebellion, Elizabeth's grandfather, Robert Bowen, began to harvest the timber that was scattered across the demesne and he wrote a will that "disposed of what he was free to dispose of" (376). Upon Robert's death in 1888, Henry Bowen received the house and the adjoining land, but was left without the money necessary to maintain him and his family in residence full-time at Bowen's Court. This struggle was just one in a long series of conflicts that characterized the family's relationship with their ancestral home. A costly litigation begun in the late 17th century by John Bowen with the intention to attain the Bowen's share of John Nicholls's treasure "became a hereditary obsession with the Bowens, their real resources squandered in pursuit of these imaginary riches" (Ellmann 45).<sup>9</sup> The ambivalence that many critics, including Phyllis Lassner and Vera Kreilkamp, notice in Elizabeth Bowen's treatment of her family history and Bowen's Court may not only be a result of her conflicted feelings and the "deep but critical attachment Bowen felt towards her Anglo-Irish heritage," but also a more personal response to the contentious history of her family home (Lassner 2).<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps reasonable to extend this "critical attachment" to the houses that for Bowen were so deeply associated with the Anglo-Irish identity.

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<sup>9</sup> The father of John Bowen II, John Bowen I, as Elizabeth Bowen herself refers to them in Bowen's Court, was married to John Nicholls's daughter, Mary.

<sup>10</sup> For Lassner, Bowen's relationship to her family history is more ambivalent than has traditionally been recognized in Bowen criticism, which has previously focused on the conservative elements in her fiction.

Although not all of her fiction concerns Anglo-Ireland and the Big House tradition, Bowen does repeatedly return to the influence of houses, especially family homes and the objects that populate them, on her characters. Like many of the Big Houses that were constructed in Ireland following Cromwell's appropriation of Irish lands in the second half of the 17th century, Bowen's Court represented stability and permanency for its inhabitants, who ironically had been dispossessed of their land in Wales by Flemings (*Bowen's Court*, 37). Though their new estate removed the Bowens from the people of Ireland both physically and socially, the house served as a physical sign and justification for their right to remain in Ireland as landlords. Nevertheless, in her biography, Phyllis Lassner claims that this sense of separation came to influence Bowen's idea of the Anglo-Irish (4), and this influence will be sharply evident in Bowen's novel *The Last September*, where the Naylor's live in a world of physical and temporal isolation. Though at least part of this seclusion is self-imposed, the Naylor's are also inevitable anachronisms, stranded in a house and a historical moment that no longer hold the defining power they once possessed for the Anglo-Irish.

### ***Bowen's Court* and World War II**

Written over the course of a few years, from 1939 to 1941, *Bowen's Court* is inevitably linked to the mounting tensions in London at the onset of World War II. Bowen openly admits the war's affect on her perspective in the Afterword she added to her family history in 1963. Elizabeth Bowen's perspective on her family's conflicted history in Ireland as well as the country's uncertain future following independence is inescapably colored by her experience in London in the late 1930s and early 1940s as she is writing *Bowen's Court*. Bowen states in the Afterword that she began to write the history in the summer of 1939, and she had only drafted two chapters when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. In

these early chapters, as she is initially considering the “ruins in Country Cork there were as yet few ruins in England” (453). Bowen claims that though the war may have affected the “color of [her] narration,” it did not alter her “values” with relation to her Anglo-Irish ancestors and the family home (453). If anything, the violence and uncertainty of the present conflict lent an extra weight to all of the details from the past. “The past – private, just as much as historic – seemed to me, therefore, to matter more than ever: it acquired meaning; it lost false mystery. In the savage and austere light of a burning world, details leaped out with significance” (454). The details that seem to acquire the most significance for Bowen were those concerned with the lasting impact of Bowen’s Court. The enduring impression of tradition represented by the “myth” she recognizes in the house itself is at this point in time, the fall of 1939, more important than ever because of all that is being lost in terms of life and property. As she continues to work on *Bowen’s Court*, Bowen recognizes that she “was writing (as though it were everlasting) about a home during a time when all homes were threatened and hundreds of thousands of them were being wiped out. I was taking the attachment of people to places as begin generic to human life, at a time when the attachment was to be dreaded as a possible source of too much pain” (454). The “attachment” to places that Bowen references was in a state of transition brought on, in part, by the forced realization that place could no longer offer the permanence and stability that it once seemed to promise. It was this realization of what had been lost that made Bowen’s purpose in writing *Bowen’s Court* all the more necessary and essential. As the place most associated with the formation of identity, the family home, was revealed to be fragile and transitory, the very idea of place would have to evolve. For those who drew power from their property, or who at least understood their authority as “mostly vested in property (property having been acquired by use or misuse of power in the first place),” the destruction or dispossession of place created a

material and psychological “void” that could make those who have nothing left on which to raise a stable sense of self dangerous and unpredictable.

The trauma of this new sense of homelessness is a uniquely modern one in that it was born of the spatial disconnect that has so characterized the twentieth century. In Kathleen Kirby’s *Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity*, she locates this growing disconnect in various changing political and technological realities. The gradual breakdown of the imperial order across the world led to a heightened awareness of space and boundaries of place. Spurred by calls for independence and movements aimed at freedom, “colonies began to call attention to their presence” and so imperialist nations were “confronted by an ‘other’” more directly than ever before. The simultaneous advancements in transportation meant this “other” was no longer remote: relative distances between center and periphery shrunk in time and space. As Kirby asserts, “the invention and popularization of such devices as the telephone, telegraph, bicycle, motorcar, airplane, iron and glass architecture, and the rail system permanently warped the traditional sense of space, blurring distinctions of near and far, and inside and outside, compressing distance and bringing into contact formerly inaccessible terrains” (71). Thus, any separation, whether between nations on a map or between localized places in a smaller community, became more and more fragile and variable.

In modernist texts, including many of those by Elizabeth Bowen, the narrative response to this destabilization has been to place home as “the protective site of warmth and security against a cold outside world” (2), according to Belinda Straight in *Women on the Verge of Home*. Straight is specifically concerned with how women narrate their modern experiences of home in both historical and literary texts. By the early twentieth century, the harsh actualities of colonialism, industrialization and urbanization “made home into a precious and rare imaginative

space in contrast to displacement and other precarious realities” (2). Through her creative focus on narrating the history of her family’s Big House, Bowen clearly turns to the stability that this “imaginative space” appears to represent. She readily acknowledges her fascination with the “family will” as made manifest in the drive to continue life in the same pattern in the same home, even as the aforementioned modern events progressively uprooted previously stable economic, political and technological realities. Through the course of researching and writing her family history, she also began to see the order her family cultivated through their continuous residence at Bowen’s Court: “Having looked back at them steadily, I began to notice, if I cannot define, the pattern they unconsciously went to make” (452). She goes on to suggest whether they were conscious of it or not, her family influenced the course of events in Ireland by their very choices, “assertions,” and “compliances” (452). In this way, Bowen does not attempt to provide a final excuse for her family’s part in the forced settlement of Ireland. She may express sympathy for their determined obliviousness to the continued antagonism of the native Irish people surrounding their demesne or admiration for the civilized ideal they hoped to advance through their example, but she also accepts her ancestors as complicit agents in the willful dispossession of thousands of Irish gentry and peasant farmers. Bowen admits, “my family got their position and drew their power from a situation that that shows in inherent wrong” (453). Although the 1922 Treaty that created the Irish Free State brought with it a hope for the future, Bowen also expresses trepidation as she concludes *Bowen’s Court* that this colonial “wrong” will continue to infect the future of the country with bitter suspicion and resentment.

## Chapter Three: Family Homes in Elizabeth Bowen's Novels

### **Historical Space in *The Last September***

In many ways, the family home created in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* is the fictional representation of the Big House of her Anglo-Irish family. In the novel, Danielstown represents the power and favorable social status enjoyed by the Anglo-Irish, embodied in the novel by the owners of this particular Big House, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor. Like their distant neighbors at Castle Trent and Mount Isabel, the Naylor's ownership of the land justified their authority and the Big Houses were visible representations of their privilege. As the central dwelling in the novel, Danielstown is clearly connected to the past, and specifically to the British colonial past with all of the political power and economic security that that past implies, particularly for the Anglo-Irish, with their often precarious position as established settlers in the colonial territory of Ireland.

The anteroom at Danielstown becomes a significant focus in the novel, and the reader is introduced to Danielstown and its legacy in an early description of this central room. There is a smell of "animals drawn from skins on the floor by the glare of morning," and Lois often trips in the jaws of the tiger skin lying on the floor. There are pictures of past generations of soldiers on the wall and a group of elephants made of ebony from India on the bookcases. The paint on the house's sills and shutters has been blistered by the sun, "as though the house had spent a day in the tropics" (9-10). Echoes of British colonies resound through Danielstown, linking the house with the glory days of the British empire in Ireland and India. This particular family home is a house of the past, which is slowly decaying under the weight of its own pretensions. In *Elizabeth*

*Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue that it is the dead, whose pictures fill the Big House and whose presence is felt throughout, who end up defining the living: “for Bowen, people are figured, characterized, given identity, precisely by the thought of the dead – their thoughts about dead people and dead people’s thoughts about them” (17). As Bowen would have been fully aware because of her experiences with her own Anglo-Irish Big House Bowen’s Court, the patterns of privilege and expectations established by the generations who have inhabited these homes exert immense pressure on any future generation to embrace those same patterns and maintain the conventional social order.

In the novel, one sees the younger generation, embodied by Lois and Lawrence, trapped by the history and expectations of Danielstown and the generations who have come before. One evening, following an unexpected encounter on the house grounds with a “man in a trench-coat,” whom she assumes to be a local Irish native, Lois imagines the scene inside the house as the evening draws to a close: “Chairs standing round dejectedly; upstairs, the confidently waiting beds; mirrors vacant and startling; books read and forgotten, contributing no more to life; dinner-table certain of its regular compulsion” (Bowen, *Last* 34). In her imaginative vision of the home’s inner life, the furniture stands around the inhabitants as “witnesses” to a life that appears to be winding down, as the objects themselves are depicted as “waiting,” “vacant,” and “forgotten.” These objects have a purpose, a “regular compulsion” but that purpose has been interrupted by the decay of Anglo-Irish authority and power. Similarly, Lois and Lawrence also exist in this family home as interrupted entities whose purpose – to inherit and perpetuate the family’s estate and legacy – is still expected to be fulfilled by their aunt and uncle, but that purpose is revealed to be increasingly irrelevant. As the logical heirs of this Big House and its legacy, Lois and her cousin lack a clear vision of their future outside of Danielstown’s demesne.



Lady Myra Naylor has vague plans for Lois to study art, but Lois herself has little inclination or talent. Lawrence is home from Oxford but expresses no apparent interest in the management of the estate or pursuing any professional field: he often secludes himself away to read in some hidden corner or just wanders around wishing for something dramatic to occur to relieve his boredom.

More specifically, the continuing presence of the dead, including Lois's mother Laura, in the Big House of Danielstown has become an overwhelmingly oppressive force for Lois and Lawrence. The fact that Laura repeatedly comes up in conversations within the home, especially once the Montmorency arrive for their visit, means that her presence remains a palpable part of everyone's life, along with stories of her attempted rebellion of the rules and codes that the Big House seeks to perpetuate. Hugo Montmorency, a former lover of Laura's tells his wife Francie that Laura "was never happy at all, even here [Danielstown]. She never knew what she wanted." As Richard Naylor's sister, there would have been expectations regarding appropriate behavior and any proper future marriage, which she shattered when she ran away "up North and met Farquar," Lois's father (19). James F. Wurtz in his article "Elizabeth Bowen, Modernism, and the Spectre of Anglo-Ireland," suggests that Bowen's depiction of Danielstown and the history that it embodies indicates that the house is actually "draining life from the present" by "[sapping] vitality from its inhabitants and [replacing] it with politeness and etiquette" (123). In this way, the living heirs of the Anglo-Irish legacy, Lois and Lawrence, are at risk of becoming ghosts of themselves: a risk that possibly led Laura to escape from Danielstown years ago before her own life and future could be strictly defined by the social order of the Anglo-Irish house. Ironically, in death, Laura has returned to Danielstown in the form of a memory of beauty and energy that only functions to highlight the house's failure as a nurturing home for that vitality in life. Indeed,

because Laura has scratched her name into the very windows of Danielstown, her own failed attempt at self-determination, to decide for herself who she was to become, has been incorporated into the home. Literally imprinting herself onto the house was one early effort to break through its restrictive codes of behavior by claiming authority over her own identity (160).

The dead of Danielstown, including Laura, are powerful only in so far as they continue to inhabit the house. Their lives have been sacrificed to the continued existence of this Anglo-Irish family home and the order that it represents: they have become part of the house and the tradition. Derek Hand takes this idea of sacrifice one step further when he argues in “Ghosts from our Future: Bowen and the Unfinished Business of Living,” his exploration of the relationships between characters and places in Bowen’s fiction, that Lois’s “existence, and that of the Anglo-Irish society she is representative of, is a ghostly one, predicated on the washed-out rituals centred around the Big House of Danielstown” (71). There is the possibility that Lois herself also exists to be sacrificed to these fading rituals if she is not able to break with this potentially suffocating tradition. Already, like her mother, Lois is terrified of becoming too narrowly defined. When she overhears a conversation between Aunt Myra and Francie Montmorency, she listens with alarm as Francie says, “Lois is very-” and Lois is overwhelmed by anxiety to the point that she deliberately knocks a pitcher on the basin table in order to advertise her presence. “She had a panic. She didn’t want to know what she was, she couldn’t bear to: knowledge of this would stop, seal, finish one” (60). For Lois, the consequence of being ultimately defined and “finished” by the conventional expectations represented by the Big House would likely be an act of desperation, such as the escape that her mother attempted, or one of resignation in which she forgoes any hope or possibility of determining her own future.

The very penetrating and overwhelming presence of the past creates a haunted environment through which Bowen questions the somewhat nostalgic understanding of home that defines it as a stable place of refuge that contains and perpetuates the traditional order of past generations. Such an essential definition of domestic space is one that Gaston Bachelard establishes in his phenomenological study *The Poetics of Space*. For Bachelard, it is through the act of recalling former images of protection and comfort, reliving through daydreams the memories of the past, that an effect of stability in any home is created and perpetuated. Thus, human dwellings naturally retain the past because of the dweller's process of recreating images of former homes. However, Bowen suggests there may be possible negative consequences for the inhabitants when the past that exists in a home comes to dominate present experience to the extent that possibilities for self-determination are limited. In *Bowen's Court* Elizabeth Bowen may have expressed admiration for the stable and well-mannered social order the Big Houses embodied for the Anglo-Irish, but in *The Last September* she implies the potentially harmful result if the rituals of behavior attached to a dwelling become an end in themselves. The Naylor's have maintained a social code of conduct despite the fact that the place itself, their Big House, has lost its underlying economic and political authority and justification for existence. Their home has ceased to be an essential dwelling as defined by Bachelard because the past that it embodies is one increasingly disconnected from the present circumstances. Bowen develops an effective modernist critique of the essential definitions of place and dwelling through her depiction of a family home crumbling under the pressure of its own past.

Trapped by the legacy of the Anglo-Irish political and economic power, at its peak at the end of the eighteenth century, the Big House families by the early twentieth century are increasingly isolated within the grounds of their demesnes from the growing unrest in Ireland.

Set in the early 1920s, the narrative takes place during the fighting for Irish independence. However, the Naylor's live within their house and ignore as far as they can the conflicts of the outside world. Richard Gill, in "The Country House in a time of Trouble," comments on the Naylor's lack of concern for the encroaching troubles ahead: "The Naylor's, trying to remain indifferent to the political conflict and violence in the sinister Ireland around them, keep up the conventions of hospitality and civilized form" (53). However, Gill understands these conventions as creating a community within the house at the same time that the house itself serves to isolate the residents from the outside world. In fact, Gill reminds the reader, through references to *Bowen's Court*, that the idea of the Big House for Bowen was primarily "a social idea – of good manners, good behavior, and easy, unsuspecting intercourse" (58). Bowen reinforces this impression when she writes in her essay "The Big House" of the "subjugation of the personal to the impersonal." It was for the sake of the social tradition exemplified in the Big Houses of Ireland that "people learned to subdue their own feelings" (29). Nevertheless, it is these same social traditions that can create the suffocating atmosphere of the family home in Bowen's fiction.

The expectations associated with these traditions leave the younger generations of Anglo-Irish women with no clear and distinct identity beyond the drawing room. In *The Last September* Lois has no driving purpose or ambitions in her life. Though there is talk of her going to art school and Lady Naylor claims that Lois loves to draw, Lois herself never displays such a passion for art (180). She also emotionally rejects marriage with Gerald as an option for the future, though it is actually Lady Naylor who informs Gerald of her niece's lack of affection for him. In her passivity, Lois is willing to be defined by Danielstown and the past that haunts its floors. For example, once Francie has informed Lois that Aunt Myra spoke to Gerald and Lois

begins to understand that her aunt has “interfered,” Lois accepts her aunt’s decision with relatively little protest. Any anger she feels is “faintly academic,” though she insists that she “*must*” love Gerald (186, 187). Lois understands that marriage will be expected of her eventually and Gerald offers an opportunity to fulfill the conventional role of wife. Earlier during the course of Marda Norton’s visit to Danielstown, Lois admitted to her that she “[likes] to be in a pattern...to be related; to have to be what I am” (98). In order to remain in that comfortable pattern, Lois herself will become complicit in the Naylor’s determined ignorance of the outside world and its conflicts when she decides to keep her encounter with the Irish rebel at the mill a secret. The Naylor’s insulate themselves, their family, and their guests within the walls of a house that succeeds in defining moral and social codes of behavior in part through the weight of a tradition, which is felt by every character that walks through the door. Lois remains confined in the limited expectations and conventions allowed for women in the Big House, and she never breaks free from these restrictive patterns in the course of the novel. Phyllis Lassner suggests that these conventions are more limiting for the women of Danielstown than for the men: “Unlike the male characters, who imagine power in the form of running an estate, or, as in the case of Laurence, becoming a writer, the female characters are shown to lack any fantasy not related to the house. It is as though two centuries of being the lady of the demesne has absorbed these women into the very walls” (30). Of course, at the end of the novel, Danielstown burns and Lois is perhaps at last provided with an opportunity to imagine a life free from the limited and barren pattern offered by the Anglo-Irish Big House.

In part due to the heavy presence of the dead and the Anglo-Irish past, there is no energy or passion in Danielstown. Lawrence attempts to avoid people in general and Lois’s main occupation around the house is decorative, selecting and arranging the flowers. There is also

little active discussion of politics or national affairs, though Sir Richard Naylor does lament the large number of British soldiers in the country “with nothing to do but dance and poke old women out of their beds” (25). Any emotion that could perhaps prove destructive to the Naylor’s world and their house is displaced onto the outside world and is revealed in the forces of nature or in the passion of visitors and intruders. From the very beginning, the trees are seen embracing the lawn, yet the house itself stares “coldly over its mounting lawns” (Bowen, *The Last* 7). The screen of trees surrounding the demesne is still capable of holding the outside world separate from the estate grounds by providing a type of protective barrier. However, at the same time, those trees have branches “like splintered darkness,” which suggests they may not always remain successful as form of protection. The potential approaching threat is also seen in the “orange bright sky” at sunset as it is “pressing in” on the demesne grounds “like an invasion” (22). From the trees to the sky, Bowen personifies the environment to figuratively enact the future fiery encroachment of the outside world into Danielstown. All of the energy and passion one might expect to be in the characters has been invested in the landscape. If nature and natural impulses are being repressed in the Big House, then Bowen creates an outward world full of activity and movement. By the end of the novel, the whole world of Danielstown is burning and the outside world with its passions, aggression, and hatred can no longer be ignored by simply not talking about the surrounding violence or by relying on the embrace of the estate trees to keep that violence at bay. The Naylor’s succeed through most of the novel in marginalizing the war in their lives and in their home, but ultimately the conflicts in Ireland, including the Irish War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War, cannot be buried and the Anglo-Irish are forced to open their house and answer for their repression: repression of both their own individuality and the native Irish citizenry. Phyllis Lassner associates the conflicts and violence that now consume

Danielstown with the ultimate inability of the Naylor's to subjugate the lives of their young niece and nephew to the fateful tradition of the Anglo-Irish as represented by the Big House itself. "The needs of the younger generation to save their individuality from absorption are regarded as precisely that kind of violence that launched Anglo-Irish identity but now threatens it from within and without" (35). In the final analysis, the world of Danielstown is static because it is a world at its end. The Big House is emptied of energy and expectations and it has trapped its inhabitants in a pattern that is without a viable future.

If the Big Houses were visual representations of the permanency and exclusiveness of the Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland, they were also fated to be the symbols of Anglo-Ireland's eventual death. As the paint peels from Danielstown's walls in *The Last September*, the reader can sense the unavoidable end of the Naylor's and their forced isolation. The Big House is decaying before the reader's eyes even as its features become more human. In *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*, Maud Ellmann points out that the fall of the Naylor's is a result not of the characters' flaws or moral failings, but is in part a result of the "grandiose ambitions embodied their house" (53). In agreement, Phyllis Lassner states, "Bowen regarded the destruction of the Big Houses as the inevitable result of entrenched and unchanging attitudes on the part of an unassimilated and exclusive population" (26). As long as Danielstown survives, Lois is unable to imagine and so ultimately pursue an alternative existence to the one offered by the Big House and its legacy. Therefore, Bowen's narrative suggests that the destruction of the family dwelling is inescapably necessary because the past that has made Danielstown a home, at least according to Bachelard's essentialist understanding of home, has also made it a haunted prison for its residents. As the Anglo-Irish have gradually fallen from their privileged position of colonial authority in Ireland, their houses, as symbols of that power, have become disconnected

domestic spaces, removed socially, culturally, and politically from the landscape. The burning of the Big House forces an end to the barriers dividing the Anglo-Irish from the rest of the country. Danielstown is no longer a secure, discrete place protected and separated from the outside: as the house burns at the end of the novel, the “door [stands] open hospitably upon a furnace” (206). It is too late for this domestic space to open its doors to the surrounding Irish natives and culture. While Bowen will later suggest a more peaceful reintegration into the land and culture is possible for these Anglo-Irish Family homes in her essay “The Big House,” for the Naylor, the opening of their home is not by choice and so it must be absorbed back into the land by force.

Lois represents one of the many Bowen women who are depicted in states of transition, often from adolescence to adulthood. According to Phyllis Lassner in her study of Elizabeth Bowen, “In her fiction Bowen was interested in testing the formation of female character against the literary and social traditions which had been responsible for its development” (15). Since Bowen herself acknowledged that the Big House tradition was essentially a social one in her essay “The Big House,” then this testing of character that Lassner suggests is a challenge to the only social identity allowed for women in the conventions of the Anglo-Irish demesne. Though Bowen may elegize the loss of the Big House as a loss of a social community, she succeeds in questioning the historical imperatives of such a community that exist to perpetuate its existence in *The Last September*. Furthermore, Bowen continues to question the restrictive determination that the family home itself exerted in much of her later fiction. Because Bowen’s Court was the definitive home for Bowen throughout her life and perhaps because she suffered multiple dispossessions of home and family growing up, she turns again and again in her work to the



effects of abandonment of the family home on its inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> Ellmann suggests the Big House influence that she understands Bowen to be exploring actually indicates a broader interest in the effects of constructed space on those who inhabit it: “In her writing, architecture takes the place of psychology: character is shaped by rooms and corridors, doors and windows, arches and columns, rather than by individual experience” (42). I would argue that it is the individual experience as it shapes and is shaped by the particular space it inhabits that reveals character psychology. It is in fact the fictions (in the act of remembering) that we create to understand and explain our experiences that serve to render our history meaningful and definitive in shaping identity. Bowen recognizes this when she writes the following concerning her own memories: “I know that I have in my make-up layers of synthetic experience, and that the most powerful of my memories are only half true... The overlapping and haunting of life by fiction began, of course, before there was anything to be got from the printed page; it began from the day one was old enough to be told a story or shown a picture book” (“Out” 48-49). In Bowen’s work, these remembered fictions are inevitably linked to place, and no place proved as powerful in her life as the family home.

One’s memories often inevitably become tied to the stability of the family home and the traditions upon which that stability has customarily rested. It is in fact this very stability that phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard argues is at the heart of how any house becomes a home. We bring to any act of inhabiting a house the memories of safety and comfort that past homes have provided. Therefore, one could argue from a phenomenological perspective that whether or not any particular dwelling is literally stable is not as important for our understanding of it as a place as is the fact that we *experience* it as secure and fixed. The connection between inhabiting a

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<sup>11</sup> Bowen, *Bowen’s Court*. Bowen and her mother were forced to leave Dublin for England when Bowen was seven following her father’s breakdown. In September 1912, her mother died and she went to live with her Aunt Laura at Harpenden.

domestic place and experiencing that place through imagination and memory is thus crucial to Gaston Bachelard's concept of dwelling, for it is through the recreation of memories that this effect of stability is reinforced and maintained. Gaston Bachelard's characterizes dwelling as an essential experience of being itself that inherently retains the past because it incorporates recreated (through memory) images of former homes. There is "solidarity of memory and imagination" in the creation of these images (6) and as a result, Bachelard's definition of dwelling indicates the undeniable influence of the individual inhabitant of the home. In *The Last September*, as in the nonfiction *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth Bowen hints at the possible dangers when generations of a family have inhabited a home, with each generation adding their experiences and their memories to the place. With the passing years, the experience of stability and permanence becomes stronger, even when outside political and economic circumstances may be challenging the actual physical security of the home. In this fashion, family myths of place are created, such as that which ruled Bowen's Court in County Cork for so many generations. Ultimately, it is the moments of dispossession that are scattered throughout Bowen's texts, including *The Last September* and *Bowen's Court* that appear to suggest the existence of the many fictions that lie behind the stability of both the family home and the identities of family members attached to that space. For Bowen, when the home is under threat or has already been lost or abandoned, the sense of homelessness that results is in part based on the realization that the stability experienced in the act of dwelling was always part fiction created through Bachelard's "solidarity of memory and imagination" (6). The ensuing consequences of this homelessness for modern characters, particularly women, are explored in several of Elizabeth Bowen's later novels, including *The Death of the Heart*.

## **The Modern Uncanny in *The Death of the Heart***

*The Death of the Heart* is divided into three parts: “The World,” “The Flesh,” and “The Devil.” The first and third sections are centered around life at Windsor Terrace, the London home of Thomas and Anna Quayne, while the majority of the action of the second section takes place at Waikiki, the seaside home of Anna’s former governess, Mrs. Heccomb. Both houses become significant sites for the development and ultimate loss of innocence of Portia Quayne, the half-sister of Thomas, who has come to live with the Quayne’s in London following the death of her mother. Portia’s intrusion into both the family homes of the Quayne’s and the Heccomb’s reveals the values and assumptions inherent in these domestic places. Bowen uses them to explore the changing connection of such dwellings to the past as well as to the outside world beyond the front door. In addition, the homes function as reflections of their inhabitants, thus furthering overall character development as well as suggesting how these inhabitants are also affected by the evolution of modern spatial experience.

Quite early in the novel, we have our first glimpse of the Quayne’s London residence, Windsor Terrace, as Anna Quayne is walking around nearby Regent’s Park with friend and novelist St. Quentin on a bitterly cold January day. Reluctant to yet return home, Anna apparently prefers to continue on in the park, while St. Quentin looks longingly at the front of Windsor Terrace across the street and imagines the warmth awaiting him there (15). The reader is offered a view of the Regent’s Park houses from this outside perspective and a curious initial impression of emptiness is formed. Seen against the late afternoon sky, the houses are “colourless silhouettes, insipidly ornate, brittle and cold. The blackness of windows not yet lit or curtained made the houses look hollow inside” (10). From the beginning, the narrator’s language makes apparent the empty chill of Windsor Terrace. The house encloses an emptiness that is

tightly closed off from the life and movement of the outside world. For prior to Anna's and St. Quentin's return, Portia arrives home from her lessons, and we are told the Windsor Terrace front door "brushed heavily over the mat and clicked shut." The closing of the door effectively stops the "breath of raw air" from the outside and Portia is sealed in the silent house (23). The thick carpet on the stone staircase muffles any sound of footsteps and the stark white walls prove a blank landscape within which no intimate or imaginative life is possible (28). The lack of any sensual stimulation in this colorless, noiseless home means that it is certainly not conducive to the formation of intimate connections, as Matchett the housekeeper recognizes. She feels "some lack of life in the house, some organic failure in its propriety" that is disturbing to her and prompts her sympathy for young Portia (49). Anna's concern with the surface appearance of the interior of Windsor Terrace leads Matchett to remind Portia to take her gloves and books up to her room and not leave them downstairs in the hall because "[n]othing does down here that isn't here for the look" (27). Windsor Terrace is a house to be admired visually and in which guests such as St. Quentin and Eddie can be entertained with "rooms set for strangers' intimacy," but it is not a place "where shadows lodged" or "where feeling could thicken" (50). The perceptible void in the house from this lack of feeling is only the made more evident from the arrival of Portia. Her seemingly unwelcome (particularly for Anna) invasion into the cool, elegant residence of Windsor Terrace serves to highlight the painful absences in the individual lives of Thomas and Anna as well as the conspicuous absence of children in their marriage.

Elizabeth Bowen has created in Windsor Terrace a dwelling with virtually no places for the kind of daydreaming that Gaston Bachelard suggests is necessary and even inevitable in the process of inhabiting a home. It is our imagination that makes the act of habitation not only a physical action to secure protection from the outside elements, but also an emotional and

psychological experience in which that same imagination can “build ‘walls’ of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection – or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls” (Bachelard 5). These daydreams of comforting security or vague dangers are what form the basis of our associations with home as we grow older and through a combination of memory and imaginative recall, they remain as a foundational element in any future act of dwelling. Portia came to Windsor Terrace without such memories of a stable home, having moved between hotels in Switzerland for the last few years of her mother’s life. It is arguable that Thomas and Anna Quayne have attempted to create a domestic place in Windsor Terrace that does offer protection from the outside world and so could provide Portia with the kind of stability in which she could safely navigate and enter adulthood. However, it is also clear the house is not the intimate family home that Thomas and Portia’s father, the late Mr. Quayne, envisioned when he made his wishes for Portia clear in a final letter to his son Thomas.

The reader learns the brief outlines of the story of Portia’s birth in the novel’s opening pages when Anna recounts the events to St. Quentin. According to this first telling of the narrative (there will be at least one other version of these events later in the novel), Thomas’s father was a devoted husband to the first Mrs. Quayne, Thomas’s mother. When Thomas was at Oxford and his parents were retired in Dorset, Mrs. Quayne would occasionally send her husband to London for a few days to visit friends, arguably because these trips allowed her a bit more freedom, since Mr. Quayne was “always dangling round after her” (16). It was on one of these trips at the start of summer that Mr. Quayne met Irene, Portia’s mother, and began an affair. Throughout the ensuing summer months, he regularly returned to London for more visits, having “lost his head completely” even from that first meeting. With each visit to Irene, Mr. Quayne, literally and symbolically, began to further remove himself from the home he had

always loved. He was not to be aware of the fact that he was essentially abandoning that home until it was too late and Irene became pregnant. It was not until the early fall, when Thomas was home and preparing to return to school, that Mr. Quayne, upon learning that Irene was pregnant with Portia, was obligated to reveal everything to his wife. Thomas's mother insisted that her husband marry Irene, which meant that was forced to leave Dorset. According to Anna, Thomas's father "loved his home like a child" and while his affair with Irene had taken place in a fantastic "dream wood," Mr. Quayne "liked to be plain and solid" in the light of day. However, the solidity of his marriage and the home that he adored were now to be lost, and Anna suggests that Thomas's mother was completely "implacable" and by morning, even had become "quite ecstatic" in her zeal to do what was right in the situation (19). Within a few days, Mr. Quayne was sent to Irene and his wife filed for divorce, returning home to Dorset "all heroic reserve" (21). Not long after, Mr. Quayne traveled to southern France where he remained until Irene could join him and they could eventually marry.

The story of Portia's origins is significant for the insight it provides into her ambivalent relationship with her brother Thomas as well as into the family's experience with domestic spaces. As his sister, Portia shares certain physical traits with Thomas, including the Quayne "high forehead," that effectively reinforce their familial bond and remind Thomas of his responsibilities in fulfilling his father's dying request. (33). At the same time, as the unfortunate product of an affair, Portia is a constant embarrassing reminder of his father's failure for Thomas. Their father, Anna suggests, was painfully aware of the shame that he had brought to this family and it was for this reason that he chose to stay permanently in Europe, only rarely visiting England to see Thomas and even then at times secretly. Because he felt that Portia had suffered for his mistakes and so had been "exiled not only from her own country but from

*normal, cheerful* family life,” Mr. Quayne requested in a final letter to his son that he and Anna provide her with a family home for at least a year (13). Thomas’s father, according to Matchett’s later retelling of the story of his fall to Portia, had lost his “place in the world” and “[f]or a gentleman like him, abroad was no proper place” (97). Mr. Quayne’s desire for Portia to experience a more secure “place” of her own with Thomas and Anne is a result of his own traumatic sense of homelessness. Both Anna’s and Matchett’s version of Mr. Quayne’s banishment from Dorset include the same simile to describe his attachment to the home he shared with his first wife: “He loved his home like a child” (19, 97). While Anna’s interpretation tends to highlight “how dumb Mr. Quayne was,” Matchett expresses more sympathy for what she understood as the breaking of Thomas’s father. The housekeeper claims that she never forgave Mrs. Quayne for how she chose to do what was “right” rather than that was “good” in the matter of Mr. Quayne and Irene (96). Matchett’s more compassionate rendering of Mr. Quayne’s history implies the significance of his request to Thomas and Anna: Matchett indicates that granting his request was the “proper” thing to be done (101). Following his own forced dispossession, Mr. Quayne spoke to Portia of Windsor Terrace and “how nice it was” (101). Although he had never entered inside, Mr. Quayne had once walked in the neighborhood around the house and imagined the fashionable and elegant interior. Portia remembers the pride with which he would speak of the life Thomas and Anna had made in London and how it “made him happy to talk about them” (102). His idealization of their life and home at Windsor Terrace made Mr. Quayne want this “proper” home for Portia, who with her parents “always had the back rooms in hotels, or dark flats in villas with no view” as they aimlessly traveled through the south of France, never settling anywhere permanently (21). However, since Mr. Quayne never stepped inside Windsor Terrace, he died unaware of its true nature as a dwelling: the style and elegance

that he admired from the outside masked the home's cold interior silence as well as the "unnatural living" that according to Matchett permeates the house and the family. The chilling, refined emptiness that Thomas and Anna have created in their home can be understood as their attempt to deny the painful past and to keep at bay the changes taking place in the world outside their front door.

Danielstown in *The Last September* represents the extreme of man's desire to maintain civilized order, as symbolized in the family home, at the expense of individual identity, and Windsor Terrace in *The Death of the Heart* represents a similar desire on the part of Thomas and Anna Quayne, though the order established is more clearly artificial by design. The character in the novel who comes closest to revealing this artificiality is the housekeeper, Matchett. After Portia comes to live with Thomas and Anna, she develops a friendship with Matchett. The old Quayne housekeeper talks to Thomas's young half-sister of her father and his first wife, Thomas's mother. Matchett supplies Portia's family history because Thomas and Anna make every effort to keep the past buried and forgotten. Anna keeps letters from her old lover, Pidgeon, in a locked desk drawer (322). Thomas will not speak of his father's infidelity with Portia's mother because of the shame it brought upon his family. For this reason, along with the heartbreak that also exists in Anna's past, neither Thomas nor his wife desires a house built upon accumulated traditions from the past. At one point, Matchett points out to Portia a significant lack in the Quayne house: "They'd rather no past – not have the past, that is to say. No wonder they don't rightly know what they're doing. Those without memories don't know what is what" (99). Through the character of Matchett, Bowen suggests a connection between this willed rejection of the past and the Quaynes' desire to avoid the attachments of a traditional family home. The housekeeper is often directly identified with Windsor Terrace and in particular, with



the furniture that came to the house upon the death of Thomas's mother. As she is telling Portia the events surrounding the first Mrs. Quayne's death, Matchett again uses the word "proper" to describe her reasons for coming to Windsor Terrace with the furniture:

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. Quayne's...Furniture's knowing all right. Not much gets past the things in a room, I daresay, and chairs and tables don't go to the grave so soon. Every time I take the soft cloth to that stuff in the drawingroom, I could say, 'Well, you know a bit more'...Well, it didn't speak and I didn't. If Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are what you say, nervous, no doubt they are nervous of what's not said. (101)

Matchett is aware of the importance of objects, including furniture, in determining a home, as she has been the housekeeper to the Quaynes for years. Yet, for Thomas and Anna, the importance of Mrs. Quayne's old furniture lies in its monetary worth. They "see the value of it" as Matchett explains to Portia, but for the Quaynes, the furniture, as a collection of objects that embodies the patterns of tradition established by the past, is worthless.

During Portia's stay with the Heccombs at Seale, she remembers Windsor Terrace primarily by the objects that fill the house and her bedroom. The narrator suggests that the habit of repeated interaction with increasingly familiar objects in a house void of intimate feeling results in close attachments to these things: "Only in a house where one has learnt to be lonely does one have this solicitude for things. One's relation to them, the daily seeing or touching, begins to become love, and to lay one open to pain" (179). With her depiction of Matchett and Portia and their different relationships with the things of Windsor Terrace, Bowen implies there

are varying motivations for the intimate relationships that may exist between a house's inhabitants and the objects that order the family home. According to Mona Van Duyn in "A Reading of *The Death of the Heart*," "One's relationship to objects and houses is sign and symbol of the kind of pact one had made with reality, the novel posits" (21). It is, again, for Bowen the daily pattern of interacting with the furniture and objects of a home that breed security and familiarity: for Matchett, her connection to the objects of Windsor Terrace arises from a respect for the history and tradition they embody, and for Portia, her attachment to the things in her room is a result of the emotional vacuum that fills the Quaynes' home. The narrative voice reinforces this attachment later in the novel when Portia is in her room at the Heccombs in Seale following an argument with Mrs. Heccomb's daughter Daphne. Portia focuses her attention on a drawing of Anna in the room and the narrator offers the following commentary:

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 centres of fireplaces or wallpapers pasted on 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. (270)

Many individuals can be aware of and can basically accept the fragile and temporary nature of human life, but we often invest our need and desire for permanence into the buildings and

objects that we construct. Bowen suggests that their apparent solidity and steadiness, even in the midst of emotional disturbance, offers consolation to Portia at this moment. It is when this reassuring stability of objects is tested or lost altogether that the human spirit must confront the awful reality of the “unforeseeable.” At Windsor Terrace, every object is in its place as Anna tries to “adjudicate” for life inside the home and avoid facing the unpredictability of the city outside the front door. The raw emotion and childish innocence that accompanied Portia on her arrival to Windsor Terrace were unwelcome intrusions into a house that the Quaynes had hoped to empty of the emotional attachments of the past and shield against the “unforeseeable.” The invasion of her physical presence into the home, along with the innocence, grief and passion that accompany her, function to expose old wounds from the past and reveal the emptiness the Quaynes have now embraced as a result of those wounds.

Even before the arrival of Portia, Windsor Terrace was not a traditional family home in the sense that Thomas and Anna never had children, though they certainly tried. When Portia insists to Matchett that Anna was forced to take her in, Matchett reveals that Portia’s bedroom was “empty, waiting” because “[s]he never filled it, for all she is so clever” (103). With her emphasis on the “*she*” and her implication of the failure on the part of Anna in not successfully producing children, Matchett has suggested aspects of Anna’s character and of her marriage to Thomas that render this failure a keenly felt absence in the house. Our first glimpse of their marriage takes place in his study when Anna enters and finds Thomas, who has been waiting for her, with his sister Portia, who has been daydreaming about the final months with her mother in Switzerland. It is clear that neither sibling is particularly comfortable with the other: he tries to “[make] an effort” in conversation but replies “absently” to Portia when she speaks of life with her mother, and Portia, still filled with grief over mother’s death, fades into daydreams upon the

loss of Thomas's attention. When Anna chastises Thomas for making Portia cry after she has left the room, he is revealed to be completely unaware that Portia had been crying at all.

The narrative suggests that Thomas's inattentiveness to his sister is also linked to his desire for his wife's presence. He is shown to be anxious and frustrated when Portia visits his study before his wife: "Anyone other than Anna being near him, anyone other than Anna expecting something gave Thomas, at this time of the evening, a sense of pressure he could hardly endure" (35). However, once Anna is alone with Thomas in the room, there is a noticeable reserve in their interaction, particularly on her side. She catches his hand, "holding it a distance away from her" and when he suggests that they will be alone together later that night once Portia has gone to bed, he reaches for Anna only to have her back away (43). All of these small signs are indications of a truth revealed to the reader not long after: the marriage of Thomas and Anna was a consequence of their mutual need for comfort and security but not a product of great love. Anna had just seen the "ignominious end" of her love affair with Pidgeon when she met Thomas, and he had simply felt it was the appropriate time to marry. Allan E. Austin in the updated edition of his introductory overview of Elizabeth Bowen's fiction asserts that Thomas and Anna have actually "been living more of an arrangement than a marriage, for each came to it as an emotional cripple" (41). This arrangement, however, is not necessarily satisfactory for Thomas. We are told that upon marrying Anna, Thomas was surprised to find himself "the prey of a passion for her, inside marriage, that nothing in their language could be allowed to express, that nothing could satisfy" (Bowen, *Death* 45). Although Anna is committed to fulfilling the role of wife to a successful advertising executive, she displays no outward signs of sincere, spontaneous passion for her husband, so his own desire for her is left without

expression in words or action. What remains unexpressed in their marriage results in a house where silence often seems the main inhabitant (23).

The absence of any children in the marriage has also contributed to the silence that so often characterizes Windsor Terrace. As Matchett indicates to Portia, the room that became the bedroom for Thomas's younger sister was originally intended for any children Anna might have, but ended up only "empty, waiting" (103). After they married, Thomas and Anna planned "to have two or three children" but after two early miscarriages, Anna stopped expecting or even trying to get pregnant. It was not in her character to easily accept such a failure of expectations. Throughout her life, Anna avoided activities and professions at which she may not have succeeded and even affected indifference and idleness "for fear of finding herself less able than she could wish" (44). Thus, her inability to successfully produce the expected children in her marriage to Thomas has rendered her disillusioned with motherhood: "These exposures to false hopes, then to her friends' pity, had turned her back on herself: she did not want children now" (46). As Allan E. Austin examines the "overly ordered" world of Windsor Terrace and the emotional vacuum of the Quayne marriage, he also contends that Anna's "disappointment and her consequent adjustment to childlessness contribute to her stiffness toward Portia" (41). Given Anna's customary self-possessed reserve, she certainly does not prove adept at connecting with Portia on an emotional level, but the anticipation of Portia's stay does appear to elicit an energetic response from Anna. At least initially, there is no suggestion of the "stiffness" that Austin claims. As Windsor Terrace prepares for the arrival of Portia, Anna once again turns to the empty room "that could have been the nursery" and seems to invest all of her energy in making it pleasant and comfortable. In the anticipation of Portia's stay, Anna feels "the closest feeling for Portia she ever had" (47). Although Anna never does develop affection for Portia and

she finds it difficult to even like her, Anna's early attention to preparing the bedroom suggests that she may have initially viewed Portia's stay at Windsor Terrace as an opportunity to succeed where she had previously failed. If Thomas's sister were going to be forced on the house – and we are told that Anna “fought against Portia's coming” – then Anna could use the occasion to showcase what a proper mother she could have been if given the chance (48). However, the glaring absence in the empty nursery that Anna perhaps anticipates Portia will fill is destined to remain a void in the house. From the beginning there is a distance in understanding and a gap in experience between Anna and Portia that neither is ever able to successfully bridge.

Portia moves into Windsor Terrace and brings with her an open, straightforward demeanor that she soon discovers is not always embraced by her new family. For example, she quickly learns at Windsor Terrace not to look at anyone for too long. As a result, her eyes have taken on a “homeless intentness” as they seek to avoid catching anyone else's glance (58). Her innocence prompts her to look directly at others in order to convey and understand meaning, but here with Thomas and Anna, she has learned to avert her unwelcome gaze. At her lessons too, Portia has learned how to feign the requisite amount of attention to her instructors in order to prevent their exasperated glares in her direction. At school and at home, she is adapting to her environment and in the process, losing her natural directness and curiosity little by little. In everyone she sees in her new London environment, Portia senses action and purpose and “she could not doubt people knew what they were doing.” However, Portia remains feeling isolated in her lack of direction: “The spring of the works seemed unfound only by her” (72). Portia suspects the existence of an order but is unsure of her place in it and she feels ignorant of the rules that she feels certain dictate behavior in her new home. “In her home life (her new home life) with its puzzles, she saw dissimulation always on guard; she asked herself humbly for what

reason people said what they did not mean, and did not say what they meant” (72). Her bewilderment is at its most intense at Windsor Terrace, for she finds the mysterious “pattern” that governs behavior “much simplified” outside (72). The level of pretense that exists, however, in her new home makes it difficult for Portia to measure anyone’s motivations or expectations. As a result, she is unable to truly feel comfortable in this dwelling or develop intimate relationships with Thomas or Anna.

The cautious “dissimulation” that Portia notices at Windsor Terrace is also figured as an affected theatricality in which everyone embraces the role that they are expected to play. While Portia has begun to suspect the surface pretense, Major Brutt, visiting the home for the first time, finds the Quayne home warm and welcoming and idealizes the family as the perfect domestic unit. Because of his own desire for a safe place to call home, he remains unaware of the artificiality of this domestic space until the end of the novel. The Quaynes run into Major Brutt by chance one evening, and, as a figure from Anna’s past, he is not an altogether welcome reminder of her time with former lover, Robert Pidgeon. Yet, for Anna, there also exists a “[m]agnetism to that long-ago evening” years earlier that Major Brutt had spent with Robert and Anna, so much so that she invites him back to Windsor Terrace for a drink (53). The visit that follows becomes another evening that Major Brutt will transform into a warm memory to comfort his solitude and bolster his spirits as he wanders the city looking for work. Bowen, however, hints from the beginning of his visit that Windsor Terrace may not be as solid as Major Brutt imagines it to be. For Bowen, the frailty and unreality of the Quayne’s house does not easily lend itself to the creation of familial traditions, and it is the stability of these traditions and the comfort they represent that Major Brutt clings to in his idealization Windsor Terrace. However, Thomas notices the cold unreality of his own home upon returning from the movies

with Anna, Portia, and Major Brutt: “As though he heard himself challenged, or heard an echo, he looked sharply over his shoulder down the terrace – empty, stagey, E-shaped, with frigid pillars cut out on black shadow: a façade with no back” (53). Bowen places this scene of recognition directly after the scene in the theatre when Major Brutt, a figure from a past that Thomas and Anna so ardently desire to block out, happens upon the Quayne family. It is arguably this reminder of Anna’s past and its unavoidable reality that prompts Thomas to realize for a moment the unreality and falseness of his own home. For a brief time, it appears as if the past will reassert itself in Windsor Terrace.

In the warmth of the fire in the Windsor Terrace study and with a glass of whisky in his hand, Major Brutt seems charmed by Portia’s “perfectly open face” and gratified by what he views as the Quaynes’ hospitality and graciousness. However, we are told that Anna “looked removed and tired” and Thomas’s “face went lockjawed with a suppressed yawn” more than once during the course of the evening (55). It is unlikely that Major Brutt notices the tired boredom of the Quaynes as he and Portia are in the midst of enjoying “a high time” reminiscing about his past and their shared experiences living in hotels (58). The fact that he remains under the illusion of Windsor Terrace as the perfect family home is also suggested by his later Saturday call at the house which had left “a warm and bright” impression in his memory (108). Because Major Brutt is alone in London and without clear prospects for his future, the “unremitting solitude in his hotel” has transformed the Quaynes’ house into a “clearinghouse for his dreams” and a “visionary place, round which all the rest of London was a desert” (108). He calls there unannounced one Saturday and finds Thomas by himself. While Major Brutt is accustomed to the unassuming visit where one simply drops by, such visits “were unheard of at Windsor Terrace” because “[t]hey had been eliminated” (109). The privacy of the home is inviolate for



Thomas and Anna and their friends simply did not visit without phoning beforehand. Again, Major Brutt has misjudged the easy warmth of this particular home and he continues to do so as he is escorted by Thomas into the study. As Major Brutt sits like a “block of integrity” across from him, Thomas is frustrated that no one else is about to the house entertain this visitor and suspicious that Major Brutt is really angling for a job at Thomas’s advertising agency. Thomas is uncomfortable with small talk, and once the Major is seated, Thomas begins to regret having emerged from the study where he could have stayed securely hidden from view. Nevertheless, Thomas attempts to adopt the role of gentlemanly host, and so gives “a finished representation of a man happily settling into a deep chair” (116). Major Brutt senses “the tension behind Thomas’s manners” but his mind can “puzzle out nothing” as far as reasons for the anxiety (115). Thomas remains committed to the “manners” that seem appropriate to the situation until Portia arrives home, with Anna’s friend Eddie in tow, and Thomas can use her presence to absorb the Major’s attention and so divert it from himself.

Because Thomas has upheld, at least half-heartedly, the pretense of warm domestic society, Major Brutt’s image of Windsor Terrace remains intact. Any “tension” that he sensed from Thomas, he attributes to fatigue, for as he tells Portia when she enters the study, he has been “keeping [her] brother from forty winks” (121). Indeed, it is not until the final pages of the novel when Portia brutally reveals (and even, one could argue, exaggerates) the boredom and exasperation behind the Quaynes’ treatment of Major Brutt that his ideal vision of Windsor Terrace is shattered. “His home had come down” and the “betrayal [was] the end of an inner life, without which the everyday becomes threatening or meaningless” (391). Without a family home of his own in which to re-live memories of the past and daydream of the future, Major Brutt had absorbed Windsor Terrace into his imagination and through that idealized domestic space he

could re-create past images of safety and comfort, as Gaston Bachelard suggests all inhabitants do when they move into a new house. Any place in which we dwell, Bachelard argues, becomes a “home” because of our imaginative engagement with its space: “Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days... We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection” (5-6). Major Brutt believed he had found his own new dwelling in Windsor Terrace, and the comfort that it seemed to promise bolstered him even in the loneliness of his hotel room. Yet, even in the midst of his enjoyment of Windsor Terrace, Bowen hints that its hospitality and warmth may be deceptive:

Not for nothing do we invest so much of ourselves in other people’s lives – or even in momentary pictures of people we do not know. It cuts both ways: the happy group inside the lighted window, the figure in long grass in the orchard seen from the train stay and support us in our dark hours. Illusions are art, for the feeling person, and it is by art that we live, if we do. It is the emotion to which we remain faithful, after all: we are taught to recover it in some other place. Major Brutt, brought that first night to Windsor Terrace...already began to attach himself to that warm room. (115)

For Major Brutt, the image of that long-ago evening spent with Anna and her lover Pidgeon has stayed with him precisely because of the emotion connected to it in his memory, and for the same reason, the evening at Windsor Terrace promises to fulfill much the same function as a sustaining image. Bowen’s “emotion to which we remain faithful” and later “recover” seems to echo the comfort of relived memories that Bachelard suggests is at the heart of our capacity to create new places to dwell. Home is both remembered and created with each new dwelling. The

illusion of intimacy at Windsor Terrace evokes this process of imaginative recall for Major Brutt, but Portia finally forces the end of the illusion. Her life in the home of Thomas and Anna has been about learning, without ever really mastering, the distinction between what reality seems to be, based on well-mannered codes of behavior, and what it actually is underneath the propriety. Her own subsequent loss of innocence leads her, out of anger and disillusionment, to also compel Major Brutt to relinquish his vision of a new home. His discovery of the artificiality and ultimate inadequacy of Windsor Terrace as a home is a betrayal of the inner life that is connected to the essence of dwelling.

The failure of Windsor Terrace to become a family home is ultimately a failure to effectively understand, process, and incorporate experience into one's life: Thomas and Anna seem incapable of accepting their painful histories with family (his father) and past lovers (her Pidgeon) and so, they are also unable to fully foster the necessary intimacy to create a successful family home for Portia. Any past experience that is too distressing or tragic to think about, as far as its causes or consequences, is simply locked away, as Anna has literally locked up her old love letters from Pidgeon in the drawing room desk. As an embodiment of Bachelard's essential experience of dwelling that includes the domestic images of the past, Matchett is keenly aware of the "lack of life in the house" (49). Since Matchett arrived at Windsor Terrace with the furniture after the death of Thomas's mother, she is closely associated with the objects in the house. As she tells Portia, cleaning and polishing that same furniture in the late Mrs. Quayne's house was gratifying because Matchett "'liked the work for its own sake'" (94). Matchett's continued connection to the furniture through her housework at Windsor Terrace also can be seen as an experience of dwelling for philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who argues that the "daydreams that accompany household activities" function to "link its immediate past to its immediate future"

and can even effectively “[maintain] it in the security of being” (67). It should then be no surprise, as Matchett tells Portia, that “it wasn’t quite welcome to Mr. Thomas when [she] first came to this house after his mother dying” (Bowen, *Death* 100). For Thomas, the housekeeper of his mother’s home in Dorset is also a reminder of the shame that his father brought to the family. Therefore, when Thomas told Matchett “this feels like home again” after she came to Windsor Terrace with the furniture, he was simply being “civil” (100) in her opinion. She understood that he did not want the past in his current home, and so by association did not particularly want her either. Neither Thomas nor Anna desires to live in Windsor Terrace as a home, at least one by Bachelard’s definition. Bachelard’s understanding of dwelling as a primal experience that incorporates past images of homes and the memories of security and comfort that they are connected to in the imagination is not that Thomas and Anna share, and as such, they live in an elegant house, but certainly not a home. The distinction is not one that they are even aware of until Portia arrives and renders Windsor Terrace uncanny with her presence.

The pattern of life established at Windsor Terrace, though not based on any connection to Quayne personal history, is one that exists to protect the inhabitants from the pain and uncertainty that both the past and the outside world carry with them. There is a boundary that exists, from the beginning of the novel symbolized by the front door closing “heavily” after Portia enters, and the existence of that boundary continues to be alluded to throughout the novel in images suggestive of restriction. For example, the windows in Thomas’s study are “shuttered and muffled” and “lamplight bound the room in rather unreal circles” (37). Later the reader is also told that Portia’s bedroom, the intended nursery, has a “high barred window” (47). Through the house there have been efforts to reinforce the distinction between inside and outside by closing off any potential entry to the house itself. One possible reason for this is hinted at in an

early conversation between Thomas and Portia in his study. Their talk has turned to a discussion of her classes and Portia makes a comment about how “history is sad.” Thomas responds by stating that he does not understand why anyone would make a “fuss” about history because it is “bunk, misfires and graft” and people have “no reason to expect anything better.” More significantly, however, Thomas expresses a belief that “there was a future then” for the “tougher” people in the past. He suggests that there is no such expectation for a future for those living now: “You can’t get up any pace when you feel you’re right at the edge” (36). Because of his apprehension about the uncertainty of the future and an outside world “at the edge,” Thomas reacts by reinforcing the boundaries between that unpredictable outside and the inside of his home. He creates an “air-tight” environment inside Windsor Terrace and it takes the arrival of Portia to reveal the emptiness that exists in its suffocating interior (29). Thomas is finally unable to maintain the boundaries that secure the integrity of the house and the artificial order established inside because with the entry of Portia into Windsor Terrace, everything repressed and denied returns.

Portia, as Thomas’s sister, is both familiar, since the siblings share similar physical characteristics, such as the Quayne “high forehead,” and unfamiliar, since Thomas had previously had little contact with her before their father’s death in the south of France. Therefore, the familiar has returned to the Quaynes through an unfamiliar presence in the figure of Portia. In his essay “The Uncanny” Sigmund Freud reviews the various definitions of the German word *heimlich* and discover that at least one sense of the word is quite similar to its antonym, *unheimlich*. The more common meaning of the word suggests “what is familiar and comfortable” but there is also a definition that relates “to what is concealed and kept hidden” (132). Freud concludes that these various meanings acquired through usage have rendered the word *Heimlich*

“increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*” (134). Therefore, the unhomely or uncanny, the closest translation in English for *unheimlich*, is in some way associated with the familiar or homely. Fear of the unfamiliar or unknown is quite reasonable, as Freud grants in his essay (124), but the familiar becomes frightening when it has been “estranged from [the psyche] only through being repressed” (148) and then returns to confront the individual in a form that is then both familiar and strange. Anthony Vidler in *The Architectural Uncanny* elaborates on this return and asserts that it is “the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream” (7). Vidler also notes that such examinations of the uncanny and the dread prompted by it were “particularly appropriate to a moment when, as Freud noted in 1915, the entire ‘homeland’ of Europe, cradle and apparently secure house of western civilization, was in the process of barbaric regression; when the territorial security that had fostered the notion of a unified culture was broken” (7). Thus, the uncanny or the “unhomely” becomes “a question of the fundamental condition of anxiety in the world” for philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, who in response “wistfully [meditate] on the (lost) nature of ‘dwelling’”(7). Vidler suggests that it is in reaction to this modern sense of anxiety that Heidegger makes his claim for dwelling as signifying “the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth” (349). Therefore, for Heidegger, the buildings in which humans dwell are essential places that have meaning for our existence and even make that existence possible.

For many more postmodern spatial theorists, such as Doreen Massey, such an essentialist perspective on place can be understood as conservative, exclusivist, and limited in its definition of what constitutes a domestic place. Vidler’s own association of the uncanny with the modern anxiety fostered by widespread political and economic instability, finally resulting in two World

Wars, suggests that both Freud and Heidegger were in some way reacting to a growing sense of homelessness in the twentieth century and attempting to find ways to explain its foundation or mitigate its effects. The connection that Vidler establishes also highlights the reasons why Portia proves to be such a disruptive presence at Windsor Terrace. She is the physical embodiment of Vidler's modern anxiety: Portia is a homeless orphan with scandalous origins who has no sense of her purpose or who she is meant to be in the future. Indeed, Portia confesses to Matchett that she feels everyone in the house watching her as if they expect her to have a purpose for being born: "They would forgive me if I were something special. But I don't know what I was meant to be" (Bowen, *Death* 98). This uncertainty of purpose or future, particularly in light of the disreputable circumstances surrounding her birth, makes Portia a fitting representative of the modern world that Thomas and Anna have worked so hard to mitigate against in the ordering of their home.

Once Portia is within the walls of Windsor Terrace, she succeeds in exposing the coldly ordered surface that the Quaynes have created. Thomas himself suggests the surface nature of their life in the final pages of the novel when he tells Anna that they may have "kept the surface on things longer" if they had lived in the country and not the city. At this point, Portia has run to Major Brutt's hotel in a desperate attempt to escape Windsor Terrace after learning a few days earlier from St. Quentin that Anna had been reading her diary. Thomas and Anna must now figure out the "right thing" to do, which is the stipulation that Portia makes, through Major Brutt, for her return home (398). What results is a discussion that Thomas eventually labels "the apogee of bad taste" because it is the closest that the Quaynes come in the novel to communicating honestly what they actually mean to say. The couple must now face the reality of the situation with Portia, a situation for which Anna continues to believe that Portia is responsible because of

her unreasonable expectations toward people and life. Anna wonders aloud, “We know what we think we’ve done, but we still don’t know what we did. What did expect, and what is she expecting now? It’s not simply a question of getting her home this evening; it’s a question of all three going on living here... Yes, this is a situation. She’s created it” (403). However, Thomas indicates that the “situation” may have simply been one that Portia brought to light but that was always present: “No, she’s just acknowledged it. An entirely different thing” (403). Even at this critical point, Thomas is incapable of articulating, or even understanding, exactly what Portia has realized at Windsor Terrace, though he concedes that their manner of existence “likely may not stand up to examination” (405). What Portia has “acknowledged” is the disconnect that now exists between the signifying social rituals that the Quaynes uphold and the true warmth and feeling of intimate society that such rituals were intended to represent. They entertain guests, such as Eddie and St. Quentin, at tea and dinner and they mistake such society for “intimacies” but the lack of any essential feeling or communication in their social behavior renders it empty pretense. Anna actually interprets Portia’s anxiety as being the result of her inability to properly interpret the “signs” of social behavior, when this in fact only half true. When St. Quentin proposes that Anna ask herself how she would feel if she were Portia, Anna replies, “Boredom, oh such boredom, with a sort of secret society about nothing, keeping on making little signs to each other. Utter lack of desire to know what is was about” (409). “Boredom” is Anna’s response because of her own place in life and relation to past experience as an adult who has suffered heartbreak and disillusionment, but it has definitely not been Portia’s response. On the contrary, Portia has observed this “secret society” of Windsor Terrace “with a sort of despair” because “the spring of the works,” the language of society, remains a mystery to her (72). Anna can understand that her social environment is based on a language of these “little signs” but it is



not yet clear if she will be able to acknowledge the fact that the language itself may be broken if what is signified is no longer stable.

Elizabeth Bowen does situate Portia in another alternative for a family home in the form of Waikiki, the Heccombs' residence in Seale, though this one proves to be no more stable than the Quaynes' Windsor Terrace. When Thomas and Anna go on vacation to Capri in the spring, they send Portia to stay with Anna's old governess, Mrs. Heccomb, who lives now lives at Seale –on-Sea with her two step-children, Dickie and Daphne, from her marriage to her late husband Dr. Heccomb. In many ways, Waikiki is everything that Windsor Terrace is not. Where Windsor Terrace is closed and the living areas are "air-tight," Waikiki is constantly open and accessible (29). As Portia approaches the house walking down the esplanade with Mrs. Heccomb, she absorbs the new scene. There are "[n]umbers of windows at different levels" and indeed, the house appears to be "[c]onstructed largely of glass" with a "sun porch, the glass entrance door and a wide bow window." The effect for Portia is of "an almost transparent front." Inside the house, "a glass-fronted bookcase" in the main living area "served to reflect the marine view," effectively bringing the seaside into the home (171). From the beginning, it is apparent that this is not a house that keeps its door perpetually closed to the outside, but rather a family home that "faced the sea boldly, as though daring the elements to dash it to bits" (170). In fact, the boundaries that separate the interior of the dwelling and the exterior elements of the seaside are often so blurred that the sea "seemed an annexe of the livingroom" (172). Portia quickly learns that Waikiki is not only more physically open and airy than Windsor Terrace, but its inhabitants are also more open emotionally and socially. Within hours of their meeting, Mrs. Heccomb exhibits an openness that surprises Portia: "She talked so freely to Portia, telling her so much that Portia, used to the tactics of Windsor Terrace wondered whether this really were wise" (172).

Even in her bedroom at the Heccombs' home, Portia notices that "the electric light, from its porcelain shade, poured down with a frankness unknown at Windsor Terrace" (173). Waikiki and Windsor Terrace are the only family homes with which Portia has any substantial experience, and she pays particular attention to the differences in the two environments. Initially, at least, the frank transparency of Waikiki seems to appeal to Portia. In Seale, the pretense and dissimulation that characterizes Windsor Terrace are made virtually impossible because Waikiki is "a sounding box: you knew where everyone was, what everyone did" (173). The house itself makes life with all of its attendant functions and "intimate life" immediately and clearly felt. Thus, when Dickie is getting ready for work the morning after Portia's arrival, she can hear everything (183). However, over the course of her visit at Seale, it becomes more and more evident that Waikiki, with all of its apparent openness, is not actually a more nurturing and intimate home for Portia than Windsor Terrace. The narrative finally concludes that neither will be successful in providing the safe, protective environment that will be necessary to transition from adolescence into adulthood.

Bowen illustrates the inadequacies of Waikiki as a potential alternative to Windsor Terrace in the language used to describe the house itself. Throughout this second section of the novel, Bowen often employs nautical terms to characterize the Heccombs' family home. For example, as draughts blow through the house, "Waikiki [gives] one of its shiplike creaks" (205). Later, during a small party at the house, we are again offered figurative language suggestive of a ship's movement: "A black night wind was up, and Waikiki breasted it steadily, straining like a liner: every fixture rattled" (209). Even as Waikiki seems to open itself up to the sea right outside its windows, it also displays the same tenuous mobility of a vessel on the water. "Out there at sea they might take this house for another lighted ship" (209). Characterizing the home as a ship, and

often a ship in movement, indicates Waikiki's ultimate weakness as a family dwelling: it is not anchored and so not securely stable. While the imagery indicates the home is not physically moored securely, the narrative also suggests the lack of an emotional anchor in the inhabitants. Life at Waikiki is "spontaneous" and possesses an "uneditedness" that makes it easy "to see every motive and passion" (222, 221). However, there is also a blank emptiness behind this life and the actions of many people whom Portia meets at Seale. For example, Portia comes to understand that many of Daphne's friends are driven by the idea of acting for its own sake: "continuity dwelt in action only – interrupt what anybody was doing, and you interrupted what notions they had had" (229). Any ideas and thoughts exist with the action, and so once the movement ceases, the thoughts do as well. Not only is the house unanchored, but the people associated with Waikiki are as well. Although the shallow rigidity of the fixed social order at Windsor Terrace might be void of any meaningful foundation, Bowen indicates that the open, unanchored movement of Waikiki is no viable substitute for Portia.

Elizabeth Bowen explores at least two possible interpretations of domestic spaces in her depictions of Windsor Terrace and Waikiki and in so doing, she places herself at a transitional state in the understanding of spatial experience. The representation of this transition in twentieth century texts of female authors is at the heart of Thomas Foster's *Transformations of Domesticity in Modern Women's Writing: Homelessness at Home*, published in 2002. He specifically examines the changes in representations of the family home from the first half of the century. Modern women writers inherited a Victorian notion of domestic space, often characterized as the "ideology of separate spheres" that assumed "oppositions between public and private, outside and inside, masculine and feminine" (2). This oppositional structure offered a way of understanding of space that reinforced the clear, discrete boundaries that individual places seem

to promise by their very stability and seeming immutability. However, later in the twentieth century, postmodern theories of space introduced an understanding of space as a permeable network of temporarily fixed places or locations where boundaries blurred and the traditional oppositions were no longer clear. Foster asserts that for postmodern feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway, “the network metaphor provides an alternative to the oppositional structure within which domesticity has normally been defined and to the binary categories that organize that structure” (3). In his examination of various texts from the first half of the twentieth century, Foster attempts to demonstrate that in these works of fiction and poetry by modern women writers, both the nineteenth century and the postmodern interpretations of space can be traced and “those sets of assumptions about space and gender can still be read in relation to one another” (3). One can also argue that such a relation can be seen in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Death of the Heart* in her use of both Windsor Terrace and Waikiki to represent the two alternative interpretations of domestic spatial experience. Bowen inserts Portia into the “air-tight” and closed off space of Windsor Terrace to effectively destabilize the binary oppositions that characterized nineteenth century concepts of space and gender. Through her natural innocence Portia comes to embody an uncanny critique of the assumptions that existed at the foundation of the ideology of the separate spheres. Portia presents the Quaynes with a constant reminder of Thomas’s past and his father’s weakness when it came to love and passion. She is also the return of the innocence that both Thomas and Anna have lost. Therefore, she comes to represent all that the Quaynes desire to reject at Windsor Terrace: Portia reveals the impossibility of maintaining any clear boundary between inside and outside.

The postmodern spatial metaphor of a permeable network of places that Bowen represents in the dwelling of Waikiki is also shown to be inadequate. Foster notes the

“postmodern tendency to privilege mobility over location, space over place” and it is precisely this unfixed movement that Bowen questions in the life at Waikiki (6). With no firm foundation in tradition and social order, the Heccomb’s house, along with its inhabitants, remains adrift without a guiding pattern to structure its behavior and expectations. This unfixed idea of place as represented by Waikiki is exactly what defines the postmodern theory of the spatial network. Doreen Massey in *Space, Place, and Gender* explains that if one understands space “as formed out of social interrelations at all scales,” then as a result, place is just “a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings” (5). Spatial experience is inherently “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations,” so place becomes contingent on the nature of those social relations at any given moment (4). As a result, Massey’s is not a “view of place as bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity” (5). She associates such “exclusivist claims to place” with more traditional spatial theories - I would argue including those of Heidegger and Bachelard - that “fix the meaning of particular spaces” (4). Massey herself then creates one more opposition between what she understands as “exclusivist” interpretations of spatial experience and her own more progressive, postmodern theory of space. Elizabeth Bowen arguably represents both models of space in *The Death of the Heart*, in the process demonstrating that both ultimately have serious shortcomings. She rejects the stifling confinement of the Quayne home by revealing its emotional emptiness and surface dissimulation: Portia’s inability to find any true warmth or comfort with her brother and his wife in their family home renders her figuratively homeless. The narrative implies this state of homelessness when Portia exclaims to Eddie in her last meeting with him when he suggests that it is time to take her home to Windsor Terrace, “‘It’s not “home”!’” (363).

However, Bowen also rejects the open network embodied by Waikiki. There are no fixed boundaries in this particular place, no attempt to keep the interior secure from the unpredictability of the outside, but there is also no foundation for Portia on which to securely establish a stable identity. If there is a pattern of expectations at Waikiki on which to rely for social cues, then it is based on the “naïvest propriety” and Bowen asserts that “[p]ropriety is no serious check to nature” (221). However hollow the ordered life at Windsor Terrace as become, Bowen still maintains an admiration for the impersonality of the social order embodied in the Anglo-Irish Big Houses, including her own Bowen’s Court. The subordination of one’s own personal passions in the creation of a well-mannered, hospitable home environment is an idea that Bowen continued to find appealing in her own life and family history, and one which she also furthered explored in her short fiction. For Bowen, there is ultimately a distinction to be drawn between disillusionment and manners: a distinction unknown at Windsor Terrace where one is mistaken for the other, and unnecessary at Waikiki where manners exist only at the simplest of levels. Elizabeth Bowen continued to search through her writing for a successful balance in the domestic space of the twentieth century between a more traditional bounded idea of place and the postmodern understanding of place as unfixed and permeable, since neither model by itself seemed capable of producing intimate domestic spaces that would prove nurturing to their inhabitants. For Bowen, unlike postmodern theorists such as Massey, particular places, especially family homes, do have meanings and identities, but these can never become so fixed that they trap those who live inside their walls into restrictive patterns that stifle any possibility of self-definition.

## Chapter Four: Spatial Experience in the Short Fiction

### **Domestic Spaces in Transition**

Elizabeth Bowen understood from her own personal experience with her family home Bowens Court the powerful influence that a domestic space can have over the lives of those who inhabit it. This influence can be a positive force as the home provides a secure environment to nurture and protect the family, as well as a stable setting in which to achieve individual self-definition. However, the influence can also become a negative force if the pressure of the household pattern established in the social order of the home becomes too suffocating for those who dwell within. For some of Bowen's characters the strong influence of this social order can result in a sense of entrapment in established patterns of behavior that is only recognized when the family home is left either voluntarily or through compulsion. Several of Bowen's short stories enact this defining influence on the part of places and things such as "The New House," published in 1923 in *Encounters*, along with its sequel "The Lover" from the same collection. As two of Bowen's earliest short stories, they already demonstrate a fascination with houses and their complex relationships with their inhabitants.

Elizabeth Bowen often depicts her characters in moments of transition between homes as way to explore the relationship between people and places. In "The New House," Cicely and her brother Herbert have just moved out of the family home where they were born and raised and into a new house. The move is made possible due to Herbert's improved circumstances in business – a fact of which he enjoys reminding Cicely. As Herbert arrives home on this first night in the new house, he looks at the lighted windows, "naked" without curtains yet hung, and

he senses an “an air of pasteboard unreality” about the “shadowy façade” of the building (53). This element of artificiality and even theatricality is one that Bowen often attributes to newer and more modern homes: this can be seen most clearly in the later story “Attractive Modern Homes” where the new home feels thin and insubstantial. However, it is also possible that this effect is a result of Bowen’s feeling that “[p]ermanence is an attribute of recalled places,” as she states in the fragment of her autobiography published after her death (“Places” 44). No place is more familiar to us than the home in which we were born and raised, and it is in memory that we give the places we have known so well a sense of permanence. At the time that Herbert arrives at his new house, there are no memories attached to it and so it carries a sense of “unreality,” lacking solid substance. This new dwelling is still just simply a house and not yet a home.

Herbert’s experience of this house, as its “master,” is of particular interest and significance in understanding the nature of his relationship to it. Based on his behavior toward his sister Cecily and assumptions that he makes about her responsibilities and expectations, it becomes clear through the course of the story that Herbert is very much a product of the nineteenth century “separate spheres” ideology. Vanessa D. Dickerson argues in the Introduction to her edited collection of essays on Victorian domesticity *Keeping the Victorian House* that Victorians would attempt to more narrowly define the domestic sphere of action in the nineteenth century more than at any other time period. They endeavored to “limit the house as a theatre of action by re-inventing the home as woman’s natural or appropriate place” (xiii). At the same time, this place was characterized in relation to (and often in subordination to) the more public outside space: “the home was ‘other,’ a narrow and colonized female space that existed in opposition to and in support of the master space, that place outside the home where the business of making a living took place, where livings were earned instead of consumed” (xiv). Thus.



Herbert's initial reaction upon coming back to his home from earning that living is disappointment that not more has been done to make this new place more comfortable as a dwelling for the one person who is subsidizing these domestic arrangements. He expresses frustration with the darkness and the lack of curtains in the library where they are having their tea. "I can't have these windows, Cicely; they're quite indecent" (Bowen, "The New House" 54). Herbert holds Cicely to be responsible for the fact that no curtains have been hung and the gas has not yet been turned on to light the house. Later, as he fumbles his way down the stairs, he thinks, "Cicely was a fool: he'd teach her!" (56). From the curtains to the lighting, Herbert expects his sister to order and maintain the comfort of his new house, and when she fails to meet his expectations, he is resentful and petulant.

Herbert is representative of an early twentieth century businessman who has moved up in society financially, but he retains nineteenth century assumptions of space and gender. In his examination of modernist women's writing and its representation of domestic space, Thomas Foster describes the connection between the spatial and gender binaries that characterized the Victorian separation of public and private spheres of action: "The focus on the ideology of separate spheres that characterizes most feminist work on the nineteenth century assumes that industrialization involved the severing of the home from the capitalist marketplace and the privatization of the middle-class home as a feminine space" (2). This mapping of space as public, in the sense of the productive marketplace of supply and demand, and private creates oppositions between types of places as well as the types of individuals likely to be associated with those places. Thus, men such as Herbert return home after working outside the house under the assumption that such domestic issues of comfort and privacy, including sufficient lighting and appropriate window treatments, will have been seen to by the mother, sister, or wife who is

understood to have responsibility for this place. Such an arrangement of space is all Herbert has known, since he only recently left the “small brick villa where he and Cicely had been born, where their mother’s wedded life had begun and ended” (Bowen, “The New House” 55). He has brought with him the expectations of that familiar place and these expectations include beliefs about what a woman is and should be, which become clear for the reader in the story’s sequel “The Lover.”

The social and cultural expectations that existed as part of the domestic order of one dwelling are not always so easily transitioned to a new place. The very act of relocating from home to another can function to reveal the foundation of these conventions and act as a challenge to their validity. New homes, after all, offer the opportunity for new patterns of behavior to be established. For example, before the end of “The New House,” Cicely delivers Herbert the surprising news of her engagement to long-time suitor Richard Evans. Although Evans had proposed numerous times before, Cicely had never felt she was free to accept the proposals. As she tells Herbert, the move from their mother’s house – their family home – was a liberating act: “...when mother went, everything was broken up; this move came – all my life I seem to have been tied up, fastened on to things and people. Why, even the way the furniture was arranged at No. 17 held me so that I couldn’t get away. The way the chairs went in the sitting-room. And mother” (57). It is only after the moving van has carried away the remnants of the family home and her mother is no longer present to embody past traditions and patterns that Cicely can imagine another way of life that could perhaps include marriage and a house of her own. Phyllis Lassner, in her review of Bowen’s major novels, asserts that this influence exerted by a long-standing family home on the identities of its inhabitants is a phenomenon that the author explored throughout her career. “In all of her works, the pressures of social and family tradition

shape the lives of characters who wish for or resist change” (2). I would add that these pressures under which her characters, especially the women, struggle to achieve self-fulfillment are often embodied in the homes in which they dwell or remember dwelling. Furthermore, the pattern of household society established over time can stifle imagination, making it more difficult to envision a life beyond the home’s walls and expectations. Thus, it is not until that pattern has been disrupted that Cicely can think to herself “‘I’m free’” (Bowen, “The New House” 57). Then, she can imagine another future outside of that space. Nevertheless, the influence of these homes on the determination of one’s identity is not in and of itself necessarily a negative pressure. This influence can also be understood as productive and necessary to the formation of a stable identity.

At other times, particularly in her nonfiction texts, Bowen has argued for the fundamental and inescapable nature of such influence that is exerted by a home where generations of a family have resided. In her “The Bend Back” she discusses the contemporary interest in the past that is evident in much modern writing. The transformation of our shared history into the “better days” of the past is in part a product of a desire for a type of nostalgic escape from the war-torn years of the first half of the twentieth century, but there is also, Bowen observes, a natural inclination to remember one’s own personal history through the hazy light of an idealized past. This in part accounts for the popularity of books concerned with childhood: they have discovered “a valuable common ground” among their readership and “touched in each reader upon a special chord” that connects every individual back to their past (56). Bowen further explains,

In an age when change works so fast, when each change spells so much obliteration, and when differentiation between person and person becomes less, each one of us clings to personal memory as a life-line. One might say, one

invests one's identity *in* one's memory. To re-live any moment, acutely, is to be made certain that one not only was but is. Desire to be reminded may be a modern symptom, but it deserves respect: woe to those who abuse it. (56)

Therefore, the desire to return to the past can also be understood as a need to reaffirm one's identity as it has been conceived through memories of one's personal past. The formation of an interior, subjective self is nurtured and protected by the perceived stability and order of the home itself. That sense of permanence that one gets from remembering past places, for Bowen, is arguably also productive of a sense of subjective "permanence." However, as Phyllis Lassner asserts, this immutable sense of place and self can produce family homes in Bowen that are "nurturing but dominating" (151). This dominance of past customs, as well as the social expectations that come along with them, can be especially compelling for the women in Bowen's fiction. Lassner identifies the "persistence of female characters in Bowen's work who struggle with autonomy, dependence and self-expression in circumstances always defined by traditional family values" (153). These values as embodied in the home of Cicely's mother kept her trapped in a pattern that defined her place and her identity as daughter and sister.

The process of releasing the pressure of a long-established pattern of living in one place across generations can be an experience that is both liberating and terrifying. Although Cicely is finally able to move beyond the restrictive expectations and conventions set forth in her childhood family home, Herbert remains unconvinced that such a change is possible. Indeed, initially Herbert feels betrayed by the fact that his sister is leaving him: "He was stabbed by the conviction that she should be saying all this to him." His petulance returns and he exclaims, "What about *me*? Don't *I* count? Don't *I* need you? What about all these years; the housekeeping?" (Bowen, "The New House" 57). Herbert attempts to appeal to her sense of the

past: because they have existed these long years in the same pattern and in the same roles, Cicely should honor that existing order, as far as Herbert is concerned. Yet, Cicely has already begun to embrace the change she has chosen and this is reflected in her appearance. For the first time, the narrative highlights her attractiveness and we are told that Cicely looks at Herbert with a face “pink, self-confident, idiotically pretty” (57). She is content with her decision to marry Richard and it is soon apparent that not only her appearance is changed, but she now also has the confidence to confront her brother regarding his own narrow ideas and to stay firm in her resolution to leave Herbert’s new house.

Any new house, before it has yet been experienced as a home, is virtually a blank slate that remains to be experienced by its new inhabitants through the formation of daily routines of behavior and the creation of new memories. This process of dwelling is also inevitably creative as we begin to connect these new experiences with recollections of past acts of dwelling. Initially, Herbert is unable to envision a different family dynamic with a wife and children of his own in his new home. Cicely chides Herbert for his lack of vision, telling him that he possesses “no imagination” (58). He remains trapped in the patterns of the past, which are represented by the small brick family house where he was born. However, if the old family home symbolizes the patterns that such a structure and tradition imposes on its inhabitants, the new house with its “shadowy façade” and flickering candlelight is symbolic of the new possibilities that await both Herbert and Cicely. This new house has not yet solidified in the harsh light of familial customs. It maintains an air of “pasteboard unreality.” Though this could suggest the falseness or fragility of the structure, this unreality could also suggest that the true reality of the house has yet to be determined by the new residents. The house is Herbert’s, just as his family house belonged to his parents, and it is his to create a home for himself and his own family, perpetuating in some sense

the same restrictive pattern of behavior. This new house has not yet been imagined as a home, so it is still shadowy with creative possibilities. These possibilities come to light when Herbert is finally able to “see” his home at the end of the story. Once Cicely has departed the drawing room, “[s]lowly and cautiously the machinery of his imagination creaked into movement” (58). The future he sees for himself is one in the tradition of the most comfortably ordered Victorian home. “He [Herbert] saw the drawing room suffused with rosy light.” In this possible reality, there is light and warmth. Herbert is able to see a “pretty, cheery wife” singing at the piano and two children, a girl and a boy, playing in the plush carpet, and in the end, the reader sees him letting go of past remnants and the patterns they embody. “They could do very well without Cicely’s escritoire” (58). Whereas before he was not willing to release the things of his old family home, he is now able to let them go.

The process of inhabiting a new house begins to take shape as those who reside within experience the dwelling as coexistent with memories of past places providing intimacy and security. Herbert’s vision for this new dwelling is a domestic ideal, likely consistent with domestic spatial arrangement in which he was raised, but it is enough to realize that an alternate future is possible. He can imagine a new order, though one structured along the same nineteenth century pattern of separate spheres. At least initially, it seems as if both Herbert and Cicely have envisioned new but still traditional roles for themselves, as husband and wife to their respective spouses, within the same separate spheres that would have characterized their mother’s brick villa. Bowen’s sequel to the siblings’ story, “The Lover” hints that while Cicely may have transitioned from being a homemaker for her brother to being one for her new husband, the actual move to her new home is indicative of a more significant shift in her experience of that domestic space as a feminized sphere.

Elizabeth Bowen will occasionally employ an ironic perspective in her fiction to reveal subtler truths about the nature of her characters' domestic experience. She utilizes such irony in the sequel to "The New House." In "The Lover" Herbert pays a visit his sister and her husband. Like "The New House" the narrative voice is almost exclusively from Herbert's perspective, so we see his reactions to Cicely's new home and get access to his thoughts on her marriage. At times in the story both his sister and her home are sources of puzzlement for Herbert. His relative obtuseness remains from the earlier narrative, so we see him arrive at his sister's new home in a self-congratulatory mood, praising himself for "having foreseen the whole thing from the beginning and furthered it with tact and sympathy" (64). While the reader knows this to be far from the truth, it appears that Herbert's imagination has continued to provide him with an alternate perspective on events. He has already re-written the events of the previous story to showcase his own perceived perspicacity and goodwill.

The domestic spatial order of the nineteenth century, in which the private space of the family home is fundamentally separate from the public sphere of business and commerce, is also a focus of Bowen's ironic narrative point of view. Herbert's expectations of domestic comfort become the narrative's focus on this visit to his sister. Herbert's entry into Cicely's drawing room finds a woman further transformed by the change in her circumstances. She is "looking prettier than Herbert could have imagined" (64). Her appearance and demeanor here are dramatically altered in the eyes of her brother from her previous "stoop, her untidiness, her vagueness and confusion" in "The New House" (57). Herbert also immediately notices that Cicely and Richard appear quite at ease in their home, though the drawing room does not really meet his standards of comfort. He finds the room "startled and staccato," sharing this trait with its inhabitants according to Herbert, and furthermore, as a living space it is "emptier than a

drawing room ought to be” (64). The furniture “had retreated into corners” rather than filling the interior of the room’s space and the overall effect “lacked frilliness,” which by implication Herbert feels would be more appropriate for the drawing room. There is something “hardly regular” about the room, which even “the very tick of the clock” seems to echo. Despite Herbert’s misgivings about the look and feel of the drawing room, the couple show signs of contentment with their new circumstances with Richard “delightedly kicking the fender” of the fireplace” (64). Cicely calls for tea and Herbert observes that she has taken command in this new home as she had in their mother’s old brick villa and briefly in Herbert’s new house before she left to marry. From Herbert’s still relatively narrow perspective, Cicely has maintained the same role and is fulfilling the same function in the domestic sphere: the only difference is a practical one of location.

Bowen attempts to question the contemporary relevance of nineteenth century spatial order, along with the gender roles associated with it, by revealing the superficiality of its assumptions. Indeed, the narrative provides other indications that Cicely is different in this new domestic space and the change is not just in appearance. For example, she slaps Herbert’s knee as she comments on his engagement to Doris, and he considers that “[s]he had never taken these liberties at No. 17” (65). She demonstrates a new confidence and ease in her home with Richard that is unlike the awkwardness and reserve that Herbert remembers from before. She playfully teases her brother about his approaching wedding and at one point, even winks across the room at Richard, “an accomplishment he must have taught her” thinks Herbert (65). These little ways of communicating that characterize the personal interaction of Cicely and her husband are often a source of frustration for Herbert. He assumes that this mystery will be open to him once married and that he and Doris will “be able to look at each other across people just like that when they



were married,” as if the language of love and intimacy will be revealed with the matrimonial ceremony (65). Herbert’s expectation of a private language of signs and glances proves to be just one of his many assumptions about the nature of marriage and domesticity.

The outdated assumptions concerning marriage and the domestic order of separate spheres are effectively highlighted, as they become the target of Bowen’s ironic narrative point of view. As Herbert and Cicely are admiring a picture of his fiancé Doris, their reflections on his future happiness prompt a discussion that suggests the subtler, but more significant, changes that have taken place in Cicely’s new domestic situation and also points to the reasons why Herbert finds her drawing room “hardly regular.” Herbert notices the frame that the picture is in and he begins to commend his future wife on her willingness to be instructed: “Doris always understands me perfectly...I think it will never be necessary for me to say anything to her twice. If I even express an opinion she always remembers. It’s quite extraordinary” (66). In his praise of Doris, Herbert starts to reveal his own assumptions about marriage and a wife’s place in it. Implied is the fact that Herbert should not have to “say anything” in the way of opinions or suggestions to Doris more than once: it is to her credit that she remembers Herbert’s views and follows their lead as she did in the purchase of the frame for the picture given to Cicely and Richard. Herbert had previously told Doris “Never stint over a present when it is necessary” and he is pleased to find that in the gift of the elegant frame she has followed his prescription (66). Bowen, however, suggests an alternative interpretation of domestic roles through Richard’s and Cicely’s individual responses to Herbert.

Bowen indicates the possibility of a more modern marital union, one in which the assumed roles are not as narrowly defined. She again employs irony to further contrast the limited nature of Herbert’s own assumptions. For example, after Herbert’s description of Doris’s

excellence in always recalling his opinions and instructions, Richard responds by echoing Herbert's word of praise, "Extraordinary." Herbert detects "an ironical note in it" but one that is often noticeable in Richard's voice. This is something that in the beginning of their relations "prejudiced Herbert against him" but now "Herbert knew that it did not mean anything at all" (66). Yet, the very fact that the narrative references the frequently detected "ironical note" at this time implies that it does in fact mean quite a bit and it is Richard's comment on Herbert's expectations of a wife's role in supporting and following her husband's lead. If Herbert has decided that it means nothing, it may only be because he is unable to decipher what the irony signifies or acknowledge its implications for his own assumptions and values. Richard suggests that Doris's willingness to accurately recall and adopt Herbert's views is not "extraordinary" at all, and is in fact quite traditionally "ordinary" from the perspective of nineteenth century opinions on the proper role of wives and mothers. Cicely does understand the tone of her husband's response, as she is afterwards "a little pink" (66). She again demonstrates that she and Richard can communicate in a way that is unavailable to Herbert, not only because he is blind to the implication of the irony in Richard's tone but also because he is unable to understand their very different perspective on domesticity and a woman's place in it.

A nineteenth century understanding of domesticity was attached to and even dependent on specifically distinct gender roles, and of particular concern was the definition of the ideal wife and homemaker. Such a wife, for Herbert, is one who understands the importance of comfort for her husband. After a brief interval during which tea is served, Herbert continues the previous topic of conversation by bringing up marriage and noting how the "most surprising people" can even "make a success of matrimony" (66-67). Implying that Cicely and Richard are two such examples of these "surprising people," Herbert proceeds to observe that not every marriage is

successful because two individuals can bring to the union “varying ideas of comfort” (67). Based on his earlier praise of Doris’s submissiveness in acceding to his views, it is likely that Herbert views this failure as a result of the husband’s idea of comfort not being fully embraced as the dominate one in the family home. He anticipates no such problems with his future wife, for as he announces, Doris “is a true woman” (67). Unfortunately, much to Herbert’s chagrin, this claim leads Richard to ask the following question: “‘What *is* a true woman?’” (67). Herbert immediately dismisses the query as one of “these disconcerting, rather silly questions” and he attempts to avoid actually addressing it by observing that a man knows when he meets her. Nonetheless, Richard pursues the matter and asks, “‘Yes, but what does she consist of?’” Again, Herbert avoids providing an answer, deeming the question “rather indelicate” (67). Cicely steps in to propose a possible answer and what follows is the definition that she and Richard offer for what the “true woman” is:

‘*Sensibility?*’ suggested Cicely.

‘Infinite sensibility,’ said Richard, ‘and patience.’

‘Contrariness,’ added Cicely.

‘Inconsistency,’ amended Richard.

‘Oh *no*. Contrariness, Richard, and weak will.’

Herbert looked from one to the other, supposing they were playing some sort of game.

‘She is infinitely adaptable, too,’ said Richard.

‘She has to be, poor thing,’ said Cecily (this did not come well from Cicely). (67)

Again, Herbert has missed the irony of the discussion. Cicely and Richard, through the course of their back and forth banter have identified the characteristics, both those exemplary and those assumed, of the model Victorian wife and homemaker.

The conventional, nineteenth century feminine ideal embodied many of these same traits Cicely and Richard put forth. In her essay “The Chatelaine: Women of the Victorian Landed Classes and the Country House,” on the role of the upper-class wife as head of household management, Jessica Gerard indicates that near the beginning of the nineteenth century, “the ideology of separate spheres further idealized and elevated the female role of household management” (179). She explains that women “were held to have more suitable personality traits than men to deal with the endless small crises and myriad chores of keeping house: unselfishness, sensitivity, patience, attention to detail, and skill in personal relationships. Men were not expected to be bothered with the details of domestic problems” (179). Even in homes of the aristocracy or the wealthy elite, the wife would maintain responsibility for overseeing the management of the household duties, though there were servants available to do the actual work. The characteristics that Gerard outlines echoes the list of qualities that Cicely and Richard offer in response to the question about the nature of the “true woman.” The irony in their definition is further highlighted with the addition near the end of “contrariness” and “inconsistency.” While her “sensibility” made the Victorian homemaker the natural choice to be the moral and emotional center of the home, that same emotional awareness could at times render her inconsistent: after all, she was assumed an emotional and not a rational creature. Cicely makes this clear with the incorporation of “weak will” among the list of defining traits. That their descriptive list is in part an ironic commentary on the expectations of the model wife is suggested by the narrative’s earlier identification of the “ironical note” often heard in Richard’s voice and the fact that Cicely,

as the clear representative of wife and homemaker in the story, does not herself exemplify all of these qualities. They are a set of expectations based on narrow assumptions of gender, expectations to which Cicely no longer feels held such that she can judge their reductive standards from a position of relative freedom. As a wife to Richard and mistress of her own home, she certainly does not display “contrariness” or “weak will”: in fact, she quite holds her own with Richard in this discussion.

Any modern woman who is held to the narrow expectations of men such as Herbert is likely to find herself in a domestic space as strictly defined as any traditional Victorian home, though the possibility of continuing to maintain the integrity of that private dwelling is increasingly difficult give the overall spatial transformation taking place in the twentieth century. However, through her depiction of Herbert, Bowen suggests the persistence of the nineteenth century separate spheres. Cicely’s final comment on the traditional feminine ideal is “poor thing,” suggesting the pitiable state of any woman held to such an unreasonable standard. Not surprisingly, Herbert takes her comment quite literally and so understands her to be implying that every woman, including Cicely herself, is to be pitied. This leads to his somewhat amusing conclusion that her observation “does not speak well for Richard,” and to his rather more serious statement that Doris, rather than deserving anyone’s pity, is actually in a quite enviable position (Bowen, “The Lover” 67). The fact that Herbert takes their list so literally leaves Cicely somewhat dumbfounded. He even expresses disagreement with Richard’s description of women as exemplifying “inconsistency” but not because he believes that a woman is naturally consistent: she would only be inconsistent if she had not been instructed how to be otherwise. According to Herbert,

‘I consider woman most consistent, is she is taught – and she can be easily taught. She is simpler and more child-like than we are, of course. Her way in life is simple; she is seldom placed in a position where it is necessary for her to think for herself. She need never dictate – except, of course, to servants, and there she’s backed by her husband’s authority. All women wish to marry.’ (67-68)

Herbert further clarifies his position with regard to the arrangement of domestic space when he explains that a “true woman...loves to cling” to her husband, her home and her children, all of which are “her sphere” (68). There appears to be little doubt at this point in the narrative that Herbert is a believer in the nineteenth century ideology of separate spheres. Near the end of the discussion, Herbert does concede that a woman may have to find work outside the home if she is unable to marry and if she is “willing” and “bright” (68). Nevertheless, in his view, marriage is and should be the first and primary option.

Because Herbert’s understanding of domestic comfort is very much based in nineteenth century standards, he is more and more revealed to be out of place in his sister’s home. By this point in the visit, as the conversation is drawing to a conclusion, Cicely and Richard are beginning to grow more quiet and their questions to Herbert become less frequent. Herbert notices their silence and simply decides that they are “an erratic couple” whose married life “seemed to have made them stupid” (68). Their slight displays of nervous movement, exemplified by Richard “biting his moustache” and Cicely “[smoothing] out creases in the table cloth” (68) are possibly the result of the general boredom, combined with a bit of embarrassment, they feel with Herbert’s increasingly outdated (at least for this particular couple) views on domesticity. Herbert interprets their behavior as their anxiousness to see him depart and since he knows that in their “preposterous evenings” they “read poetry together, and not

improbably kissed,” he decides to take his leave, wondering incredulously how “something inside her [Cicely] had been clamouring” for this kind of life (69, 68). Herbert concludes that to even pity them is a waste of his time and energy, and so he focuses his thoughts on his own future and its “long perspective of upholstered happiness with Doris.” Indeed, Herbert’s heart swells as he considers “that the upholstery *was* Doris” (69). This final image of Herbert’s wife as the equivalent of household furniture sums up his view of the ideal domestic space: his wife, like the plush carpet that stretches across the floor or the cozy furniture that fills the drawing room, is there for his comfort. His home with Doris will likely not be filled with the sort of “silly questions” encountered at the home of Cicely and Richard. (67). Doris will in fact greet him this very evening, “demure, responsive, decently elated” (69). He has found his Victorian ideal and it is one that Bowen through the narrative suggests still exists in the expectations of such men as Herbert in the early decades of the twentieth century.

For Bowen, a more mutually fulfilling home and marriage is represented in the union of Cicely and Richard. Cicely and her husband have created a space in their home that has physically moved beyond the “frilliness” of the nineteenth century interiors that Herbert appreciates, but it has also begun to move beyond the gender binaries associated with the ideology of separate spheres. Cicely and Richard engage as equals in conversation, each offering thoughts of their own, and each willing to respectfully disagree with the other when necessary. They possess a shared sense of irony, a mutual enjoyment of literary pastimes, and a common language of affection. They watch Herbert leave and as he exits the gate, “Richard’s arm crept around Cicely’s shoulders” (69). Not content to live in the past and embrace nineteenth century assumption about domesticity, Cicely and Richard’s mutual affection and willingness to openly communicate (with and without words) make their home one of the most intimate and nurturing

domestic dwellings in all of Bowen's fiction. If a compromise exists between the restrictive Victorian standards of femininity and domesticity and the more open, barrier-free spatial model of the twentieth century, it arguably exists in "The Lover."

### **Dispossession and Modern Homelessness**

Elizabeth Bowen again explores the subject of transitioning between domestic spaces in her later short fiction, though at times the moves occur for different reasons and with quite different results. For example, the short story "The Last Night in the Old Home," published in 1934 in *The Cat Jumps*, also depicts a family in the process of leaving the family home, though unlike "The New House," the reader is introduced to the family members before they actually leave their old home and this particular move has not been voluntary.

Right from the beginning of the narrative, we are confronted with the problem of ownership and dispossession. The story opens with the "home-girl" Annabelle, a virtual child in the body of a "big, bustling" woman, searching through the house for the owners of a pair of gloves she has found in a wardrobe in one of upstairs bedrooms (372, 371). No one ever steps forward to claim the gloves and at the end of the story, they remain abandoned and lost. We soon learn that the house is also soon to be lost, as the family is in the course of packing and preparing for an auction of its contents on the following day. This evening is the last night that the mother and father will be allowed to spend in the home in which they raised their children, and so out of respect for the occasion and responsibility toward their parents, the adult sons and daughters have returned to assist in the preparations.

Time has effectively run out for this home, both literally and figuratively. The house is unnaturally silent, according to son Henry, and it takes him some time to figure out why: "all the clocks had been let run down" (371). As a result of the unusual silence, Annabelle's movement



through the house on her mission to find the owner of the gloves is heard clearly, and soon “dread” accompanies her approach as she finds each “victim” in the family to question them. The narrative suggests that these family members are “victims” in more ways than as the targets of Annabelle’s determined interrogations. This family has been forced to sell their home and auction off the contents because of son John: it is John who has brought his family to this extremity by a sequence of events that is only hinted at in the story. Bowen suggests that it is John’s monetary irresponsibility that has led to this occasion, though to himself, John excuses the money lost on horses, cards and women as simply bad luck: “if mess-bills ran up, horses he backed turned out rotten, cards he held worthless, and women he loved exacting, was John to blame?” (373). Bowen does not recount John’s personal downfall, but the end of the family home itself, which has been the ultimate victim of his actions. His presence this last night was expected out of “decency” and his parents have remained silent, declining to openly and directly blame him for losing the family home. Nevertheless, he resents being obliged to be present for the final “obsequies of the home,” even though he had loved the place as a comfortable refuge, especially “after a thick night” when “it made him feel good and squashy” (373). Almost every family member, with the possible exception of the parents, is anxious for the night to be over and for the old home to be finally laid to rest. Bowen’s use of the word “obsequies” to describe these final preparations suggests that it is a death the reader is witnessing. Maud Ellmann argues that “Bowen’s addiction to personification creates the sense that every object has a psyche,” and if every object, even a building, can have life, then it is also possible for these same objects to have a death (6). This is one more Bowen house, like her own Bowen’s Court and the fictional Danielstown, that is personified to the extent that it becomes another character, and one whose passing initiates a process of grieving, with each family member experiencing that process in his

or her own way, whether through anger in the case of John or embarrassment in the case of Henry.

Nevertheless, despite the tinge of bitterness in the forced move, there is again, as in “The New House,” a sense of freedom that results from letting go of the patterns and conventions of the past. John’s sister Delia expresses this freedom by unburdening herself to their brother Henry, much to Henry’s dismay. Delia is only able to reveal herself to her family once the physical ties to the home itself have begun to break down with the emptying of the house:

...she [Delia] felt a profound relief. Something let go of her conscience. Delia was no good; to her husband, who bored her, she had for years been unfaithful; she was as light as a little cat. With home still going on here, some fiction of innocence had always unnerved her. Now mother and father and Annabelle would be people in a hotel; the cuckoo-clock, the scrap screen, the big chintz chairs ruffled by dogs, would all be auctioned tomorrow and carted away. There *it* went – pouf! Its grip relaxed on her spirit.... (Bowen, “The Last Night” 372)

As with Cicely, Delia is free to be herself with her brother once the family home is emptied of the furniture and objects that organized and defined existence for both past and present inhabitants. Maud Ellmann suggests that it was Bowen’s wartime experiences that created a “fierce division in her attitude towards furniture,” a contradiction that becomes apparent in the fiction written during World War II. The division exists in Bowen’s simultaneous “piety for solid things” and her “intoxicated dream of weightlessness” (168). Bowen connects this freedom of being completely unencumbered with the physical devastation experienced during wartime in the Preface she wrote for *The Demon Lover*: “The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us,

equally, heady and disembodied” (95). One also sees this “disembodied” freedom in effect in several of the stories in *Look at All Those Roses*, including “Oh, Madam...” where the entire narrative is related through a one-sided conversation. We only every have the literally disembodied voice of a housekeeper, speaking to her mistress who has returned home to find her London townhouse bombed. I would argue, however, that Bowen began to explore the ambivalence of the dispossessed and the newly homeless even before the war, depicting spatial transitions that could either be threatening due to the loss of a previously stable order or exhilarating because of the freedom to now be wherever and whoever one desired.

The identities associated with the patterns of the old home become more fluid and permeable when that home ceases to exist as part of daily experience. Delia no longer has to maintain the pretence of the good girl of the family home because that home in which that identity was fostered and preserved must now be abandoned. However, her brother Henry hints that the home’s purpose, at least from his perspective, had already been lost once the children began to move away: he implicitly reveals his understanding of home as a protective and nurturing environment in which to raise a family, and for this particular family, there will be no more children. Henry had told his brother John, in an effort to ease his guilt over his responsibility in the loss of the home, “that rationally, this was for the best, that the old place had no place now they were all grown up” (373). What Henry has identified is the meaning that had previously provided the home with an identity, as a family’s place of security and comfort, has long since been absent. Thus, the home “[has] no place now” in the sense of being a defined, localized, and discrete space for the primary purpose of providing shelter physically, emotionally and psychologically.

If the house is now dead for them as a home, as the word “obsequies” suggests, then it exists still as nothing but a felt absence. It has effectively become a ghost of itself. Rather than being haunted by spirits of past inhabitants, it becomes a spirit that haunts the individual consciousness of each family member. Thus, John in his anger kicks the rocking-horse of his youth in the same moment that he remembers playing on it as a child. By the final paragraph of the narrative, there are only “draughts [creeping] through the house” and a “door [slamming] upstairs,” apparently from the rising wind because no one is present on the upper floor of the house at this time. Henry is on his way to close the windows upstairs when he notices the “rocking-horse [is] still rocking” (374). There remains movement but no life as the house gradually passes from the solid substance of experience to become only a ghostly echo of the past. Phyllis Lassner points to Bowen’s short stories as often depicting such houses that “haunt the living” (150). Lassner argues that many characters will blame the family home, whether “real, imagined or unattainable,” for the “failed promises” of their own lives (151). The ghostly presence of what the home promised to provide, stability and nurture, remains to haunt the living even after life has failed to achieve its full potential of success.

Again, Bowen uses homes to embody potentially restrictive codes of behavior and patterns of identification that when eliminated lead to the imaginative freedom to envision life with quite different expectations. In both “The New House” and “The Last Night in the Old Home,” it is women who particularly feel this sense of liberation at the dissolution of the old family home. In each story, the brothers appear shocked at the ease with which their sisters make the transition into self-definition and autonomy, and they are left to search for their own identity in the absence of this family home. However, not all of Bowen’s female characters view the dispossession of the family home with a feeling of unencumbered freedom. As Ellmann

suggests, there is ambivalence in Bowen's attitude toward the objects that order one's life. Published in 1941 in the volume *Look at All Those Roses*, "Attractive Modern Homes" again depicts a family in the midst of a move from the family seat to a new house. The Watsons have just moved into a new modern home, which they call Rhyll. From the very first sentence, it is made clear that Mrs. Watson's melancholy is connected to her new domestic space: "No sooner were the Watsons settled into their new home than Mrs. Watson was overcome by melancholy" (521). She hopes that having her own possessions around her, once they are officially moved in, will ease her mind and make her more contented. Yet, even her personal things are not comfortable in the recently constructed house. She notices, "her things appeared uneasy in the new home" (521). Bowen personifies Mrs. Watson's belongings to reflect their awkwardness in this new, modern environment, giving them "sulky" looks in response to their surroundings. The reason for their uneasiness is suggested by the frailty of the house itself.

From the beginning of the story, this new home is defined not by the traditions and memories of the family who inhabits it, but by the material gains that will be reaped by its sale. This home is located in a new neighborhood, and the houses on this street are being constructed as quickly as the builder can manage. The sounds of construction fill the new house and are a constant reminder of the physical, and clearly commercial, activity that is going on outside. "Even after dark these hollow echoes continued, for Eagles, the builder, was selling houses as fast as he put them up..." (521). Bowen suggests that this particular house is made by profit, and not by any desire to create an intimate space for dwelling. It is in part this reason that the house appears so fragile. Bowen describes the house in terms that render it both flimsy and formulaic: "The semi-detached house was box-like, with thin walls: downstairs it had three rooms and a larder, upstairs, three rooms and a bath. The rooms still smelled of plaster, the bath of putty. The

stairs shook when the wardrobe was carried up: the whole structure seemed to be very frail” (521). Though the pattern of the house is rigidly fixed, with the shape of a box and matching floor designs upstairs and downstairs, it is nonetheless thin and insubstantial. Bowen reflects on the relative weaknesses in modern dwellings in her essay “The Bend Back,” which in general focuses on the contemporary “desire for the ideal ‘elsewhere’” (58). According to Bowen, this desire has been

aggravated to malady-point by our disrelish for and uneasiness in the present – the aching, bald uniformity of our urban surroundings, their soulless rawness. Where is the eye to linger, where is the fancy to dwell? No associations, no memories have had time to gather around the new soaring blocks of flats, the mushroom housing-estates. And, will they ever do so? – where shall they find a foothold? Nothing rustles, nothing casts a feathery shadow: there is something frightening about the very unhauntedness of “functional” rooms. Atmosphere has been conditioned out of the air. Nor even, among all this oppressiveness of brick and concrete, do we feel secure – all this, in a split second, could become nothing. (59)

Accustomed to the solid environment of her old home and town, where memories and dreams had accumulated over the years of experience, Mrs. Watson is incapable of identifying with this new modern house in its unfriendly and unsocial neighborhood. Even the very ground appears to reject these new dwellings, as the damage their construction is inflicting on the land is figured as physically excruciating: even the “gored earth round the buildings looked unfriendly with pain” (“Attractive” 520). Modern progress, as represented by these mass produced houses appears

already to have serious negative consequences for the landscape, as well as for the people who must now live in this painfully transformed environment.

Mrs. Watson's identity was firmly established in the town the couple left: a town where they had both been born and raised. Left without the old patterns and conventions of the family home, Mrs. Watson lacks the imagination to redefine herself in this new neighborhood and new house. Furthermore, philosopher Gaston Bachelard suggests that this newly constructed dwelling will not be easily adapted to the kind of "intimate living" necessary to inspire such imaginative day-dreaming and so also the creation a home. He explains that "where houses are no longer set in natural surroundings, the relationship between house and space becomes an artificial one. Everything about it is mechanical and, on every side, intimate living flees" (27). Mrs. Watson readily admits that "[s]he had never needed imagination herself" (Bowen, "Attractive" 523), quite likely because she had always lived in a place already stable and secure through the "body of images" accumulated over years of experience that gave to her former family home "illusions of stability," according to Bachelard (17). Not surprisingly, as a result, Mrs. Watson falls into a state of depression due to the inability to imagine any other life or identity beyond the walls of the home and town that were left behind in the move. Allan E. Austin, in his review of Elizabeth Bowen's short fiction, examines several stories for their depictions of characters "suffering modern malaise." Longer, more developed stories are his main focus, including "The Disinherited," from the same collection as "Attractive Modern Homes." However, it is the latter story that arguable contains one of the strongest depictions of this modern melancholia. Mrs. Watson is one of Austin's "hollow" women who are effectively "immobilized by the problem of finding alternate lives" (79). Whereas Delia in "The Last Night in the Old Home" is lightened by the removal of the family home, Mrs. Watson is crushed by the weight of a suddenly

unpredictable future. Her old family home with its steady sense of permanence and “illusions of stability” had made that future appear in much the same pattern as the past (Bachelard 17).

However, the freshly constructed house in the new neighborhood that she must now call home brings with it unknown possibilities, the blankness and unfamiliarity of which proves paralyzing for Mrs. Watson. Her melancholy that appears immediately after the move is a direct result of the unsteadiness of her new home as well as the resulting instability in her once secure sense of self.

Without the secure surroundings of her family home and accustomed society, Mrs. Watson is left without any sense of affirmed identity. Thus, by the end of the story, Mr. Watson has found Mrs. Watson lying face down in the woods in an awkward effort to escape the emptiness of the house and herself and find something natural. She remembers her life before and the apparent reality of the many events that formed her past and her identity. “Everything that had happened to her seemed natural – love, marriage, the birth of Freddie, then Vera – for she had seen it happen to someone else. She never needed to ask what was happening really. ... Now no one cared any more whether she existed; she came to ask, without words, if she did exist” (Bowen, “Attractive” 524). It is only at the end of the story after she has finally met a neighbor that Mrs. Watson begins to understand the nature of her discontent more fully. The neighbor, Mrs. Dawkins, introduces herself to the Watsons and asks if Vera can come to tea with her own daughter, Dorothy. The two women begin a conversation, and Mrs. Dawkins remarks on the difficulty of becoming comfortable in a new house: “I always say,’ continued Mrs. Dawkins, ‘that it takes time to settle into a place. Gentlemen, being out so much, don’t feel it the same way.’” In response to this remark, Mrs. Watson muses that a new place probably “grows on one,” and that being settled is really just habit (528). As the story concludes, Mrs. Watson begins to make new acquaintances and establish new habits.



Through this final conversation, Bowen has revealed two significant elements in the idea of “home” set forth in this short story, as well as “The New House” and “The Last Night in the Old Home.” Houses become homes through the accumulation of traditions and the stability provided by a fixed arrangement of furniture and objects. It is perhaps an effort on the part of the family members themselves to impose order in a world that is constantly changing and disrupting plans and expectations. In the destruction of this nucleus of order, the world again asserts its unpredictability. For some characters, this dispossession can prove liberating if they possess the imagination necessary to redefine their identities. For those who lack this imagination, such as Mrs. Watson, this disruption becomes a source of melancholy and anxiety. Gaston Bachelard claims that it is the imagination that increases the very real value of inside space. Inhabited space possesses practical value because of its ability to shelter and protect its inhabitants; however, the residents of a house experience that value through their imagination. Bachelard explains that “the imagination [builds] ‘walls’ of impalpable shadows, [comforts] itself with the illusion of protection...He [the sheltered being] experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams” (5). Throughout the lives of those who have inhabited the family home, those dreams of security and intimacy return, and there exists “solidarity of memory and imagination” (6). It is therefore not surprising that Herbert in “The New House” begins to feel comfortable in his new home only after his imagination has begun to visualize that space in terms of fantasies (or daydreaming, as Bachelard refers to this act of imaginative fancy) that reaffirm a sense of security and intimacy.

Bowen also provides a clue as to why so many of these characters who struggle with, and are eventually liberated by, the destruction of the family home are women. Women are the ones who traditionally have had little choice but to stay home, especially within the expectations

established by the nineteenth ideology of separate spheres. As men leave for work in the morning and do not return to the early evening, they are less confined to the house and so do not suffer the same tendency to be defined by the home itself. If women are to remain at home without any chance of defining themselves through any other activity, then the destruction or abandonment of the family home has the potential to displace the identities of the female members of the household upon whom it is interdependent. Vera Kreilkamp, in her book *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House*, recognizes the profound influence of aesthetic order as represented by the stability of the family home on Bowen's narratives: "Each of her fictional houses embodies a desire for wholeness and safety...the image of her family home offers a promise of identity and security" (142). Yet, as a writer, Bowen seems to be acutely aware of the imaginative investment in any memory of order (and therefore identification of self) associated with the family home, whether that home is her own Bowen's Court or the home of one of her fictional characters. For many of the women in Bowen's short fiction, the possibility of such imaginative investment is both terrifying and cathartic. It is only once the security of the family home is no longer present that these women realize the restrictions that order had imposed on identity and the extent to which the imaginative faculty is capable of re-envisioning new paradigms of behavior.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### **Domestic Fictions: Negotiation of Place and Identity**

Scenes of movement and depictions of literal and figurative transition, across physical and psychological spaces respectively, are at the center of much of the fiction of Elizabeth Bowen. In the opening chapters of an autobiographical fragment published in 1975 after her death, Bowen writes of the importance of these moments of passage through rooms and places: “Bowen characters are almost perpetually in transit. Arguably: if you are to include transitions from room to room or floor to floor of the same house, or one to another portion of its surroundings. I agree, Bowen characters are in transit *consciously*” (“*Pictures*” 41). In her novels, the scenes of movement between rooms in a single family home or movement crossing the threshold in and out of the home itself are often suggestive of more emotional or psychological periods of transition for the characters in transit. From Lois in *The Last September* to Portia in *The Death of the Heart*, it is as if Bowen’s young women are continuously searching for a comfortable *place* to be, one in which they can more effectively realize *who* they are meant to be. Bowen implies the significance of these physical transitions with her emphasis on the word “*consciously*” in the above quote. It is not simply that the characters move through domestic space insensible to their surroundings, but rather they observe, feel and recognize the importance of the movement through places as experience. Indeed, Bowen proceeds to clarify her use of the modifier “*consciously*”: “An arrival, even into another room, is an event to be registered in some way. When they [Bowen characters] extend their environment, strike outward, invade the unknown, travel, what goes on in them is magnified and enhanced: impacts are sharper, there is

more objectivity” (42). These characters are aware of the movement as an experience to be felt and acknowledged. The change in space, whether to a new room, home, or city, is viewed with interest and the “impacts” that it registers on the characters can be recognized and understood with “objectivity” because the transition itself has offered a new perspective. Derek Hand in his article “Ghosts from our Future: Bowen and the Unfinished Business of Living” notes the altered outlook that such movement through space and between places brings: “It is ironic that for Bowen home only comes into sharp focus when it is under threat or absent. In a circuitous way, then, homelessness leads to home” (69). As Bowen’s characters move beyond home, the place itself comes into “sharper” focus and its existence as a stable place is “magnified” through their recollections of it, which effectively locate and freeze it in memory. Bowen's idea of permanence as “an attribute of recalled places” is precisely a result of the experience of being or dwelling in one place, later recollected and given a stability that it may or may not ever have actually possessed (“*Pictures*” 44).

While Bowen is often concerned with more localized transitions in her texts, movement between rooms or at times between houses, these arrivals and departures are indicative of a larger concern with the development of character felt in her work, in part related to the broader changes in spatial experience taking place in the first half of the twentieth century and their implications for the formation of subjective identity. If one’s perspective can be altered by simply moving from one room to another or one home to another, one’s perspective could be fundamentally transformed by the transition from nineteenth-century domestic places that were securely rooted and demarcated to the more open and permeable places of the twentieth century. The change in the individual’s understanding of what it meant to exist in space was in part a result of the advances in transportation technology. By 1914 the mass production of the

automobile took a step forward with the implementation of Henry Ford's assembly line. By the first World War, airplanes were being used for military purposes, a little over ten years after the first sustained flight by the Wright brothers. Advances in transportation were transforming the way people experienced space. Bowen expressed a love of movement and travel and a fascination with the "age of speed," including "motor-cars and their offspring motor-bikes," both of which seemed "mythical and phenomenal" (*Pictures* 43). She even claims that it was "good for art" because it "alerts vision, making vision retentive with regard to what only may have been seen for a split second. By contrast, it accentuates stillness" (44). Space was compressed, as far as experience of it, and clearly, for Bowen, this necessitated a keener observation of one's surroundings, as well as a heightened awareness of the pauses that still existed. Homes have always been one of the most influential places of pause and "stillness," and so once again, the home is brought into sharper relief by movement, and perhaps most especially by movement away from it.

The boundaries between places also became less distinct. The growth of cities meant that the spatial distance between homes and individuals grew less. This growing urbanization further changed how people understood and experienced space and place. Maintaining the bounded identity of a place is much easier the more distance there is between discrete locations, when those very boundaries do not feel threatened. It is simply easier to view them as secure, defined sites of dwelling that enclose a household community and protect that social group from the outside. As places literally grow closer in the city, to the point where there are apartment buildings with multiple dwellings in one structure, it becomes harder to maintain the perspective of a distinct, rooted place called home. Finally, the twentieth century also exposed the very real fragility and temporality of the physical structures that we call home with the reality of the

destruction that resulted from two World Wars. All of these changes succeeded in highlighting the role that imagination had always played in creating the previously assumed fiction of permanence and stability. The sense of immutability was in part given to them by our recollections of them as frozen in time and space. Elizabeth Bowen would later succeed in contrasting the destruction of World War II with the solidity of family homes rooted in the past in *The Heat of the Day*, where we see Stella escape the destruction of the Blitz in London by going to Mount Morris, a Big House located in County Cork. Mount Morris is very much outdated, lacking many structural modernizations including electricity, but it is a family home that offers a temporary peace from the unpredictable chaos of the bombing in London.

At the same time as the nature of places comes into question, then so does the nature of a stable sense of a unified self. The presumed stability of place had appeared, according to philosopher Gaston Bachelard, to provide a secure foundation for the formation of a subjective individual identity. In other words “the values of inhabited space” are exactly the “non-I that protects the I” (5). However, if places are indeed more permeable than imagined and more easily damaged, such as in the course of war, then the consequent changes for the foundation of subjectivity may represent one more transition Bowen’s characters must undertake. It is ultimately telling that both Anna and Portia are so concerned with how they are seen by others. Particularly as they stand in windows looking out at the world, they think about the world looking inside and how they must appear. They imagine their forms as objects to be gazed at and judged: Portia considers how “gay” the living room of Waikiki “must look from the esplanade” and Anna “[steps] back instinctively” from the drawing room window when Portia waves to her from outside, thinking about “how foolish a person looking out of a window appears from the outside” (Bowen, *Death* 173, 321). These women cannot simply stand at a window to experience

the view as a reflecting subject: they seem to be aware of their existence as a type of performance that can be viewed by those outside of the domestic space. The performative aspect of living is one that Bowen claims the Anglo-Irish excelled at: “Art is for us inseparable from artifice” (“*Pictures*” 23). For the Anglo-Irish, not entirely English nor fully Irish, the formation of identity was a continuous process of negotiation and performance, and as such, life was lifted “above the exigencies of mere living to the plane of art, or at least style” (“*The Big House*” 27). Thus, Bowen would have been more familiar than most with the idea of living one’s identity as performance. However, the changes taking place in spatial experience in the first half of the twentieth century made this understanding of identity increasingly relevant. As a result, all identity becomes a complicated negotiation between the observations and reflections of one’s own self on the one hand and the observations provided by an outside perspective on the other hand. The combination of one’s own conscious experiences as a feeling, reflecting subject and a separate “other” who offers an outside perspective on one’s position in the social order is influential in the development of a modern sense of identity, thus effectively rendering every individual’s post-domestic experience - at least in the traditional interpretation of grounded, stable dwelling - also a post-colonial experience,

Born at the turn of this new century and sharing her youth with that of the modern age, Elizabeth Bowen inherited an understanding of space that had been, at least in the last century, characterized as essential and gendered. The idea of separate spaces, or spheres, that were based on notions of public and private rested on two basic assumptions: that individual places, such as homes, were bounded and discrete and that places, depending on the activities taking place within them, were naturally gender specific. Thus, home could be a secure, enclosed and feminine place that was separate from the more public, masculine places of commerce and

industry. Linda McDowell in *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* explains the gendered identity associated with each of these spheres: “Housework and childcare in particular were seen as women’s ‘sacred’ duty, they and the ‘master’ of the house being protected in this sphere from the harsh competitive world of capitalism” (75). This dividing up of space into places assumed to be the ‘natural’ sphere of one or the other sex” also suggests that space and place are to some extent socially constructed (31). Thus, McDowell argues that places, in as much as they “touch the ground” or exist in actuality as literally experienced sites of activity and habit, are then also “spatially located patterns and behaviours” (30). These patterns are inevitably social ones as people in general exist together in more or less structured groups, including family units, tribes, and communities. Bowen often acknowledges this basic human need for social interaction, as she does in *The Death of the Heart* when the narrator suggests, “Frantic smiles at parties, overtures that have desperation behind them... squeezing to kissing all indicate that one cannot live alone. Not only is there no question of solitude, but in the long run we may not choose our company” (221). A family home, just like any other established place, contains and is contained within a network of social relationships. However, the family home, more than any other place, has the ability to reinforce and perpetuate these social relationships, ensuring the order they embody is continued into the future. Thus, according to social scientist Doreen Massey, the domestic sites of the nineteenth century were “both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity” (179). If one’s experience of place, especially a domestic dwelling, is connected to certain social patterns of behavior, including behaviors that are understood to be “naturally” feminine or masculine, then those places also come to be identified as gendered.



Homes exist as both physical and symbolic sites, in that they are both material structures and reflections of the social order within. That there is a social order present in the place of the home is a point that many spatial theorists can agree on, from Gaston Bachelard to Doreen Massey. It is the extent of the influence of that order on determining one's spatial experience that is often up for debate. For example, in Massey, the complex network of social relationships is responsible for creating a dynamic process of spatial experience. Places are thus contingent on the individual inhabitant's location within the network. Bowen, however, does not appear willing to embrace such a synchronic view which allows for the existence of multiple spatial realities at any given time since each person will occupy his or her own site within the order and that location is continuously changing as we move through space. Bowen still believes that "the attachment of people to places" is "generic to human life" (*Bowen's Court* 454). It is in this belief that she demonstrates a closer affinity with Gaston Bachelard and his theory of spatial experience. The act of dwelling, or of being securely grounded in one place, such as the Victorian home, is always a result of a creative combination of memory and imagination, as Bachelard claims in *The Poetics of Space*. Everything we are and have been goes into creating a home. He insists it is by "a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" that we create an experience of home (17). It is "the imagination that engraves them on our memories" in so doing, our recollections are enhanced and ultimately replaced with "imagined recollections" (32). These images engraved on the memory of dwelling can come from personal experience of past homes or from a shared cultural memory of what it is to dwell from which Bachelard indicates that we acquire primal images of inhabiting places. These primal images of dwelling include the isolated hut that offers refuge and the light in the window that promises

safety and solace. I would argue that Bowen shares Bachelard's overall perspective on the experience of dwelling and the creation of homes from places in which we pause.

Elizabeth Bowen's depiction of characters who invest a sense of intimacy and permanence in "recalled places" appears to suggest that she understands the importance of memory in giving these places their apparent immutability ("*Pictures*" 44). Characters such as Lois, Cicely and Mrs. Watson all look back to the homes in which they have been raised as sites of tradition and order. Even Portia in *The Death of the Heart*, who has never had a stable home until she came to Windsor Terrace, daydreams about being with Eddie, but it is where they are in her vision that reminds one of Bachelard's primal images of dwelling: "she and Eddie sat in the door of a hut. She felt the hut, with its content of dark, behind them... She felt the touch of calmness and similarity: he and she were one without any touch but this. What was in the hut behind she did not know: this light was eternal; they would be here forever" (106). Intuitively, Portia reaches for one of Bachelard's primal engravings, one which he suggests "leads us on towards extreme solitude" because "there radiates about this centralized solitude a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside the universe" (32). Portia is drawn to the peace and solitude of the image, along with its promise of "forever," but unlike Bachelard's image of "extreme solitude," Bowen's representation of Portia's vision includes Eddie, with whom she enjoys the peace as if they "were one." This is arguably where Bowen parts ways with Bachelard's understanding of spatial experience. For her, any experience of dwelling represents not only an individual's desire to find a place of stability and comfort, but also to ideally share that place with others: at the heart of Bowen's understanding of place is society and our inescapable need, though not always desire, for it.

Bowen's characters are in a constant state of transit from place to place because the technological and social changes in spatial experience at this point in time make a secure stasis in one stable place increasingly problematic. As a result, they move between places, searching for a lost stability and rootedness that they believe once existed. In fact, the characters' experience of place in Bowen is a fundamentally modern one: they are rendered either literally homeless with the physical destruction of the family home or psychologically homesick as their secure understanding of the discrete place of home is challenged by rapidly encroaching urbanization and the technological advancements in transportation. However inescapable this change in our spatial perspective is for Bowen, it is also not necessarily one that her characters accept without struggle. In an attempt to fairly outline Bowen's modern romantic sensibility, her literary executor Spencer Curtis Brown describes the imaginative vision evident in much of her longer fiction in his forward to Bowen's posthumously published work *Pictures and Conversations*: "what she saw was Eden in the seconds after the apple had been eaten, when Evil was known, immanent and unavoidable but while there was still awareness of what Innocence had been" (xxvi). The modern realization that the places in which we live are not secure or permanent as they may appear is one that cannot be ignored for many of Bowen's characters and this knowledge is the equivalent of a fall from innocence, particularly for her young female characters who must now enter a transformed world of experience. These women seem to recall, perhaps through images akin to Bachelard's primal engravings of dwelling, that there did exist places of security that provided peace and refuge from the outside world. Unfortunately, there is no return to Eden and any new home is one that must be built on the ruins of what has been lost, with the awareness that one day it too may be lost.

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## About the Author

Shannon L. Tivnan received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History from Duke University and her Master's Degree in English from the University of Virginia. She is the Bibliographer for *The Mailer Review*, an academic periodical focused on the literary works of Norman Mailer.