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Elizabeth Bowen's fiction from World War II is among the most celebrated of the era. As most readers know, her remarkable collection of wartime short fiction, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, joins war writing with the gothic. This odd conjuncture has produced two dominant modes of reading Bowen's stories: either the immediate historical context of World War II guides interpretation or Bowen's deployment of gothic tropes and imagery invokes a longer tradition of Anglo-Irish gothic fiction, thereby restoring a specifically Irish historical context to these stories. Rather than privilege one form of reading over the other, I suggest that the defining features of Bowen's war gothic – disorderly temporalities, alternating narratives, hauntings – formally mediate between these two historical moments. On my reading, Bowen's stories transfer the anxieties of Anglo-Irish gothic fiction – the erosion of property rights, wealth distribution, and inheritance – to the scene of the People's War. Bowen's gothic fictions, then, treat the war populism of the 1940s and the calls for a more equitable postwar democracy as augurs of the same economic and social disaster that befell the Anglo-Irish landowners. In Bowen's hands, a genre initially suited for a dying settler colonial class is uniquely, if counter-intuitively, appropriate for a bombed imperial metropolis. These gothic stories of unsettled pasts and ghostly returns function as anxious ruminations on the near future, distress signals from the world to come.

Keywords

Elizabeth Bowen; gothic; World War II; war literature; late modernism; Irish literature; Irish modernism

Elizabeth Bowen's wartime fiction is among the most innovative and most admired of all World War II literature. Curiously, though, Bowen's stories contain very little of the actual war.[1] Unlike the celebrated war fiction of Henry Green, James Hanley, and William Sansom, her short stories conspicuously lack typical characters such as civilian firefighters and air raid wardens; missing too are harrowing air raid scenes, enflamed buildings, and depictions of British resistance in this so-called People's War. Bowen would apologize to her readers in the 1945 preface to the American edition of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, a collection of her wartime fiction, for the absence of any 'straight pictures' of war-torn England.[2] Instead, her stories render what she calls 'war climate', an unsettled, often ghostly atmosphere that permeates all facets of everyday life in a war capital.[3] This odd conjuncture of war writing and the gothic has generated two dominant modes of reading Bowen's stories: either the immediate historical context of World War II guides interpretation or Bowen's deployment of gothic tropes and imagery invokes a longer tradition of Anglo-Irish gothic fiction, thereby restoring a specifically Irish historical context to these stories. Critics who privilege the former over the latter interpret the discontinuous, fragmentary form of Bowen's stories as reflections of the disruptions of everyday life during the war.[4] Michael North and Leo Mellor have shown how World War II induced its own set of aesthetic innovations. This brand of late modernism 'drew its potency from historical specificity, material debris, and traumatic fears'.[5] For both North and Mellor, late modernism's formal innovations are tied to the social, political, and even psychic transfigurations of everyday life in the war metropolis. In this way, Bowen's stories attain legibility only when read against the historical pressures of World War II.

For those working primarily in Irish studies, Bowen's fictions bear the traces of Irish history within their very textual patterns and formal structures.[6] Vera Kreilkamp suggests that the gothic motifs in Bowen are derived from the most renowned nineteenth-century practitioners – Charles Maturin, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker – whose novels expressed the terror of the Anglo-Irish ruling class: 'irregular lines of legitimacy and inheritance; miscegenation; victimized young women; animated ancestral portraits; sudden outbursts of violence; and, always, the imprisoning mythologies of the past'.[7] These features encipher the protracted erosion of a system of property rights, wealth distribution, and inheritance that legitimated and ensured the ruling power of the Anglo-Irish.[8] And yet if this gothic, plagued and defined by Ascendancy guilt, seems to fit Bowen's biography and her 'Irish' writing, it is not immediately clear why it fits wartime England.

Rather than privilege one mode of reading over the other, this essay contends that the Anglo-Irish gothic mediates a particular cluster of class anxieties brought into relief during World War II. The particular mode in

which the British fought the war – the flattening of class levels, the mobilization of all sectors of the population, the empowerment of the working classes – brought to the fore the inequitable distribution of property, wealth, and power in contemporary England, conditions that mirror the asymmetrical economic and social relations of Anglo-Ireland during its troubled tenure and protracted demise. Like those nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish gothic tales of sinister uncles and vampires, Bowen's stories function as expressions of property loss, class levelling, and the coming redistribution of wealth and power that many believed would follow the war. The anxieties and fears of inexorable structural change that made the Anglo-Irish gothic 'the political unconscious of Anglo-Irish society'[9] reappear in Bowen's stories, but they are directed towards the visions of a more democratic post-war Britain. Such visions took shape before the first bombs of the Blitz ever fell. One early sign of the changing political tides comes from a famous and oft-quoted leader from *The Times* on July 1, 1940:

> If we speak of a democracy, we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live. If we speak of freedom, we do not mean a rugged individualism which excludes social organization and economic planning. If we speak of equality, we do not mean a political equality nullified by social and economic privilege. If we speak of economic reconstruction, we think less of maximum production (though this too will be required) than of equitable distribution ... The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege be that of a country, of a class, or of an individual.[10]

The war, then, served also as a catalyst for social revolution, one that appeared absolutely necessary if democracy was to endure after the war. George Orwell also sensed a coming revolution. In autumn of 1940 he thought 'the London gutters will have to run with blood'.[11] In his 1941 report on the efficiency of social services during the Blitz, Ritchie Calder concluded that the material destruction of the war effectively closed one phase of English history and outmoded an entire political structure: 'An epoch went crashing down in the angry brown dust of crumbling property. The ruins of the Victorian town houses in the West End and the slums of the East End were apocalyptic; they were symbolic of the catastrophic End of an Age'.[12] Calder believed these ruins were forecasts of the world to come: 'In the perspective of history, the Lesson of London may be that "Black Saturday", September 7, 1940, was as significant in its own way as Bastille Day, July 14, 1789'.[13] Divining social revolution from the smouldering ruins, Calder's prophecy of a new democracy symbolizes a current of utopian thinking that rose out of the ashes of bombed England.

A flurry of government reports in the early years of the war put these utopic hopes into the language of policy initiatives. The Barlow Report of 1940 strove to equalize regional prosperity and growth while the Uthwatt Report in 1941 provided a plan for reconstruction while also regulating speculation and profiteering by landowners.[14] The most widely read and debated of all these reports was The Beveridge Report (1942), which outlined the fundamentals of the future welfare state. Two lakhs fifty six thousand copies were sold to the public in its first year of publication, and another 369,000 abridged versions found their way into eager hands. Public enthusiasm for these overtures of state planning and a more egalitarian society led *The Daily Mirror* to declare the Beveridge Report as a 'symbol of the new Britain'.[15] Reconstruction, then, did not mean reassembling pre-1939 Britain; rather, it was a code word for dramatic social change. In the words of J.B. Priestley, England was being 'bombed and burned into democracy'.[16]

The new social order promised a redistribution of property, land, and income, granting to the masses the rights and privileges long enjoyed by the upper classes. Such priorities also forced a paradigmatic shift in what it meant to be a citizen in a state organized around welfare capitalism. As Alan Sinfield points out, redistribution and class levelling signalled catastrophe for Bowen and others in her privileged class.[17] The truly singular feature of Bowen's stories is not their articulation of a counter-narrative to these widespread sentiments; it is the way they align the yearnings for a more democratic, post-war British future with the political anxieties of the Anglo-Irish past. For Bowen, then, a genre initially suited for a dying settler colonial class is uniquely, if counter-intuitively, appropriate for a bombed imperial metropole. In other words, Bowen's stories anticipate a historical recurrence of Anglo-Ireland's fate in post-war Britain.

This recursive logic appears rather poetically in her October 1945 'Preface' to the American edition of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*. Bowen construes the war as a process of dispossession, both of property and subjectivity. Bowen claims that the abnormality of wartime collapsed the distinction between author and citizen: 'Arguably, writers are always slightly abnormal people ... In war, this feeling of slight differentiation was suspended'.[18] 'Writer' here should serve as a designation of apartness, of separation from the ordinary citizens and the masses in peacetime; the war, however, permits no such separation. The very stories comprising this volume, she says, were not her inventions, but rather that of 'the overcharged subconsciousness of everybody ... It is because the general subconsciousness saturates these stories that they have an authority nothing to do with me'.[19] This indistinction between writer and ordinary, or 'normal', citizen expands to encompass the entire population: 'sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began'.[20] If 'general subconsciousness' and permeable lines between the self and

others suggests a new collectivity, a nascent mass less restricted by class, it is not something Bowen figures positively. Rather, in Bowen's estimation these are unwelcome aftereffects of the physical devastation of property: '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. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other'.[21] Bowen conjoins the loss of property and 'solid things' with subjective erasure. Reading, writing, dreaming, and scavenging for lost objects all serve the same purpose in Bowen's preface: restore 'the communicative touch of personal life' and rescues the 'I' that loses its material and immaterial boundaries in wartime.[22]

The equation of subjectivity with property ownership and stable class boundaries exposes how much Bowen's comprehension of World War II is rooted in her own experience and understanding of Anglo-Ireland's twilight years. By turning now to *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, we can see precisely how the defining features of Bowen's war gothic – disorderly temporalities, alternating narratives, ghostly returns – formally mediate between these two historical moments. The Anglo-Irish gothic offers a framework for thinking the present historically.

Future perfect promises

The titular story of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* models the recursive historicism I claim is central to Bowen's war gothic. The story opens with Mrs Drover's return to her London home to fetch some remaining possessions and to assess the damage done by air raids. The opening scene paints Mrs Drover's ravaged neighbourhood in gothic tones: a 'steamy, showery day'[23] gives way to clouds 'already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out' (p. 80). The only witness to the ominous scene accompanying Mrs Drover's arrival is a cat weaving 'itself in and out of railings' (p. 80). Against these staple materials of a gothic setting, the known and the familiar turn inside out, introducing a series of uncanny effects: 'In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness has silted up' (p. 80). Mrs Drover's house is a relic, a reminder of a life once lived, of a life interrupted and suspended by the war. This unhomely place bears 'traces of her long former habit of life' (p. 80): smoke stains on the mantelpiece, traces of furniture moved away for storage, and 'the bruise in the wallpaper' (p. 80). This quick inventory of descriptions and plot devices – an abandoned house, a lone woman, the uncanny inversion of familiar places and things, accumulating suspense – might suggest that these stock gothic traits actually map cleanly onto the appearance of a bombarded city; to be sure, the photojournalism of Cecil Beaton

and Bill Brandt supplied images of wartime London that resemble the eerie landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich's famous gothic canvases. 'The Demon Lover', however, marshals the gothic for its particular ability to detect the afterlife of the past within the present.

The historical past first intrudes by way of a letter: it is without a postmark, has no return address, and, as far as Mrs Drover can determine, it should never have found its way inside her shuttered house. Mystery and suspense are redoubled with Bowen's Radcliffe-like description of encroaching night: 'the sun had gone in; as the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank lawns seemed already to smoke with dark. Her reluctance to look again at the letter came from the fact that she felt intruded upon – and by someone contemptuous of her ways. However, in the tenseness preceding the fall of rain she read it' (p. 81). The letter, as we soon discover, is from Mrs Drover's missing fiancé who disappeared in August, 1916 while fighting in World War I:

> Dear Kathleen,
> You will not have forgotten that to-day is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to see you leave London, but was satisfied that you would be back on time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged.
> Until then . . .
> K. (p. 82)

She reacts to the letter with pure shock: 'her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white' (p. 82). On the literal level, an errant lover keeps his appointment; on the heavily freighted figural level, the first line of the letter, cast as it is in the future perfect, suggests that a potential, dormant event from the past has reached its moment of unfolding. The lover's promised arrival marks the return of total war and shades World War II as a moment of historical recurrence and even fulfilment.

Yet, if the future perfect tense marks a promise kept even beyond the bounds of life and death, the letter also induces a temporal break, a pivotal moment of narrative discontinuity. In narratological terms, the first narrative that carries the story forward in the present ends abruptly with Mrs Drover's shock, expressed in a series of questions and ultimately terminates with an ellipsis: 'The hour arranged . . . My God', she said, 'what hour? How should I . . .? After twenty-five years . . .' (pp. 82–83). A textual space separates Mrs Drover's present from the onset of an analepsis that moves the narrative back 25 years to August 1916. Here we see Mrs Drover with K. before his departure to the battlefields of World War I.

K. asks his lover, who is clearly more disturbed than infatuated, to wait for him and, months later, K. goes missing and is never found. The narrative accelerates and takes us through Kathleen's life, detailing what transpired in the years after K.'s disappearance, how she met William Drover, where they settled, and how many children they had. When we catch up with the rattled Mrs Drover in her vacated house, we find her musing over the letter's arrival and somewhat frantically planning her quick departure from London. This story famously ends with Mrs Drover climbing into a taxi only to realize that K. is the driver. She screams and the taxi 'made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets' (p. 87).

What I am suggesting here is that 'The Demon Lover' models two things: first, the appearance of the letter creates a moment of incomprehensibility in the narrative and breaks its temporal structure; second, the analepsis explains the story behind the letter, restoring cause and effect between the past and the present moment. At the formal, even allegorical level, Bowen's story breaks then reassemble the continuum of time and history. The past returns to make sense of the present, or, at the very least, to explain Mrs Drover's otherwise cryptic moment of shock. Yet, the conclusion is the most salient feature of Bowen's war stories: even with linear time reconstituted and the explanatory power of narrative restored, the futures that await these characters are disastrous.

The narrative pattern I have sketched out for 'The Demon Lover' repeats throughout Bowen's war stories and many of her characters find themselves consigned to similarly unwanted fates. Like the blank Henry Russel in 'Sunday Afternoon', the psychologically wounded Gavin Doddington in 'Ivy Gripped the Steps', the hopeless Clara Detter of 'The Inherited Clock', and the abandoned, affectless daughter in 'Songs My Father Sang Me', Mrs Drover's unsettled past leads only to a grievous end. The narrative form of these stories – the recurrence and intensification of a past that leads inexorably to disaster – models a philosophy of history, one that incorporates the fear of civilizational decline and extinction that marked the Anglo-Irish gothic.[24] Neil Corcoran draws a similar conclusion regarding the employment of the gothic in Bowen's war stories and her 'Irish' books, *The Last September* and *Bowen's Court*. 'Bowen's discovery in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*', he writes, 'is that a mode of writing inherently appropriate to the circumstances of bombed-out London where, exactly, and as these stories again and again insist, people were feeling pushed to the side of their own former lives'.[25] Indeed, in Bowen's other wartime book, *Bowen's Court*, she openly considers how the war years might have shaded the recollection and assemblage of her family's long history in Anglo-Ireland. She notes in her 'Afterword' that the 'urgency of the present . . . seems to communicate itself to one's view of the past . . . The Past – private just as much as historical – seems to

me now to matter more than ever: it acquires meaning; it loses false mystery. In the savage and austere light of a burning world, details leap out with significance'.[26] And what are those details? How do the fears and fantasies of a settler colonial class acquire, even transfer, meaning amidst the ongoing destruction of an imperial metropolis? Bowen gives us a window into this odd convergence in her narration of the death of Henry Bowen III, the builder of her family's big house, Bowen's Court.

A popular and highly social man, Henry III, was, on Bowen's account, not exactly the most learned or culturally discerning of her ancestors. And yet Bowen's reflections on his death, as well as the inheritance he assumed and expected to pass along in perpetuity, tout his livelihood and legacy against the liberal and cosmopolitan virtues that would come to signify the *absolut moderne*:

> Henry, a pre-eminently social figure, lived in a Philistine, snobbish, limited and on the whole pretty graceless society. But he got somewhere, and lived to die in his drawing-room surrounded by hosts of children and the esteem of what looked like a lasting order. And to what did our fine feelings, our regard for the arts, our intimacies, our inspiring conversations, our wish to be clear of the bonds of sex and class and nationality, our wish to try to be fair to everyone bring us? To 1939.[27]

Property, genealogy, and clear lines of inheritance ensure continuity and ground a 'lasting order' for Bowen's past and present. The final soundings of these Burkean notes resonate so poignantly throughout *The Last September*; they also resonate in the war stories. The 'burning world' of England at the dawn of the 1940s and the near extinction of the Anglo-Irish merge into a constellation where the past is legible in terms of the present moment; in turn, that present is understood, and indeed narrated, as another iteration, even amplification, of an eclipsed era's fraught hopes. The repetition, then, exceeds even the existential malaise that Corcoran identifies; it is equally, if not more so, one of historical recurrence. The two situations are not 'like' or 'equal' or 'similar' to one another at all, but, in Walter Benjamin's terms, the violent end of Anglo-Irish power achieves the 'now of a particular recognizability'[28] in wartime England.[29]

'We know this is only something happening again'

The alignment of past and present is precisely what is at stake in two wartime stories – 'The Happy Autumn Fields' and 'Sunday Afternoon' – that imagine the war city through Ireland past and present. 'The

Happy Autumn Fields' alternates between two narrative sequences: one follows a nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish family and another focuses on a young couple in wartime London. While cleaning out her bombed London apartment, Mary uncovers a box of letters and photographs that tells the story of this nineteenth-century family. The material from this scattered archive, particularly as it relates to the two young sisters Sarah and Henrietta, migrates into Mary's dreams where she watches the family and the sisters' struggles unfold in her deep slumber. The story opens in the middle of one of Mary's dreams. We see an orderly family procession moving across County Cork with Papa at the head and his children and nephew in tow. The harvest has been bountiful and, to his pleasure, his oldest daughter is set to marry. These early images of family order and continuity are reinforced with the arrival of Fitzgeorge, the sure heir to the estate, who later sits atop the procession, figuring his future position as family patriarch and, indeed, ensuring the continuity of the estate into the next generation. Yet, these images of continuity and duration are arrayed against tragic anticipations that loom large over this first narrative sequence: rooks hover over the Anglo-Irish family as they march in procession through newly harvested fields; the two young sisters briefly consider visiting the cottage of a dying neighbour whose death will be followed by the slow decay of his property; finally, sitting in the family home, Sarah strangely apprehends that 'the seconds were numbered' (p. 108), forecasting not only the imminent death of her suitor Eugene, but her and her sister's untimely deaths and, to be sure, the end of the Anglo-Irish way of life her father, like Henry Bowen III, expected to endure.

The second narrative follows Mary, who drifts in and out of sleep in her bomb-damaged apartment, ostensibly conjuring the scenes of Sarah and Henrietta in her dreams. Bowen's narration, however, implies that the lines separating these two historical eras are deeply perforated. The first indication that the nineteenth-century tale is not a discrete story comes by way of a pronominal shift. As we watch Sarah and Henrietta bring up the rear of their family procession, we find their childish jokes and games interrupted with the arrival of Sarah's suitor, Eugene. The shy and timid flirtation between the two distresses Henrietta and, in an echo of Philomela, she transforms her pain into song: 'At the other side of the horse, Henrietta began to sing. At once her pain, like a scientific ray, passed through the horse and Eugene to penetrate Sarah's heart' (p. 100). The accumulating tension between the sisters culminates in an abrupt shift in the narrative voice from an apparent detached omniscience to 'we', insinuating that Mary has joined Sarah and Henrietta: 'We surmount the skyline: the family come into our view, we into theirs' (p. 100). The newly minted 'we', and in particular the ghostly and as yet unnamed Mary, pleads with Sarah to 'stop oh stop Henrietta's heartbreaking singing! Embrace her close again!

Speak the only possible word! Say – oh, say what? Oh, the word is lost!' (p. 100). This moment of urgency, of Henrietta's pending emotional injury, ends abruptly, but nevertheless carries the narrative forward into the present. Muttering 'Henrietta . . .' as she awakens, Mary is pulled from her dream after her hand strikes the corner of a table. As Phyllis Lassner points out, Mary's physical pain is both a manifestation and continuation of Henrietta's; but more than that, this narrative transition suggests a binding link between these two historical periods.

As the story oscillates between 1940s England and nineteenth-century Ireland, Mary intrudes yet again on the scene of Sarah's family. Back in her family's household, Sarah reveals that she cannot remember anything after Mary awakens and shifts the narrative out of the nineteenth century:

> She drew a light little gold chair into the middle of the wreath of carpet, where no one ever sat, and sat down. She said: 'But since then I think I have been asleep'.
>
> 'Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off', said Henrietta mockingly. Sarah in anguish pressed the palms of her hands together upon a shred of geranium leaf.
>
> 'How else', she said, 'could I have had such a bad dream?'
>
> 'That must be the explanation!' said Henrietta.
>
> 'A trifle fanciful', said Mamma. (p. 108)

Sarah uncustomarily sits 'where no one ever sat', further implying that Mary inhabits Sarah in this apparent dreamworld. Sarah too slips out of her nineteenth-century world and confirms that the Anglo-Irish scene is not contained entirely in Mary's head. When the story first transitions to the present and Mary awakens, it is Sarah inhabiting Mary's body:

> Frantic at being delayed here, while the moment awaited her in the cornfield, she all but afforded a smile at the grotesquerie of being saddled with Mary's body and lover. Rearing up her head from the bare pillow, she looked, as far as the crossed feet, along the form inside which she found herself trapped: the irrelevant body of Mary, weighted down to the bed, wore a short black modern dress, flaked with plaster. (p. 103)

The dress appears 'modern' only through the nineteenth-century gaze of Sarah; the body is foreign and 'Mary's' alone. There is not much on the literal level that accounts for this episode, but its figural effects are manifold. The haunting, even possession, of Mary's body by Sarah shatters the historical distance between the two narratives and marks the return of that past moment within the present. When we learn towards the end

of the story that Sarah, Henrietta, and Eugene all died young, we are invited to think how their tragedy might be Mary's and, more broadly, how the fate awaiting the Anglo-Irish might be recurring at the very moment that Mary passes in and out of sleep as her house is rocked by distant bombs.

In this way the ghosts of Anglo-Ireland have become the ghosts of 1940s England. The tragic end of the nineteenth-century family and their world parallels London in the present. The 'discovery',[30] then, of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, is that the gothic articulates the return of an Anglo-Irish narrative of class decline and civilizational erosion in another time and place. As we have seen up to this point, the disarticulation of property ownership from the value of citizenship in political discourse in the 1940s registers itself in Bowen's fictions as historical and ontological crisis. This may very well be why the emotional inertia and psychological ruin of so many of her characters is bound to places that signify recent historical pasts where lives were less scattered, less damaged. The coastal house in 'Ivy Gripped the Steps', the apartment in 'In the Square', the villa in 'Sunday Afternoon', and Mrs Drover's foreboding, bombed house in 'The Demon Lover' are all what Bowen called 'indestructible landmarks in a destructible world',[31] but they are also relics of lost forms of life that, in Declan Kiberd's words, 'may survive the death of their contents'.[32]

Casting a glance back at her own family, Bowen remembered how 'their natures shifted direction . . . when property could no longer be guaranteed'.[33] The other Irish wartime story, 'Sunday Afternoon', is about living without such guarantees. On a visit to old friends in neutral Ireland, Henry Russell is welcomed as a storyteller from the war zone across the sea: he is expected to relay his experiences, but include 'nothing dreadful' (p. 17). Henry's role quickly changes from storyteller to artifact, from subject to object. He acknowledges that his London flat was bombed and all his possessions destroyed. Ria Store suggests he is too resigned to such loss and Sir Isaac hints at a deeper change: 'One cannot help look at you, said Sir Isaac. 'You must forgive our amazement. But there was a time, Henry, when I think we all used to feel that we knew you well' (p. 21). Henry only responds that his experience is one amongst many and that he is 'very glad to remain. To exist' (p. 22). Existence without one's possessions, though, is not life in any recognizable sense to an audience shielded from the violence of the war. 'I wonder how much of you has been blown to blazes' (p. 22) asks Ria Store, marshalling the language of material destruction to ponder Henry's diminished existence. Dispossessed and property-less, Henry can no longer be said to live at all; he simply remains.

Bowen's story casts Henry's dispossession as subjective erasure; his is an existence without a form of life. 'Sunday Afternoon' also extends this

crisis beyond Henry and frames it as a historical dead end for people of his class and, importantly, his background. Henry is effectively caught between two historical moments embodied by two generations: the fossilized past of Mrs Vesey and his old Irish friends and the younger Maria who desperately wishes to become part of history and participate in the war. Maria's arrested development in this vestige of Irish aristocracy is familiar enough in Bowen's work, but wartime England offers no options for a brighter future.[34] Henry tells the upstart youth that her arrival in London will lead her to a fate not unlike his own; she will not become the historical agent she imagines: 'You may think action is better-but who will care for you when you only act? You will have an identity number, but no identity' (p. 25). Henry declares his desire to return to the life he had amongst his Irish friends even though such a return is impossible. With a slip of the tongue, he calls Maria Miranda, which Maud Ellmann suggests is 'presumably because she is compelled to leave the magic island and to confront a brave new world of fire and blood'.[35] Henry cannot return to the charmed life of neutral Ireland and Maria faces either perpetual stasis in Ireland or, like Henry, subjective erasure in the war. Henry's nostalgia for the remnants of an all but extinguished past and Maria's desire for an impossible future sketch out a historical trajectory in generational terms: 'half-old' (p. 26) Henry is dispossessed and desubjectified, fit neither for the world that made him nor the one to come; Maria's ebullience will go nowhere in an eclipsed Anglo-Irish world and she faces identity-loss in the world of action. For Bowen, Maria and Henry continue without roles in this unfolding historical epoch; their active participation, or the simple desire for active participation, secures nothing for them. Stasis or erasure, closed pasts or impossible futures: 'Sunday Afternoon' lays bare the ontological and temporal parameters of obsolete life in the post-war world.

Buildings survived people

When Bowen declares in her 'Preface' that 'the past, in all these cases, discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetized and bewildered present'[36] she outlines for us the gravest danger of living through the war: survival entails the stark realization that one may very well be on the verge of outliving her historical role, of being unfit for the world to come. Surely, this is Henry's realization in 'Sunday Afternoon'. In 'Mysterious Kôr', the final story Bowen composed during World War II and the last one I will consider here, Bowen pairs wartime London with an imaginary place wrested from one of the nineteenth century's greatest imperial romances. As the title of the story indicates, the primary reference is another decimated

imperial city: the Kôr of H. Rider Haggard's *She* and, more directly, from Andrew Lang's commemorative sonnet of the same name. Bowen's admiration for Haggard is documented in a 1947 radio broadcast on *She*. Although she was initially swept up in the 'soaring unrealism'[37] of Haggard's tale, Bowen held tight to 'the idea that life in any capital city must be ephemeral, and with a doom ahead'.[38] Somehow, though, Haggard's depopulated, fallen city provided consolation for Bowen: 'I found something reassuring and comforting in the idea that, whatever happened, buildings survived people'.[39] These competing formulations sound familiar enough as they recall the two sides of Baudelaire's *modernité*: the ephemeral (urban life) and the eternal (buildings). Bowen's story maps London and Kôr onto either side of this division: London the historical and transient, Kôr beyond history and eternal. The opening scene of moon-bleached London imports and transforms Haggard's description of the courts and temples of Kôr. I quote a passage from Haggard at some length for the sake of clarity and comparison:

> Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars – some of them (especially at the gateways) sculptured from pedestal to capital – space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and the brooding spirit of the Past! How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! [. . .] Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoar majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fane of Kôr. It was a wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had gazed thus upon each other, and in the utter solitude of space poured forth each to each the tale of their lost life and long departed glory. The white light fell, and minute by minute the quiet shadows crept across the grass-grown courts like the spirits of old priests haunting the habitations of their worship – the white light fell, and the long shadows grew till the beauty and grandeur of the scene and the untamed majesty of its present Death seemed to sink into our very souls, and speak more loudly than the shouts of armies concerning the pomp and splendour that the grave had allowed, and even memory had forgotten.[40]

Through Horace Holly's narration, Kôr's 'eloquence' and 'grandeur' abide long after its fall. The moon shines down 'hiding all their rents and imperfections', and the exquisite beauty of the city washes from memory Kôr's

historical collapse. Bowen's depiction of London borrows heavily from this very passage, but for a markedly different effect:

> Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon's capital – shallow, cratered, extinct. It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads and streets in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up. The soaring new flats and the crouching old shops and houses looked equally brittle under the moon, which blazed in windows that looked its way. The futility of the black-out became laughable. (p. 173)

Laid bare by moonlight, London possesses none of Kôr's timelessness nor does the moonlight conspire to conceal the traces of history. The moon hides nothing; 'cratered' and 'brittle' London is all too apparent. Unlike Haggard's city, time is specifically marked in the narration and the war is ever present.

These differences between Kôr and London underwrite the allure of the imagined city for Bowen's wandering lovers. Pepita and Arthur emerge from the Underground and gaze at the excessively bright London night. Pepita mutters 'Mysterious Kôr' (p. 174) and quotes a few lines from Lang's poem. In Pepita's imagination, it is 'a completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history' (p. 175). Preserved from the ravages of history, Kôr symbolizes for Pepita (and Lang) a refuge from the present and, possibly, provides a reason to hold out hope for the future: 'This war shows we've by no means come to the end. If you can blow whole places out of existence, you can blow whole places into it' (p. 176). Rapt with the illusion of London as Kôr, Pepita declares that Kôr is 'here'. Her amused lover only replies 'What, you mean we're there now, that here's there, that now's then . . .?' (p. 176). The fervour of Pepita's imagination collapses the distinctions between two places and two times, not entirely unlike Mary's dreams in 'The Happy Autumn Fields'. Kôr's autonomy from historical time is part of what makes it so utopic. Pepita tells Arthur that the only measure of time in Kôr comes by way of the circadian rhythms of the sun and the moon: 'but those two could do what they liked; we should not have to calculate when they'd come or go' (p. 177). She only desires that Arthur never ask 'what next?' (p. 177). Kôr becomes an imaginative refuge from linear, measurable time and, indeed, from the movement of history. But we might ask why Pepita evokes dead, imperial Kôr to give form to her longing for another world outside of the distress of the present.

The story's concluding scene grants Pepita the fulfilment in her dreams that she cannot find in her waking life in wartime London. Sleeping

like a 'mummy rolled half over' (p. 186), Pepita dreams her way into the timeless preserve of Kôr. She stands amidst the remnants of Kôr with Arthur:

> She still lay, as she had lain, in an avid dream, of which Arthur had been the source, of which Arthur was not the end. With him she looked this way, that way, down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades. With him she went up the stairs down which nothing but moon came; with him trod the ermine dust of the endless halls, stood on terraces, mounted the extreme tower, looked down on the statued squares, the wide, void, pure streets. He was the password, but not the answer: it was to Kôr's finality that she turned. (p. 189)

Arthur is neither 'the end' nor 'the answer'. A passage from *She* holds a key to the importance of Pepita's presence in the ruins of Kôr. In Rider Haggard's tale, Ayesha, the titular She, translates the last scrawls on a cave wall that serves as Kôr's eulogy: 'This do I write in misery of heart before I die, because Kôr the Imperial is no more, and because there are none to worship in her temple, and all her palaces are empty, and her princes and her captains and her traders and her fair women have passed off the face of the earth' (p. 183). Pepita and Arthur's presence brings new life to this dead imperial capital. In the logic of Bowen's story, Kôr's imperial decline rhymes with contemporary England and its post-war future. Kôr, then, offers a hope for the restoration of a lost empire and its forms of life. However, writing towards the end of the war, Bowen knows well that these consolations exist only in the realm of dreams and fantasy. This late war story ends on a note of solemn resignation and, perhaps, imperial nostalgia.

By charting out the dialectics of history and genre in Bowen's wartime stories, I hope to have illuminated her rather complex politics of form. Because Bowen is a gifted chronicler of both Anglo-Irish decline and everyday life in World War II, historicizing her work presents an enormous challenge; then again, determining where to place her within the ever-shifting terrain of twentieth-century literary history has never been easy. The renewed attention to Bowen's work over the last several years as well as the swell of interest in late modernism[41] opens new possibilities for reconfiguring Bowen's place among writers who, to crib a line from Fredric Jameson, 'had the misfortune to span two eras'.[42] For Jameson, the two eras were modernity and postmodernity; for Bowen, those eras were Anglo-Ireland and the perpetual crises of the first half of the twentieth century. Because her work dwells between these two histories, it formally

mediates the historical pressures of the twentieth century in unique ways. Treating Bowen's wartime stories as dense encryptions of a melancholic philosophy of history reveals that they are not merely counter-narratives to the war populism that underwrites so much literature of World War II; they are especially important for the ways in which they adumbrate a mode of historical thinking where looking backwards is looking ahead. The formal effects of her war gothic inscribe World War II within a longer historical cycle marked by recursive temporalities and foreclosed futures. In Bowen's hands, stories of unsettled pasts and ghostly returns function as anxious ruminations on the near future, distress signals from the world to come.

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Notes

1 This essay only deals with the short stories Elizabeth Bowen wrote during the war and only those that were collected into *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945). Not all of the stories she published during the war found their way into this volume. I have left out her stunning novel *The Heat of the Day* for two reasons: first, it does not traffic in the gothic features I focus on here, features Bowen herself believed were best suited to short fiction; second, *The Heat of the Day* was drafted in 1944, dramatically revised in the post-World War II period, and published finally in 1949. This essay is concerned with questions of form and genre during the war.

2 Elizabeth Bowen, 'Preface', *The Ivy Gripped the Steps* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946), pp. vii–xiv.

3 Ibid., p. vii.

4 There is a long and very smart tradition of reading Bowen as one of the preeminent and most experimental writers of World War II. See, for example, Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (London: Palgrave, 2009); Michael North, 'World War II: The City in Ruins' in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 436–451; Gill Plain, 'Women

Writers and the War' in Marina Mackay (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 165–178; Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

5 In addition to North, see also Marina MacKay's *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Leo Mellor's *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsite, and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

6 W.J. McCormack's, *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History Through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats, and Bowen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) provides an essential and skeptical reading of the Anglo-Irish gothic. For arguments on Bowen's place in this tradition, see Margot Backus, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981). Backus claims that 'The Demon Lover', although a war story with no references to Ireland, mediates Irish historical conflict through its 'patterns of repetition and historical recurrence that are characteristic of Anglo-Irish narrative structure' (p. 157).

7 Vera Kreilkamp, 'Bowen: Ascendancy Modernist' in Eibhear Walshe (ed.), *Elizabeth Bowen* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 17–18.

8 John Paul Riquelme and Nancy Armstrong make strong cases for the gothic as a subversive force that tries to undermine all forms of stability, be it class, psychic, sexual, or otherwise. See Riquelme's 'Introduction: Toward a History of Gothic Modernism: From Bram Stoker to Samuel Beckett', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.3 (2000), pp. 585–605 and Armstrong's *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). For a broader overview of gothic subversion in the twentieth century, see the second volume of David Punter's *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1996).

9 Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (New York: Verso Press, 1995), p. 187.

10 Quoted in Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), p. 137.

11 George Orwell, *George Orwell: An Age Like This, 1920–1940* (Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine, 2000), p. 539.

12 Ritchie Calder, *The Lesson of London* (London: Seckler & Warburg, 1941), p. 125.

13 Ibid., p. 128.

14 The Uthwatt Report stopped short of land nationalization, which the Labour Party abandoned altogether by the time of the 1945 election. For more on the evolution of land ownership and post-war reconstruction, see Michael Tichelar's excellent account.

15 Quoted in Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change: 1900–1967* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), p. 311.
16 J.B. Priestley, *Out of the People* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 9.
17 Alan Sinfield also numbers Evelyn Waugh and Angela Thirkell among those for whom social change was a 'great agony' (p. 14). See Chapter 2 of his *Literature, Culture, and Politics in Postwar Britain* (London: Continuum 2004 [1997]).
18 Bowen, 'Preface', p. viii.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. ix.
22 Ibid., p. xi.
23 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), p. 80.
24 In *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), Julian Moynahan argues that the tradition of Anglo-Irish literature is inaugurated with its own end in view. 'The paradox of this literature . . . is that it flowers just when the social formation producing it enters a phase of contraction and decline. As Anglo-Irish literature 'arises', the Anglo-Irish begin to go down in the world' (p. 9).
25 Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 149.
26 Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1942), p. 453.
27 Ibid., p. 125.
28 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 463.
29 Like Benjamin, Bowen coordinates two historical moments that achieve recognition and become charged with meaning. As provocative as it is to find such historical similarities between Bowen and Benjamin, they should be pursued with a degree of caution. Bowen laments the defeat of the ruling classes where Benjamin's historical materialism seeks desperately to reclaim the stories, hopes, and yearnings of the vanquished and the oppressed who suffered at the hands of the ruling classes.
30 Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 149.
31 Bowen, 'Preface', p. xi.
32 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), p. 370.
33 Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 455.
34 Jed Esty brilliantly tracks the problem of arrested adolescent development in Bowen's *The Last September*. See his 'Virgins of Empire: *The Last September* and the Antidevelopmental Plot' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 53.2 (2007), pp. 257–275.
35 Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 169.
36 Bowen, 'Preface', p. xii.

37 Elizabeth Bowen, 'Rider Haggard: *She*' in Hermione Lee (ed.), *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1986), p. 247.
38 Ibid., p. 249.
39 Ibid.
40 H. Rider Haggard, *She* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001 [1887]), p. 263.
41 Tyrus Miller's, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) consolidated and expanded a range of references to late modernism from the debates over modernism and postmodernism in the 1980s and early 1990s. His book develops a typology of late modernist style best represented by figures like Wyndham Lewis, Djuna Barnes, early Samuel Beckett, and Mina Loy. Jed Esty's, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and Marina Mackay's, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) take their cue from Miller, but historicize late modernist form in the contexts of imperial decline and World War II, respectively. Although none of these books pays heavy attention to Bowen's fiction, her work surely addresses problems of style, waning imperial power, and total war in ways that complement these arguments and, to be sure, offers other ways to think about late modernist form and history.
42 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 305.