

CHAPTER - II

FROM TENDERNESS TO TRAUMA : THE FIRST STORIES,  
THE TWENTIES AND THE THIRTIES

## CHAPTER - II

This Chapter seeks to explore some of the major thematic implications as they are reflected in the pre-war stories of Elizabeth Bowen which belong to the twenties and the thirties of this century. This is necessary for a proper critical appraisal of her war stories which constitute the major focus of the present dissertation.

The early stories analysed in the first section of this Chapter are 'The Daffodils', 'The Evil That Men Do', 'Breakfast', 'Requiescat', 'Coming Home' and 'The Shadowy Third'.

Bowen wrote her first stories when she was twenty. They are a mixture of comedy of manners, the uncanny and acutely portrayed emotional instants. They do not rely on any specific form for their subjects, but rather follow the tone of stories she most remembered reading. Certain themes emerge, however, which set the tone for the rest of her writing career.

'Daffodils' is the story of a schoolmistress who invites some of her pupils who are passing by her window, to entertainment at her lonely lodgings. We are at once established in the schoolgirls' world: They have other things to do and their own life to lead. Their schoolmistress, Miss Murcheson, is no more than a curiosity to them. She offers them Daffodils which they refuse to

accept.

"Not your daffodils, Miss Murcheson" they chant in unison. This is the ultimate rejection of the teacher, the daffodils -- symbolic of the old values she cherishes and the authority she represents. The teacher wondered if any of her class could "weep for the departure of a daffodil". This portrays what she feels the daffodils represent. The new generation of her students feel.

"Its cruel, isn't it, to lie in wait for you  
like this and pull you in and lecture you about  
what you don't feel about daffodils".

This utterance takes us to the heart of the matter -- the dicotomy between two generations, the conventional as opposed to the modern, the teacher and the taught, the sensitive as opposed to the hard materialist.

The pathos is evident even in the physical descriptions. Despite the season of spring there is no feeling of being on the threshold of a new phase. The description of "The day's dinner" which still "hung dark and heavy" and "a sudden desolation in the emptiness of the house" testify to this. Later, when the teacher muses "I can't correct my essays in the dark", she is emphasizing her lack-lustre existence. It is also clearly stated that there was little light in the corners of the room. This is how Bowen creates a visual world to correlate to the loneliness of a woman living in time but out of tune with it.

It is ironical that she feels she can make her students believe anything. Reality is quite the contrary. One of her students actually condemns the essay set by the teacher on the subject of "Daffodils" as a beastly subject. The other students pronounce Miss Murcheson as a person who has "never really lived". This satirical statement is not lost on the reader who can perceive that the students will probably never live a full life, inculcating age-old values, like their teacher has done. Their life will remain both shallow and false, valuing only material things.

'The Evil That Men Do' is a story which has a climax in its exposition, and ends with a bold statement of fact. Both are linked together in a tension that is dramatic.

The opening paragraph tells us of a little man who was run over by a motor lorry. There is no sentimental pronouncement of this death. In fact, the statement "what was left of him" is almost callous in its utterance. The narrative unfolds and we see a lady who has received a letter in an "unfamiliar" writing. She is not averse to receiving it as it was so exactly what she had been expecting for the last four days. The sender's name is 'Charles'. The letter is blatantly flattering; the writer insinuates that the lady's husband and children are superfluous to her happiness.

Apparently, the addressee and addressor of the

letter have met at a poetry reading session.

Every word in the letter brings joy to the lady. She begins to live in a make believe world where she relegates her husband to work-a-day world status and promotes Charles as the man of her dreams. She wonders if he is in possession of a wife!

Her husband, a stolid, decent solicitor, is away in London and when he comes home he finds his wife out. She is, in fact, walking down the High Street, abstractedly, for in her reverie, she has forgotten to carry her purse and shopping basket. Before leaving the house, she wonders if her husband would bring her anything from London. When she returns home, she is peeved because Harold, her husband, has brought her nothing. Petulantly, she complains of her daily routine of household chores. Harold, a patient man, retorts only mildly.

She seats herself at her writing table and begins to dwell on her beauty. She is vain and narcissistic. She recalls the main incident of the story -- the unexpected meeting of two strangers in a bus, the intimacy that ensued between them and how they got onto another bus together, as if they could not have enough of each other's company. A reference is made to Browning's "The Last Ride Together", when they (the lovers) "Ride, ride together forever ride". (Ironically, this turns out to be their last ride also.)

She re-reads the letter and thinks of all the things she has never done with her husband. She feels it would shake her husband out of his complacency if she were to have an affair with this stranger she met and who has corresponded with her. Then a thought enters her shallow mind, "Harold must never know" about this secret assignation. Her fickleness is displayed when she reverts the next minute to thinking, "what would be the good of anything without Harold for an audience". She does not pause to think of how hurt he would be by her infidelity.

At this juncture her husband enters the room with a beautiful silver grey handbag with a clasp of real gold -- a gift he had brought for his wife from London but had forgotten it in the office by mistake. The purse contains a gold case also. The lady's mood swiftly changes to one of elation. She is ecstatic. Her previous regret over her dreamy existence recedes into the back of her memory. All at once her husband is 'wonderful'. All is well between them again. The previous discord is forgotten. He ever asks if he should post her letter. She asks him to wait as she has to write a postscript to her letter. She ends her letter thus: "P.P.S. You must not think I do not love my husband. There are moments when he touches very closely my exterior life".

The letter is posted. She wonders how Charles would react to the postscript. The end is ironical and dramatic. It is Charles who has perished in the road accident which took place in the story's exposition. So he

"never knew that fate had spared him" the contents of her letter.

The story takes us to the core of human relations -- the frivolous woman who wants her sport and at the same time does not wish to forfeit the shelter and security of a husband's protection. She is happy with her husband only when she sees his valuable gift. The Charles of the letter has tried to elevate her to a position of a sensitive, thinking being, dissatisfied with her limited existence. The truth is the reverse. She is vain and shallow and is charmed by a man whom she encounters for just "an hour and ten minutes". She is not a woman who cannot communicate with her husband and is deeply disturbed by this. She indulges in a sort of romance.

However, on further examination it appears that Bowen is satirical about the kind of marriage the lady has. One person suffers and makes a compromise, the other selfishly takes what she can from it. Charles is also a hollow man who indulges the lady for his own amusement. Unlike Huxley's serious work on human communication in his novel "Point Counter Point" where he states that "parallel lines are lines that do not meet", here the lady happily leads a dual existence.

The title "The Evil That Men Do" from Shakespeare is suggestive that Charles's mischief or flattery is as 'evil' as her husband's pampering. She admits that she

'likes' her husband and therefore there is no serious threat to the lady's mental equilibrium. Her hypocrisy further surfaces when she reveals that "she hadn't even understood the poetry" at the poetry reading session. To her, poetry symbolizes 'romance' and 'high thinking'. Yet it is the novel from the local library that holds her interest. Though relegated to the 'bottom drawer' it has top priority for her.

She displays shades of Flaubert's "Emma" in her desire to escape from dull country life to London, which epitomizes the exciting world.

"Breakfast" is a tale giving an account of lodgers in London, meeting at breakfast before journeying into their work place by the morning trains. There is no action. In exposing the persons of each lodger, Bowen has captured different moods and temperaments and the inevitable problems of co-existence.

"Requiescat", literally means to wish for a dead man's repose. A triangular relationship seems to exist between the Late Howard Majendie, his widow and Stuart. The scene is the Majendie Villa in Italy, three months after Howard's demise. His widow is awaiting Stuart's arrival in response to her letter appealing for his help in attending to her late husband's affairs.

Their meeting is portrayed poignantly, in the beautiful garden of the villa. They speak haltingly at first



-- the sum of memories lying between them, making easy communication stilted. The 'unspoken' speaks volumes. Her marriage to Howard and how his happiness had been "everything to her", whilst Stuart was "a person who did not matter, the nice friend", relegated to the status of "the family dog?" Why then had she called him now? She further startles him by calling him 'David' (she had called him this) and asks for his forgiveness. When she asks why he had not visited them oftener in Howard's lifetime, he replied "a third is never really wanted. I had set my heart on seeing Howard happy and when I had, I went away to think about it".<sup>2</sup>

Her present stance puzzles him -- her desire for his forgiveness inexplicable. Perhaps he had a special place in her heart after all.

His feelings for her had been pent up for so long, yet he does not express them. He decides to leave her "to live out her days in the immunity of finished grief". In the unusual usage "finished grief" we may find an insight into the widow's feelings. Her grief could scarcely be deep if it was 'finished'. Ironically, the grief she will experience when Stuart leaves her (as his love has turned to bitterness within) may not 'finish'. This is ironical, as Stuart's "dead loyalty" qualifies the kind of 'loyalty' he now feels. Yet, when Howard was alive the friendship between the men had been 'unassailable'. He had even gone to India to be out

of the married couple's way.

He promises Ellaline that "I won't go until I have finished everything that I can do for you".

It is only when he leaves with a promise to return next morning to attend to routine paperwork that her true feelings threaten to surface and almost give way. She stands with her back towards him, leaning against a pillar-- looking out across the lake. She is desperately keeping a tight rein on her emotions. She grips in handfuls "the branches of the climbing rose" -- whose thorns run deep into her hands -- wounding her physically. The thorns in her hands cause them to bleed -- symbolizing her bleeding heart. She is conscious of what she is losing, yet she does not call him back. She longs intensely for Stuart and he too, despite his bitterness, nurtures the hope that she may call him back to assuage her loneliness. Both of them could have taken a step forward towards each other in harmony. Instead, the branches of the roses shake and more white petals come fluttering down, as if to shower Howard's grave.

They have chosen to forsake one another. They decide to bury their feelings in Howard's grave, as it were, inadvertently giving his soul the "requiescat" it deserved. 'Coming Home' in Elizabeth Bowen's own words was purely 'transposed autobiography'. Rosalind's burning desire to be appreciated for her good essay (written at school) by her mother "Darlingest" has a pathos which echoes Elizabeth's

seeking Florence Bowen after the finality of her death. On coming home, the child Rosalind does not find her mother. This gives a death blow to her sense of security and her imagination runs riot, thinking of all the things that could have befallen her. When Darlingest eventually comes home, it is an anti-climax for the child. The pleasure and excitement of reading out her essay to her for her approbation has abated. She has, in the meantime, experienced a series of charged emotions and childishly decides to hurt her mother for being the cause of her discomfiture. She decides not to tell her about her essay at all. The confused girl's mental agony is sketched with pathos. Her lovable, absent-minded mother (a true portrait of Florence Bowen) does not know and cannot conceive of what had transpired in the child's mind in her absence. In this story the mother is temporarily absent. In reality, when the story was written, the 'remembered grief' of her mother's death enters the inner recesses of Rosalind's mind, resulting in producing a narrative charged with emotion. It is this autobiographical element that makes the story special and therefore special note has been taken of it.

In 'Mrs Windermere' the relationship between older and younger women suggests the tensions that Bowen was to explore in many of her later works. In this story we are shown the powerful influence exerted on a young girl by an older, more experienced woman. She takes over her life and Esmee, the younger one, does not protest. Under the guise of

being a mother to her, she insists on accompanying her wherever she goes. She does exactly what she wants and imposes herself on Esmee by insisting on going to stay with her, regardless of any inconvenience she may be causing her. She takes Esmee totally under her wing for her own benefit. She succeeds in getting exactly what she wants from the younger girl, who only protests mildly. This relationship between the experienced and the innocent sets the tone for later Bowen works on the same theme.

'The Shadowy Third' deals with Martin and his second wife who are happily awaiting the arrival of their baby. They enjoy a close relationship. Yet the presence of the first wife who had died in childbirth is always there like a 'Shadowy Third' in the house. This disturbs the serenity and happiness of the second wife. They try to dispel this gloom but the presence is like a live presence.

This ghostly atmosphere created by Bowen is a forerunner of what appears in her later works. The uncanny feeling that someone is watching over the living is a part of the atmosphere she creates in her stories. Here, the presence of the 'third' is still in its elementary stage. Her later works reveal the violence of feelings against such a presence.

In her 'First Stories' Bowen does not rely on any specific subject. Her themes are divergent setting a pattern for her future career. Most of her stories have swift shots,

moments of suggestion and swiftly implied gestures.

Bowen herself advanced the idea that the short story in its use of action is nearer to the drama than to the novel. Her early stories exhibit the origin of future Bowenesque creations.

Bowen herself felt that her early stories had "a striking visual clarity". She said that she would "posit a situation and then explore it".

## II

### The Twenties

In the section on 'The Twenties' Bowen's stories have titles as varied as 'Anne Lee's'; 'The Parrot'; 'The Visitor'; 'The Contessina'; 'Human Habitation'; 'The Secession'; 'Making Arrangements'; 'The Storm'; 'Charity'; 'The Back Drawing-Room'; 'Joining Charles'; 'The Jungle'; 'Shose : An International Episode'; 'The Dancing-Mistress'; 'Aunt Tatty'; 'Dead Mabelle'; 'The Working Party'; 'Foothold'; 'The Cassowary'; 'Telling' and 'Mrs. Moysey'.

Due to paucity of space and the scope of this dissertation, only the following major stories have been analysed.

'Ann Lee's' :

Anne Lee's -- Hats, a Milliner's shop and residence of Ann Lee lay in the more silent South-West London. She is known for the originality and good quality of her hats. Her

clientele include Miss Ames, who has now brought Mrs Dick Logan with her. A detailed description of the shop creates a physical atmosphere of warmth, emanating from the electric fire, but its odd silence is sinister. The proprietress too, has a quiet, indifferent air, despite her serene face and priestess like demeanour.

The ladies begin to inspect the hats, whilst Ann Lee gave them the benefit of her expert advice on what would suit them. Suddenly, the outer door of the shop opens and a man "timid and aggressive" blatantly comes in and addresses Ann Lee. The man is reprimanded by the ladies who feel the draught of cold air which his entry through the outer door has brought in. The intrusion of a male among them annoys the customers, who are busy in the personalized task of selecting appropriate hats. This encroachment on their privacy is not appreciated at all.

The man, however, insists on waiting, despite the least encouragement from Ann Lee. She addresses him as "Mr Richardson" and says he has been mistaken about his appointment date and time. But his persistence is reiterated in "I'm not going away today". He seems to be waiting for Ann Lee for some imperative reason.

The ladies finish their shopping and leave the premises in quest of a taxi. The man, in the meantime, goes into the further recesses of the shop. He obviously is on intimate terms with Ann Lee. He is determined to 'resolve'

whatever he has come for.

The climactic end is swift as a cinema shot. Mrs Logan and Miss Ames, standing on the kerbstone, hear "rapid steps approaching them, metallic on the pavement, in little uneven spurts of speed. "Somebody, half blinded by the fog, in flight from somebody else".<sup>3</sup>

The same man in the shop is running blindly past them -- his breath "sobbed and panted". It was by his breath that they knew "how terrible it had been -- terrible". He rushes on into the fog in that same charged manner.

What could be the meaning of this? This violent end could be a final, complete break in communication between Ann Lee and the man, for reasons unrevealed to the reader. The effect it has had on the man is devasfating. The word 'terrible' describes this. Some violence in action or speech has occured. The outcome of the meeting has obviously 'snapped' something inside the man irrevocably. The words "somebody, in flight from somebody else" suggests that Ann has either physically assaulted him or degraded him in some way -- destroying him mentally. This is left to the reader's interpretation.

Bowen has projected the man's feelings very aptly in an economy of words and action, forcefully imprinting an indelible mark on the reader's mind regarding the finality of the breakdown in the relationship for whatever it had been worth.

'Joining Charles' is the story of a young woman visiting her husband's family. She is leaving their home where she has been smothered in the love of her husband's mother and sisters. She worries that their nurturing love is overtaking her attachment to her husband. They are over-solicitous of her every comfort. She is the wife of a competent banker and is going to join him at Lyons. In her mother-in-law's home, her husband Charles is the centre of their universe --he almost has a halo around his head -- and she too is cossetted as his "dear Louise". "The son and brother " dominate" the "white house" where the family live. They can hardly wait for the day Charles and Louise would have babies. It would make their cup of joy overflow.

The story deals with the day of the departure of young Mrs Charles to join her husband. She has mixed feelings on leaving these people and rejoining her virile, generous husband who loves her. The descriptive passages go into every detail of her departure -- the breakfast prepared for her so lovingly, the concern of her mother-in-law Mrs Ray over her travelling clothes and comfort -- the sisters-in-law fussing over her to the last detail. Louise is overwhelmed. She almost does not want to leave. She almost blurts out "I can't go on. I don't love my husband. Its<sup>4</sup> death to be with him". She is besieged with doubts about Charles because she is reluctant to leave the stable, parental home. Her stance makes her mother-in-law wonder if anything is the matter. In fact, she eventually asks her



with understanding tenderness that she could always rely on her support "if things should be difficult with Charles". The anti-climax of the story comes when Louise, kissing her mother-in-law goodbye says she knows she can count on her support and affection always, "But there isn't really, mother, anything to tell".

Bowen has effectively kept the reader's interest sustained till and end. The point of view of Charles' wife is very effectively used for the narration. The interaction between the ladies is powerfully portrayed. It is on Louise's second visit that she began to be really accepted by the family. "The White House opened its arms to her and she began to be carried away by this fullness, this intimacy and queer seclusion of family life"<sup>5</sup>. She is now an integral part of the family and will be more firmly ensconced in it when she adds to the family tree.

During the story we get a doubt about whether Louise really cares for her husband, but in the end when she confesses to her mother-in-law that there is nothing 'to tell', we realise that her doubts were the result of the overwhelming and clinging love of the family members, making her regret going away to join Charles.

'Shoes : An International Episode' is an amusing account of the travels of a young married couple, Dillie and Edward. They are holidaying in a French Hotel, enjoying the novelty of it all.

During her stay there, her shoes, which had been taken by the hotel staff for routine cleaning, get mixed up with some other lady's shoes. So the wrong pair of shoes are delivered to her. What ensues is the long process of retrieving the misplaced shoes, humorously told. This couple is travelling a great deal, wishing to imbibe new cultures -- the woman wishes to identify with the French. They consider themselves intellectual and are even interested in each others shortcoming -- like 'tempers' and 'moods'. The husband is besotted by his 'Dillie'. Their discussions range from wines to sex, to the Latin attitudes. They are shallow people, and the man seems to be quite enamored of her, accepting all her childish behaviour of throwing the shoes out of the window, when they were eventually found. Her "brogues" which were exchanged with someone else's shoes, probably had a few adventures on someone else's feet!

Through this 'episode' -- called 'International', because the couple think they are encompassing knowledge of all the places in their world, is the underlying adage that you cannot put yourself in somebody else's shoes. It is better to be true to your own self, your own identity, your own convictions. If you try to acquire a veneer of sophistication through travel, without imbibing intrinsic values, the facade will soon fall -- and the truth will be revealed.

The story ends with both of them in amity, made for each other in their matching 'insufficiencies'.

This is Bowen's social comedy on the subject of matrimony, communication and hypocrisy.

'Telling' is a weird story of action, intensity, pathos and irony in its subject matter. Young Terry, back from Ceylon, is emotionally unsound and unsure of himself. He has always been "depreciated" by his family. He was no good. The younger ones laughed at him till they, like their brothers and sisters, grew up and were schooled into bitter kindness.

There is obviously something wrong with Terry. He is abnormal. With his low confidence level, he wishes to prove that he can "do" something.

The something turns out to be the brutal killing of Josephine in the chapel, where people came courting, after last night's party held at the house. Now there is no one there and Terry is justifying to himself the deed which he has performed with an African knife from the dining room cupboard.

Terry was obsessed with Josephine, but obviously Josephine, a family friend, was only humouring him. Terry had revealed to her the "spark" in him which he felt for her, and which made him feel like "a man". Unfeelingly, Josephine had laughed at him. Her laughter had pierced his inner recesses and this had been the last straw on his back. He finished her off!

Terry goes back to the house and sees his sister Catherine and Beatrice, Josephine's friend. Beatrice had been in the same chapel the night before with a man. Terry had seen her. He now asks her not to go to the Chapel. But no one imagines why he is saying this. When Terry's elder brother John appears, Terry follows him up the stairs, saying "I killed Josephine in the Chapel". But John only placates him by saying "Oh Yes!" He does not believe him. Terry finds that no one believes him. To him, this is the final blow to his ego. He then confronts his father and says he has come to discuss his future with him. The father gently says "you really have got a future?" This reveals that Terry is not normal and his family is only treating him kindly but without understanding his dilemma of wanting acceptance at any cost.

He begins 'telling' his father about the African knife and is going to tell him about Josephine -- when he suddenly finds that he has not got the knife! Probably he has lost it, or misplaced it, after wiping the blood off it. Now he has no evidence to substantiate his claim. His support was all gone; he was terrified now. "I've lost it" he quavered. "I've lost it". The father is perplexed. He cannot understand what Terry is trying to "tell" him. Weeping and shaking, Terry breaks down, saying "Nothing, nothing, nothing".

This is a deeply psychological study of a young man, who feels inadequate and smarts at the treatment he

receives from everyone including his own family members. They obviously know that there is something wrong with him, for they always try to hide the fact of their "knowing he didn't know".

With Josephine, Terry probably felt on a kind of wavelength. She, somehow, made him feel like a whole normal man. But when she laughed he realized that she had been pretending. She did not really reciprocate his tender feelings. To Terry, who is so unsure of himself, this is the final assault on his manhood, his confidence level, his belief in himself. So he 'killed' her with the African knife. He is proud of his achievement. This is something no one can do. He tries to tell this to everyone but no one takes him seriously. So he goes to his father, wanting to give him evidence of his deed. The anti-climax is that the weapon is not in his possession. Is it lost? This was his greatest support. How would anyone believe him now? He breaks down, telling his father that, after all, he has "nothing" to tell him.

Little does he know that his brother John had, the day after Terry's return from Ceylon, locked the sideboard cupboard in the dining room. So there was no question of Terry taking the African knife.

John had anticipated danger from keeping such a weapon within Terry's reach. So he has kept it safely away. The terrible crime is therefore a figment of Terry's lurid

imagination. He wanted it to happen. He is a psychiatric case and therefore equates the murder of Josephine to a great manly deed -- a matter of vital importance -- a means of establishing his manhood by this execution.

It is a "tale told by an idiot, full of Sound and Fury" -- "signifying nothing".<sup>6</sup>

'The Parrot' is the tale of a parrot belonging to Mrs Willesden -- not a parrot brought home from the Indian seas -- but at an auction. It had no pedigree and could mutter "Poll-Po-oll-pol-pol-pol" for hours. Mrs Willesden loved the parrot. It occupied a pride of place in her home. She would sit beside it for hours in the afternoon. At mealtimes it was carried into the dining room, its cage placed beside her at the head of the table in a butler's tray.

Her sentiments were not shared by Maud Pemberty the parloumaid and Eleanor Fitch, the companion, who in fact hated the parrot.

Whilst Eleanor was cleaning the cage, Maud left the window open and the parrot escaped!

Knowing what the consequences would be if her mistress discovered the parrot's flight, set Eleanor into instant activity. However, the parrot leads her a proper dance, ambling through the air. She decides that eventually the parrot would come to earth at their neighbours.

However, it finally reaches the Lennicott's garden. This place, apparently is forbidden territory, as the Lennicotts were socially unacceptable to her mistress Mrs Willesden. There seems to be unsavoury gossip regarding the moral values of the Lennicotts. Though they were not rowdy whilst entertaining, they were not accepted. They had come from London to stay, perhaps in the hope of making nice friends. However, they are not welcomed by the locals. With this background, Eleanor did not know what to do when the parrot disobligingly perched itself on the end of a pergola where Mrs Lennicott sat reading a book of poetry, sitting on a deck chair, smoking a cigarette in a long holder. When she spies Eleanor she smilingly invites her to come in, thinking she has thrown a tennis ball into her garden. When she hears of the parrot, she is amused and asks Eleanor to come over the wall to take the parrot.

As she enters the Lennicott's garden nervously (as she is in territory forbidden by her mistress to trespass) the parrot, as if entranced by Mrs Lennicott, soars away into the air. He then settles himself on the ridge of the roof between two chimney-pots. The exasperated Eleanor has to accept Mrs Lennicotts invitation to get on to the roof from the window of her husband's room. When she realises that she is actually in the Lennicott's home she experiences an anticipation as to what she would see inside. She meets Mr Lennicott and is surprised at his quizzical Spanish face. Between the three of them, they plan a strategy to catch the

elusive parrot.

During the process of retrieving the parrot, Eleanor actually sees the man's bedroom, reeking of his masculinity. She is really tasting of forbidden fruit! She is in a place where she could never have come to otherwise.

Eventually she is helped onto the roof by Mr Lennicott. The parrot comes sidling down the roof towards them and sits besides Eleanor 'a sadder' bird after its adventures. Apparently the other birds had pecked at the parrot as was obvious from its dishevelled feathers. "Poor beasta", said Mr Lennicott. "I believe you know the other birds have been nasty to it. They don't like anything a different colour from themselves; no one ever does you know, it's damned funny".<sup>7</sup>

Inadvertently, Mr Lennicott, who has tasted of social ostracism, has uttered words of wisdom, applicable to society and its discrimination against some of its members. Anyone who is "a different colour", in other words, does not conform to the pattern created as 'socially acceptable', is a social outcaste. This is the crux of social intercourse.

With the Lennicott's co-operation, Mrs Fitch has retrieved the tiresome parrot who is her mistress's obsession. As soon as the parrot is in the bandbox, safe and secure, Eleanor wishes to leave and be home in time to carry up the parrot with the breakfast tray into Mrs Willesden's room. She refuses the Lennicott's offer of refreshment. The



socially 'out of bounds' world of the Lennicotts had overlapped with Eleanor's for a brief while, but they could never become one. The barrier between them is insurmountable.

When Eleanor returns home, she tells her mistress that the parrot had got out of its cage, but that she had caught him and brought him back. She takes all the credit for the deed rather than even mention the Lennicotts. Ironically, her mistress says she is relieved to hear this and know that she is not obliged to any stranger for its safe return. Little does she know what the truth.

The parrot's flight from home is symbolic of Eleanor's temporary escape into a strange new world where she tastes freedom. Yet she knows, like the parrot, that she will have to return to her own cage. Despite knowing that people like the Lennicott's have been unfairly labelled as 'outcastes', she cannot openly rise to their defence and call them warm and friendly. Society will not accept anyone who does not conform to its norms.

In 'Making Arrangements' Bowen has dealt with the subject of divorce in a novel manner. In Charity, she establishes what home life means to a child who is homesick. In The Visitor she gives a superb account of a boy being entertained by friends while his mother is dying; her handling of an adolescent's feelings in such a situation is totally satisfying.

Bowen's men seem to comply with the wishes of

their women quietly. Almost always, the women are projected in their new image -- intellectual, daring -- stepping out of their previous confines. The men are also inclined to buy matrimonial peace.

Bowen's children are desolate and self-conscious. She bends back into the past to her own childhood. This is how she is able to faithfully portray a child's intense feelings. Her own childhood did not give her emotional stability.

In the stories of the twenties, just as the new woman emerges, the plight of troubled adolescents, disappointing fathers and important mother images also emerge.

Hotels and foreign places begin to assume an important significance. Awkwardness, insecurity, maladjustment and isolation in family terms begin to occur.

### III

#### The Thirties :

A variety of titles greet Elizabeth Bowen's stories of the thirties, varied, odd and sometimes queer.

1. 'The Tommy Crans'.
2. 'The Good Girl'.
3. 'The Cat Jumps'.
4. 'The Disinherited'.
5. 'Maria'

6. 'Her Table Spread'.
7. 'The Little Girl's Room'.
8. 'Firelight in the Flat'.
9. 'The Man of the Family'.
10. 'The Needlecase'.
11. 'The Apple Tree'.
12. 'Reduced'.
13. 'Tears, Idle Tears'.
14. 'A Walk in the Woods'.
15. 'A Love Story 1939'.
16. 'Look At All Those Roses'.
17. 'Attractive Modern Homes'.
18. 'The Easter Egg Party'.
19. 'Love'.
20. 'No 16'.
21. 'A Queer Heart'.
22. 'The Girl With the Stoop'.

Of these, the following six stories have been chosen for detailed critical analysis.

'The Tommy Crans' is an Irish story set in Dublin. The Tommy Crans are bold adventurers. They are always living beyond their means, travelling around a great deal, giving lavish parties and making much of their adopted daughter Nancy. To them, Nancy is another means of contributing to their livelihood. As a child she used to "dance for charity". Whose charity, is the question posed by Bowen. They are in no way conventional, or patterned in their living style.

Into Nancy's childhood enters the podgy eight year old Herbert, who has just lost his father. Herbert "fancies Nancy" but she only uses his as a means to escape the "boisterous grown up society". Herbert at eight, fat and bespectacled, was a contrast to the angelically beautiful Nancy, aged nine, with lovely ringlets. Nancy lives with the Tommy Crans, in a house with a lake, across Dublin. Herbert went to school and when he was thirteen, he met Nancy again at a dancing party given by the Crans. A week later he receives a letter from Nancy, asking him to join her for tea at Mitchell's.

When they meet she seems distracted. She gives him the news that "The Tommy Crans had lost all their money". So she goes with him from jeweller to jeweller, to sell her wrist watch, but in vain. At last, a man on the quays gives her "eight and six" for it. Herbert, in the meanwhile, has spent his precious pocket money on their cab! This does not seem to bother Nancy, who takes everything Herbert does for her as her due. This she has learnt by living with the Crans.

Just then Tommy Cran runs joyfully to say that he has raised some money. So he sells the house with the lake and they move to an ornamental castle by Dublin Bay. In this house, at the age of twenty (Nancy was twenty-one) Herbert proposes marriage to Nancy. She, however, refuses even though "they kissed seriously and searchingly".

Nancy and Mrs Crans are now off 'to the Riviera'. In spite of their ever-wavering finances, Tommy Crans wishes them to be elegantly dressed, so they go shopping. They also have "that last party to give before leaving home", then yet to another party at the "Euston Hotel". Despite their finances being precarious they are incorrigible in their habits which incur expenditure.

Nancy tells Herbert, when she refuses his proposal, that she could never leave them as "They're my business". Though they are not her real parents, she adds, bitterly "They would be my affair whoever I was. Don't you see, they're like that."

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When the Tommy Crans return from the Riviera, they are totally ruined financially. They then turn totally to Nancy for help for they had "the highest opinion of Nancy". Just to show them, she accepts the marriage proposal of Jeremy Neath and his 'thousands'. The world saw the Tommy Crans and their daughter as 'lucky'. To the ever faithful Herbert, she explains nothing. Rather, she expects him to understand her commitment to the Crans.

Nancy later comes to fetch her parents to England where her husband has found a small appointment for Tommy. But the adventurer does not want to do a day's honest work. He is nothing but an inveterate gambler, a trickster. Tommy rigs up a scheme where you wrote to a hundred people and put in half a Crown. He even asks Herbert to join in the scheme.

Nancy and Herbert meet on the terrace after dark. She is ill and tired as she is going to have a baby. He finally asks her why she never married him. Her answer is ambiguous. She says "we could never have loved each other and we shall always love each other. We are related"<sup>9</sup>.

For Herbert, this is the last straw. He storms at her, as if with a 'sword', saying he would have done anything and everything for her, but she did not let him do anything. He adds "you hold back everything from me and expect me to understand. Why should I understand?"<sup>10</sup>

When she looks to face the window, her face is tender but "not for him". It is for the Tommy Crans, who are talking about the child to be born, who will again make a fortune in this world like the mother has done, and continue to contribute to their welfare.

The crux of the story is in the last sentence "The Tommy Cran would go on for ever and be continued; their seed should never fail"<sup>11</sup>.

What a heart rending account Bowen has given us of human relations. The Tommy Crans are people of doubtful character - adventurers -- they live for the moment - hand to mouth-dangerously and selfishly, involving their adopted daughter in their schemes. To them, she is the prop of their old age. Once they are unable to look after themselves, she will take over as will their "grandchild" eventually. It is for this that she had been adopted. She has been brought up

to believe that she is beholden to them for her very existence. They have, from childhood, stifled her emotions and every natural instinct. Her responses are now schooled to meet their every demand.

As a child, she dances for charity- as a young woman she gives up the genuine love of Herbert, deadens her natural motherly instincts and marries a man who will provide for her and "The Tommy Crans". The image of the doll stitched upright into its box, pitching forward only when the string is cut at the back is very aptly conceived vis-a-vis Nancy. She is at the beck and call of the Crans. They cut the string that binds her to her box and pitch her forward at will.

Another interesting aspect of Bowen's creative achievement is seen here - a preoccupation with the relationship between the individual and his environment. Nancy is the product of the environment the Crans have put her into. She has become selfish as a result of this. She 'uses' Herbert for her own purpose whenever she wants to and expects him to understand her unquestioningly.

The very title "The Tommy Crans" indicates that they are a type of people. The last sentence 'The Tommy Crans would go on forever' indicates that Bowen has not invested them with individualistic traits. She has 'type cast' them and is telling her readers how such thick skinned people bounce back from any kind of adversity, as they are

willing to stake everying they possess.

'The Cat Jumps' is one of Elizabeth Bowen's popular stories. Here she explores the terror created by the atmosphere enveloping a house in which a murder has taken place. Her evocation of terror in the atmosphere is effectively created. 'Rose Hill' is the location of the Bentley murder which had taken place two years before. Newspaper headlines had flashed 'The Rose Hill Horror'. Harold Bentley had murdered his wife and been hanged for his sins. So, after the execution, the Bentley legatees place the house for sale. Most people reject the house on grounds of 'dreadful associations'. The Harold Wrights are not deterred as they have no complexes, or inhibitions and even explain everything to their children. Rose Hill, up to date and convenient was delightfully situated over the Thames Valley, within easy reach of a golf course. It suited the Wrights who wanted a week end house. Harold Wright even managed to get the agent to reduce the price due to "that unfortunate affair of the murder". Otherwise they paid no heed to the Bentleys.

As they set about renovating the house, they find the stamp of the previous owners almost indelible. Descriptions like "their bedroom mantelpiece stained by the late Mrs. Bentley's cosmetics had to be scrubbed with chemicals"<sup>12</sup> create an atmosphere of impending doom. Another suggestive description is of "the house's having been so long shut up" and a smell of "unsavoury habitation" that



pervades.

After renovation, the Wrights instal themselves and the children, to coincide with their first week end party.

Bowens descriptions of the "full moon pendent over the river and the blanched lawns" powerfully create an atmosphere commensurate to the rest of the tale. Their children are Jane, Jacob and Janet. Their house guests include Muriel Baker, Mr. Edward Cartaret, Theodore Smith and Sara and Talbot Monkhouse.

Next morning was overcast: in the afternoon it rained, suddenly and heavily. An early dusk set in. The party, gathered in the library hear "a howl, a scuffle, a thin shriek" emanating from the hall. This has an eerie effect on the assembled company till they realise it is only Jane and Jacob "biting each other with uninhibited passion".

Meanwhile, the guests draw into 'a tight knot' discussing "Crime Passionel". Muriel is speaking to them of the Bentley murder and their host cuts across their conversation, abruptly suggesting "let's leave that family alone, shall we?" Strained relations result. Muriel goes alone for a walk in the rain, though not before telling Mrs. Monkhouse "she could not stand Edward Cataret. He seemed so cold blooded cruel".

The Monkhouses quarrel bitterly. Mrs. Jackson, who runs the house, locks herself in her room. Around the table, their "wax faces seem for one "fatal instant exposed to a furnace". Somehow the atmosphere makes them behave peculiarly. All their intellectual discussions seem to lose its charm. At the far end of the library, Mrs. Monkhouse and Miss Barker sit together.

As Muriel proceeds to narrate gory details of the Bentley Murder, such as how one of Mrs. Bentley's hands were found "in the library" whilst her fingers were "in the dining room", everyone wonders how she knows so much about the Bentleys "as if they had been er relatives". She then proceeds with details of how Bentley had sent everyone away except one maid- so that the maid was imprisoned within the house, until she dramatically broke a window pane and got through. The lights were on all over the house. As she ran down, the garden she saw Harold Bentley moving about in the bathroom. In sheer fright she fell right over the edge of a terrace.

Muriel's strange obsession with the murder makes her almost insane, making Sara say "Muriel, you ought to see a specialist". She also asks Muriel why she had come on this visit at all. Muriel replies "I thought I might like it. I thought I ought to fulfil myself. I'd never had any experience of these things"<sup>13</sup>. She proceeds to tell everyone how she had wanted to meet Edward since people had said that they were "made for each other". "Now, of course, I shall

never marry. Look what comes of it", she says. She even addresses her married counterparts, saying, "How can you be shut up all right with a man all alone - I don't know how you dare sleep".<sup>14</sup>

She further elaborates about Edward "He is utterly pathological. He's got instruments in his room, in that black bag".

At this point Jocelyn, the hostess, decides that she has had enough of this unsavoury conversation and prepares to go to bed. There was a silence within the house "a solid silence, silence as heavy as flesh". As Jocelyn drops her wrap to the floor, a draught comes in under her bathroom door. She sees her reflection in the mirror-- a "strained, pale woman". This image of her is alien to her true self. The effect of Muriel's narration has taken toll of her nerves and her spirit seems to be "dismembered in agony" -- She was being claimed by a "violent death" of the spirit and "ultimately was to be given up to terror".

Undressing, she is shocked by her "reflected movements" in the glass and therefore flings a towel over the glass, in a desperate attempt to block what she sees. She hears the bolts on the doors being locked from the outside. The clock struck two. Harold moved in softly; quietly whistling in the bath.

Her distraught frame of mind makes her jump to conclusions. Her husband must have hated her always, wanted

this house to perform the same deeds done by the previous owner, in the same manner. She thinks he is lying in wait for her, so she attempts to leap from the bed to the door -- but "her door has been locked from the outside". 'Harold' she said to the silence - the door opened on Harold. He seemed to her to 'don' the mantle of Harold Bentley before murdering his wife Lucinda. She went down heavily. Harold Wright was 'appalled' as Jocely had never fainted before. He shook her, fanned her and applied restoratives. He called out to Sara and went from 'each to each' of the locked doors. There was no way out. Across the passage Sara Monkhouse keeps drumming on her locked door. Further down the passage, Edward Cartaret tries in vain to open his locked door.

The climax of the story is that Muriel had turned all the keys on the outside, as she did not know which door was Edward's. She was expecting Edward to "murder" her. She was a woman who took no chances.

In this pseudo ghost story, Bowen has built up a terrible feeling of impending doom in the hostess because of the realistic narration of the Bentley murder by the neurotic Muriel.

The title "The Cat Jumps" is aptly given, as the cat is symbolic of Jocelyn's state of mind. Just as a cat intuitively reacts to a sense of foreboding, Jocelyn reacts to every move her innocent spouse makes, because she has mentally worked herself up into a frenzy- by Muriel's

narrations. She therefore 'Jumps' to conclusions at every provocation. Muriel has a suspicious and wary nature, resulting in cat-like behaviour.

The atmosphere created by the author enhances the fears of the hostess. This atmosphere further pervades the entire household - causing them to behave in a manner alien to normalcy.

The story "The Cat Jumps" is the title story of one of Bowen's short story collections. During the course of its narration she has never allowed the readers interest to diminish. The suspense is kept at high pitch to the very end. Herein lies its success.

In 'The Disinherited' we see Bowen at her best, in her ability to place before the reader the atmospheric descriptions corresponding to the theme of the story. She writes of how in "this first phase of autumn", "the rain came" and there were drenching monotone days". "Everything rotted slowly". She then begins the main story by saying Marianne Harvey was not aware of the autumn to which her friend Davina was becoming a prey".

The story revolves around Davina Archworth, who, at twenty nine, had no money as she had run through her capital with her expensive habits. Love affairs had contributed to her moral degradation. She had therefore come to live with and 'off' her uncle's widow Mrs. Walsingham Archworth, who still looked upon herself as the patroness

of the village. Davina was adored by her aunt "a puffy, huffy formal, bewildered, charmless elderly widow".

Davina, starved for company in this small country, befriends Marinne, fifteen years younger than her husband Matthew, who had lately retired from the civil service.

Cautious, well read, tolerant, he has fathered two sons, Edwin and Luke. They have built a new home in the vicinity of the Archworths. Marinne was "house proud", "big limbed" and looked like a "diffident goddess".

Though Davina was a poor relation, she ordered the servants around, stayed in bed overtime, rang bells all day long and took the car when she chose. There was, however, one person who would not take any nonsense from her and that was Prothero, the Chauffeur who lived in the coachman's room. He had been with Mrs. Archworth for four months, "had come with a first rate character" reference, was a faultless, careful driver. Yet something about his filled his mistress with a resentful uneasiness.

Prothero could not tolerate Davina bringing the car (Daimler) back dirty. So one night she found the gates of the garage bolted against her; two days after that he had locked the garage. What occurred between the two no one knew, but Davina no longer took out the car.

One night, in early November, Prothero in reply to repeated whistling noises, came down the stairs to find

Davina at the foot of the staircase with Marianne Harvey behind her in the yard. Both wore heavy overcoats, indicating their intention to go out. Davina said to Prothero, "I want some more money". Here the operative word is 'more' showing that there is something habitual about her borrowing money from him. Curiously, Prothero complies and Davina and Marianne go off together in Marianne's coupe.

Marianne has joined Davina for an outing, as her husband is away in London; she seems to be "under a spell" where Davina is concerned and at the same time wishes she is safely at home, as she does not really approve of Davina's unconventional behaviour. She sees in Davina a means of escape, temporarily, from her humdrum existence.

Prothero's 'pound note' is soon used to fill the car with petrol. In fact Davina makes a startling statement about him. "He's lying low here. I have seen his photograph  
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sometime somewhere -- something once happened".

They drive on into a Road House where there is no one except a sleepy barman who served them beer. They wait for Davina's friends, but as the clock strikes ten, they both realise that no one has come to meet them there. So Davina phones her friend Oliver and is surprised when she finds that a message had been delivered to her at her aunts place, changing the venue of their rendezvous. They then drive on to the immense house of Lord Thingummy. The house apparently is "masterless" and the party is hosted by Oliver

in the master's absence. When Davina and Oliver had been younger, they had been in love, and "expected to marry", one day. Today he is fascinated by Marianne, who being "most beautifully shy", is a novel prey to the jaded palate of Oliver. Oliver tries to introduce her to "forbidden fruit" like whisky. This makes it exciting for her and she decides to indulge herself. The others present are a Mrs. Bennington, who takes care of the house, a stout dentist called Purdon, and another man who was Russian. The atmosphere of the party, the conversation, the promiscuous behaviour of those present, is something which Marianne has not encountered before.

Oliver is like Davina, "an enemy of society" -- disinherited by his father. He is a product of changing England -- the old order left him stranded (disinherited) and the new offered him no place. He does not want to work to earn his living and therefore imposed on his friends. He had previously catalogued country house libraries and was at present supposedly doing the same for Lord Thingummy. For this he gave Oliver twenty pounds.

During this period in England, aristocrats who were in reduced circumstances had such problems with their children. Oliver and Davina are both of this 'disinherited' species.

Lord Thingummy had probably seen through Oliver because in his absence he had taken the precaution of



locking the wine cellar and turning off the "heating" - making the house ice cold. So Purdon, the dentist, had generously bought the drinks for tonight's party.

Marianne in the meantime, is intoxicated by the intake of alcoholic beverages she is not used to. She feels lost and wishes to go home, but Oliver takes her for a walk around the house and then escorts her from room to room. He tries to seduce her, then breaks into sobs of self pity, which arouse Marianne's maternal instincts rather than sexual ones and she begins to comfort him.

During the course of the evening, Davina finds out from Miriam that she had personally gone to Davina's aunt's house and given a message to the Chauffeur informing her of the change of venue of the party.

Davina, who had got no message, wonders why Prothero had not conveyed it to her.

In the meantime, at half past ten, Mrs. Archworth's evening bridge session was over. She tells the maid that "Miss Davina is dining at Mrs. Harvey's (that is the white lie Davina has told her) and that she should bolt the doors on her return.

Over the coach house Prothero with his four lit candles, is writing furiously. It is in this missive that we come to know the truth about his disreputable past. Here Bowen has employed the age old narrative mode of a 'tale

within a tale'. It is also the interior monologue of the man. This device has made this short story fairly lengthy.

From Prothero's writings one comes to know that he is hiding his true identity. He is a man who once had an affair with a rich married woman. They had succeeded in tricking the husband, leasing a bungalow in fake name and carrying on an illicit liason there. He is a motor salesman who is ekeing out a living after the war. During the course of their stormy relationship, they quarrel and he actually smothers the lady, Anita by name, with a pillow. He then runs away with her money, crosses to France, sells her jeweller in Paris and then goes on the Lyons. By then the papers are full of the news of the murder, but Anita's husband, worrying about his reputation if someone came to know of his dead wife's liason, tells the police that his wife had taken the bungalow for a rest cure. So eventually the police fix robbery as the motive for the murder. No one could find the real culprit, for he later went to Marseilles on work. A man came along there, a drunk chauffeur called Prothero, who had been sacked from a villa near Antibes. In his drunkenness he sold his passport for two hundred francs. He then walked him down by the quays and threw him into the water where he sank like a stone. He left his own baggage in the hotel and bolted. So the hotel people reported him missing. In due course, when the hue and cry had quietened down a bit, he put 'Prothero's references into action'. He got a job with Mrs. Archworth as Prothero the Chauffeur. His

tale also reveals how he had Davina under his control because he trades his money (which she is always in need of) for her kisses.

The end of this letter is a heart rending cry 'Anita, I love you, Anita, Anita, where are you... I won't hurt you, come back, come back, come back, ...' This reveals his dual personality-a man who has committed two murders is capable of deep feeling for a woman whose death he regrets and he pines for his lost love.

The next morning, at Lord Thingummy's house the solitary housemaid sets about cleaning the mess created by the party the night before. Her footsteps wake up Oliver who then realizes that it is day and Marianne has gone. He is back to where he was -- yet being a lazy good for nothing, he eventually does not finish Lord Thingummy's catalogue.

Davina goes home to her aunt and tells her in the morning that she was late the night before as Marianne's car had broken down on a drive after dinner. The aunt then startles Davina by telling her that she had made her heir to her house after her death.

Davina, however, has a bone to pick with the Chauffeur for not having given her the message from Miriam regarding last night's party's venue. When they come face to face, she rudely asks why he did not give her the message. She even says "You'll be dismissed for this". Instead he challenges her about the money she owes him. He says, "I

know your sort. You keep your place, Miss Archworth and I'll  
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keep mine".

Davina knows she is being blackmailed. Knowing she is defeated as she has no money, she realizes she can precipitate nothing. She also knows that in her present penury, the security of her aunt's inheritance is a great boon. She cannot afford to scoff at it or do anything which would offend her aunt. She cannot afford to be 'disinherited' by her aunt. So she comes to terms with herself, throws away her precious recklessness and decides to ask her aunt for the money to repay Prothero.

In the meantime Marianne has driven to the station to meet her husband who is returning from London by train. She is 'disoriented' by the previous night's adventure into iniquity. Her husband finds her changed and even says "You're not quite yourself". To this, she replies "Perhaps I have got a slight chill".

In this tale, despite all displacements made temporarily by the people within it, each one manages to sail their own ship to harbour. Here Bowen again shows how the innocent Marianne is temporarily fascinated by Davina and almost misled into misdeeds. The forces of evil are presented here in Davina, Oliver and Prothero. The title 'The Disinherited' applies to everyone who has lost something. It also shows how those who are at the monetary mercy of someone else cannot afford to be their own masters.

The theme of 'The Disinherited' is that most people are not in a position to do as they please. "Events" lead nowhere-- everything is a temporary illusion -- no one can really do as they wish, as they are bound by the norms of society and monetary considerations.

The title of the story 'Reduced' is very apt as one comes to know on reading it. The two Carbury girls, Penny and Claudia have a governess called Miss Rice. Miss Rice has been employed by Godwin Carbury, the father of the girls. Mrs. Laurie and Mrs. Carbury are old friends. Mima Carbury was twenty-eight when she married the forty year old Godwin. He was a very unpopular man, very miserly and had an air of self importance. His house was at Pendlewaite. No one had any social intercourse with the Carburys. Mima had to even buy her daughters coats and shoes at reduced rates in London. This was how she met her now widowed friend Mrs. Laurie, who invited herself to Pendlewaite. The house was "not a loveable house", in fact it looked dedicated to a 'perpetual January'. Indoors there was no electricity, spreading an atmosphere of gloom. Before October, no fires were lit till night.

Mrs. Laurie found another house guest here, a second cousin of Mima's, Frank Peele, aged thirty, just back on leave from Siam.

The only startling feature of the household not commensurate with the rest of the place, was the governess,

whose technique was perfect. Mrs. Laurie is most curious as to how Miss Rice has accepted this assignment in this outlandish place. The girls are devoted to her completely. Mrs. Laurie, on making enquiries about the governess, is repulsed by her host, but on badgering her friend, she makes an astonishing discovery. She discovers that Miss Rice is no other than Henrietta Post, who was involved in the murder of Sir Max Rant. She also finds out that Godwin had followed all the evidence of the court case carefully and when she was cleared (though the murderer was never found) he got his wife to write to her three weeks after the trial, offering her a new life and "twenty five pounds a year". Since she has no where to go she takes the offer and comes to stay at Pendlewaite, as governess to the girls.

Frank Peele overhears this conversation and also hears Mrs. Laurie cautioning her friend against a person like Miss Rice, who could be a murderer after all. She was with the girls all the time! The girls were two years apart. They are pathologically attached to their governess who is their 'darling'. They do everything she asks of them. They knew how people laughed at their father and pitied their mother because of him. In their lack lustre existence, Miss Rice assumes a godly supremacy.

While they are skipping and playing with Miss Rice, Frank Peele enters the room and casually asks, "Miss Rice, who's Henrietta Post?" Miss Rice coolly answers that she was an accused in a murder case but disappeared, hoping

to be forgotten. Frank continues the discussion by probing further, but Miss Rice gives away nothing.

Later, their mother comes to their room, where they were all in the dark, as the lamps never came sooner than necessary. Mrs. Carbury's mind is bursting with her friends words and insinuations. "Henrietta Post, well, they're your children, not mine". She keeps eyeing the children's bedroom which is connected to Miss Rice's bed. She is consumed with all kinds of fears. Her imagination runs riot. She thinks "that is the woman my children are with the whole time". She wishes to run to her husband to tell him to send Miss Rice away - tomorrow. "Nella (Mrs. Laurie) will back me up", she thinks. Then a cold fear envelops her. She wonders what will happen when "Godwin hears I've told Nella?" Before Nella had come on her visit to them, he had asked her if her friend had an inquisitive nature. She tries to tell her children to call the governess who is in her room. But the girls protect the governess and attack their mother by asking why she wants to talk to Miss Rice when she generally never does. Then she tells the girls that Miss Rice would be going away tomorrow. The climax of the tale is when both Penny and Claudia declare in their quiet voices, "Then we will go too".

Bowen is placing before us several instances where the title 'Reduced' becomes so apt in this story.

Mrs. Carbury, at the age of twenty-eight, is 'reduced' to accepting the unpalatable forty year old Godwin

as her spouse. He is the one who reduces her to pulp out of fear. Her 'reduced' economic circumstances compel her to accept him. Mrs. Laurie's 'reduced' circumstances make her accept even Mrs. Carbury's unpalatable hospitality. Miss Henrietta Post is 'reduced' to accepting the offer of governess to the Carbury girls as she has a tarnished reputation. Mrs. Carbury is 'reduced' to accepting her out of fear of her husband's temper and the unswerving loyalty of the girls to their governess. Mrs. Carbury is reduced to a state of irrational fear by her friend Mrs. Laurie's insinuations.

Miss Rice exercises total influence on the girls as they lead a lonely life away from society. Hence they can see no flaw in their governess. The girls are 'reduced' to the status of puppets by her hold over them.

Bowen has again portrayed deeply disturbed, lonely, psychologically unsound girls. She has also shown how innocent people can be victims of circumstances. She has successfully portrayed Godwin Carbury as a cold, selfish, unscrupulous man, who will do anything to save himself the expenses of running a household properly.

The central theme of the story 'The Apple Tree' is mental imprisonment of a young woman called Mrs. Simon Wing, in the vision of a suicide she came upon at school. She is freed from this by an understanding and sympathetic older woman called Mrs. Betterley.



Bowen often employs the method of week end house parties hosted by squires or other aristocrats, in old mansions with eerie atmospheric descriptions. Here, at Simon Wing's weekend party, we encounter a description of a "nerve packing combination of wind and moonlight. Simon escorts his guests to the Saturday concert in the village memorial hall. Lancelot and Mrs. Betterley are Simon's guests. They are discussing Simon's marriage to this girl, barely nineteen, which had been a shock to this friends. The choice of a wife-sexless-mousy, a wraith, and very passive, is surprising to all.

At night, when the "house was quiet too quiet" Lancelot, who could not sleep ventures downstairs into the dark hall where he starts violently on hearing the clock strike three. He finds Simon in the Library. Simon has been drinking heavily as if to drown some sorrow. He seems gripped with fear. He pushes at Lancelot in the dark, and when his elbow knocks a switch, the hall, springs into an explosion of light. Lancelot sees Simon's face clammy with sweat. Just "out of the light", Mrs. Simon stood, looking fixely and pointing at something above her head. Her eyes did not flicker and "she did not stir". With a violent movement Simon shuts the library door. This slam of the door brings Mrs. Betterley out, but Lancelot reassures her by saying, "All right, only somebody sleep walking". Simon, to Lancelot's horror, sways, sags and suddenly faints. Lancelot is quick and props him against the wall. He knelt, one ear

to the keyhole, and sees Mrs. Simon there. Then he heard a thud-thud three times, like apples falling. "The idea of apples entered his mind and remained, frightfully clear - the idea of fruit detaching itself and from a leafly height, falling in the stale, shut up room had the sharpness of hallucination. He thought he was going mad". He called out to Mrs. Betterasley who came downstairs.

She went to the library door, cautiously turning it. She tries to call Mrs. Simon, but comes out again instead, "very white". "Its impossible", she said. "One can't get past-- its like an apple tree". Next Mrs. Wing comes out in her nightgown, her plaited hair hanging over her shoulders, blinking under the strong light. Seeing them all she announced in natural confusion, "I walk in my sleep", and went upstairs without a glance at her husband. Then Simon begins to come out of his stupor.

Mrs. Betterasley had some idea of why Mrs. Simon is so mentally disturbed. Seven years ago, newspapers had been full of the tragedy that had occurred at Crampton Park School. A little girl had committed suicide. This had become a great scandal. "The school broke up and, the fine house and grounds in the West Country were sold at a loss. It was said that one pupil, Myra Conway collapsed the day after the suicide and nearly died of brain fever. She lay, along with the nurses in the house. All the other children had been hurried away. Myra's health and nerves were ruined. Myra Conway later became Myra Wing - this much information even Simon was acquainted with.

On Sunday morning when the other go to church and Mrs. Simon is lying in her room, Mrs. Betterley decides to tackle her and her problem. She asks Myra if she often sleep walks. She then says "how old were you when that happened? 'Twelve' she replies.

Mrs. Betterley then insists that she unburdens herself by speaking about the incident. She tells her "You're making Simon ill". She adds, "Talk to Simon. You never have, have you? You never do?"<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. Betterley makes her unburden her heavy heart to her. Myra speaks of the school which was called 'a home school', which housed, among others, orphan children under the age of fourteen like herself. There was a very high wall around the school. Doria and Myra were always in trouble and somehow never got along with the other girls. They were both queer looking girls, who got together "like two patients in hospital". They depended upon each other but did not have much in common.

Later another girl befriends Myra Myra took to her because this girl was happy and gay with a home of her own, a contrast to Doria. She therefore began to neglect Doria, who was left alone.

Doria is miserable when Myra leaves her. She used to walk about by hersef. "It was as though everything I had got free of had fallen on her too; she was left with my wretchedness".<sup>20</sup> So once she called Myra to the apple tree,

the same beautiful old tree, where, in happier days, they used to climb together. But this time Myra, terrified of being claimed again as a friend by Doria, said "terrible things to her".

That night Doria leaves her room which she shares with Myra and two others. "She tied the cord of her dressing gown", it was very thick, "round her waist tightly". She goes out and does not come back. With a sense of foreboding, Myra followed her. She sees nothing at first. It was September. She goes to the apple tree - two or three apples fall down. Then she saw Doria. Her feet were just above Myra's head. She had hanged herself in the apple tree! Myra crept back into bed and waited. No one knew. The school authorities tell the girls nothing. Myra pretended she knew nothing but when she fell ill, she started hallucinating, thinking the leaves of the tree would choke her. Whenever she moves in bed, she feels an apple fall down. Finally when she recovers, she goes to look for the real apple tree, which in the meantime had been cut down. No one ever knows that Myra has been a witness to Doria's suicide.

Then Myra goes away to her aunt and uncle at Cannes and lives there in a villa. It is there that Simon meets and marries her. Simon to her seems like a saviour after what she has been through.

Now she confesses that she is haunted by the guilt of Doria's suicide. She feels in a way responsible for it.

She says "there is always the apple tree. Its roots are in me. It takes all my strength, and now its beginning to take Simon's". Her behaviour is certainly affecting their marital life. So she says she must leave Simon, though she is so happy with him.

Mrs. Betterley insists that Myra spends a month with her. It is during this period that she patiently exorcizes the 'apple tree' from her mind. Mrs. Wing returned to her husband a changed person, and they move 'into happiness'.

Here Bowen shows us the technique employed by the older woman in helping the young distressed girl. It is, in a way the method a modern psychiatrist would employ. The burden of guilt in a child, unless released by confession, can have far reaching effects as in the case of Myra. This method succeeds in liberating Myra from a heavy mental burden which she has borne for years. But the fact remains that the poor orphaned Doria is shattered mentally when her friend Myra deserts her. Her loneliness and sense of rejection leads to these drastic consequences. Bowen is making a strong point against the bad treatment of children by other children or grown ups. Their minds, unformed, are incapable of taking mental disturbances. Here again, we have a picture of disturbed adolescents and their distorted minds.

'Look At All Those Roses' is a story with an

unusual title - the theme is that all roses have thorns, which cause torment. Those who have roses seem to be oblivious to the thorns whilst those who have to live with the thorns appreciate doubly, the beauty of the flowers. Roses are symbolic of happiness, thorns signify distress.

The scene here is a 'gabled' flat fronted country house with a paved path leading to the door. The startling feature is the riot of roses on each side of the path -- hundreds of them, "overcharged with colour", Crimson, coral, blue-pink, lemon and cold white. The face of the house was "plastered with tea roses".

Edward, a writer, whose wife would not divorce him, is driving to London through Suffolk, with Lou who lives with him. They are returning after a week end spent together.

It was Lou who spied the house, "in a sheath of startling flowers". She reacts spontaneously to the house and even wishes they could live there. Edward, on the other hand, had no illusions about life in the country. There exists a communication gap between Edward and Lou-- not for them the deep communication that exists between lovers - Edward is an extrovert. Lou, however, "saw life in terms of ideal moments". Therefore their future weighed on them like a dull burden.

Their car suddenly develops mechanical trouble and Edward is unable to repair it. So they both walk backwards

to that house they left behind, hoping to either use the telephone, if there is one or borrow a bicycle to go to the nearest garage. They lock their suitcases in the luggage boot. They find the "blistered door" open but could not find a bell. Just then, woman, with no 'expression' at all, looks out and explains to them that she had two swiss cow bells hung on loops of string by the door, instead of a bell. The woman, a "shabby Amazon", on being told what they were looking for, says she has neither a telephone nor a bicycle, as her maid had ridden home on it. She offered them tea, but Edward declined and asks how far the nearest garage would be. She directed him to the village, three miles distant. "Leave your wife here", she said unexpectedly, so Lou, though not Edward's legal wife, stayed on in the house. She complimented the hostess on her roses, only to be told, "they grow well for us. Josephine likes to see them".

As Lou wonders who Josephine is, she sees a girl of about thirteen in, "a wicker invalid carriage". She has "an unresigned living face". Seeing her, Lou felt here was the nerve and the core of the house".

The girl, hungry for company, bombards Lou with all sorts of questions. She takes for granted the beauty of the countryside, the sky, and the beautiful roses, as this is her daily scene. She longs for news of the outside world which is denied to her because of her crippled state.

"Piccadilly Circus" and "Trafalgar Square", hold a fascination for her.

Her physical condition is a mystery, as she tells Lou, "My back was hurt, six years ago. It was my father's doing". Obviously the woman who had let Lou into the house, the woman with "powerful looking hands" was the mother of the crippled child.

The child makes a dramatic announcement that her father had "gone away". Whilst contemplating on this mysterious family Lou is also, inadvertently analysing her own relationship with Edward. Perhaps Edward had also "run away" like the child's father (Though he has only gone to the garage). She, insecure in Edward's affection, sticks to him like a necessity. This is because to her, "the idea of love was adhesiveness". In reality, this only deadens affection.

The child tries desperately to persuade Lou to stay on and not return to London. She admits that no one comes to see them. Most servants find the place too lonely. When Mrs. Mather, Josephine's mother, comes in with the tea Lou indulges for a moment "the astounding fancy that Mr. Mather lay at the roses, roots", perhaps not physically, but he appears to be the thorn among the roses.

Mrs. Mather tells Lou that this place, once a farm, proved unlucky, so since her husband left, she had "let the land".



Her husband has gone and her child is crippled. She explains to Lou how when she is upstairs or working, she wears one of those cow bells. The other bell is always on Josephine's carriage. This is the way they communicate, through the sounds of the bells.

Mrs. Mather offers Lou her roses to take back to London. Lou gladly cuts the roses, and suddenly realises that Edward had gone for over two hours. A feeling of panic grips her momentarily. Suppose she remains here forever and never goes?

Lou lies down beside Josephine's carriage and shuts her eyes, slowly allowing herself to relax on the grass. She tries to view herself critically and realises how desperately she has been clutching on to Edward for emotional anchor. It was an obsession, keeping him to herself. She decides not to go after him like before.

She realises that people like Josephine, despite being crippled, knew what they want, so they still generate power. She allows her frayed nerves to sink her into peaceful slumber.

She then hears a motor car coming, Edward arrives, but is in a hurry to leave. He asks Lou if she has been 'alright'. Lou introduces him to Josephine. Edward explains how he has come in a taxi to collect Lou.

As they make a hasty exit, Lou finds Edward really

anxious about her safety. He says he had heard all sorts of queer tales about Mrs. Mather in the village, whose inhabitants had totally excluded her from all social intercourse. Edward began to tell Lou what he had heard in the village about the abrupt disappearance of Mr. Mather.

Bowen has made the climax dramatic. It is left to the reader to interpret whether Mr. Mather has been murdered by his wife and buried there among the roses. When Lou was there she had also got an eerie feeling that Mr. Mather is "at the roses roots". Is Mr Mather really buried among the roses or does it imply the attitudes of people's minds? A woman with a helpless child, leading a cheerless, secluded, solitary existence can give cause to such conjecture. Yet we see Mrs. Mather being kind to Lou and does her no harm. The focal point of the house is the child Josephine. The father's disappearance remains a mystery. Has he gone off on his own accord because he cannot face the reality of living with a handicapped child? Was he really responsible for her handicap? If so, he must have had a terrible guilt complex. Or did his wife in a fit of rage, really kill him, because he has been the cause of the child's affliction?

Bowen has explored deeply, several relationships; Lou and Edward are only existing together in a tenuous relationship as Lou's possessiveness is affecting them both. Yet the moment Lou decides to loosen her hold on Edward, he shows he cares for her in his own fashion, by the panic he feels for her safety in that house.

Mrs. Mather and her daughter share a slender relationship, perhaps due to their forced inter-dependence. The child has been told by the mother that the father is responsible for her physical disability and has forsaken them. So the child hates her absent father, is trapped physically and torn apart mentally in a prison like atmosphere. She longs to be a part of the world beyond her "wicker invalid carriage".

Bowen has juxtaposed the situation of Josephine and Lou effectively. Lou and Josephine can see the same roses, yet they signify different things to both. Lou, living in a world exposed to all influences, is still not a fulfilled being. She has not been able to relax or let her hold on Edward. She goes not know what she wants. She wants her roses without the thorns. Josephine, on the other hand "knows what she wants, despite all her difficulties". She has more time for contemplation. She wants to be in touch with the outside world which signifies freedom. Josephine does not care for the roses because she has only the thorns' to contend with. So she takes their beauty for granted.

Lou begins to appreciate the real value of life (symbolised by the roses) more deeply after being with Josephine. She realises what it is to fall upon the "thorns of life" (John Keats) and "bleed". This has deep implications. Affliction, woe, distress, sadness and grief (thorns of life) are juxtaposed with bliss, delight, joy

cheerfulness and felicity (the roses).

Bowen has made a philosophical statement about life and what it offers to each individual. Moreover she is making an affirmation that there are no roses without thorns.

'THE GIRL WITH THE STOOP'

The locale of "The Girl with the Stoop" is a small summer town seaside resort. Where Tibbie is staying with her Aunt Cara, in a villa. She does not feel at ease in her aunt's house. She is engaged to be married. The young man is in India and had proposed by letter. In April, he would return "to claim his inert bride". Tibbie is described as a girl with a long nose, dustily freckled and a sweet mild, indeterminate mouth. She is confident of her fiance Tom's love. She also stoops.

This morning she goes for a walk on the sea front as usual, past the Palace Hotel. This great deluxe hotel, dazzlingly, white, with glass lounges, balconies, boxes of flowers with its cascade of marble steps, was the chief glory of the quiet resort. Rich convalescents stayed there, or people who played gold.

Francis is a rich cripple who lives in this hotel with his cousin Geoff for company. He notices Tibbie every day. She somehow has caught his fancy. Today when he sees Tibbie from his window, he cries, "There she goes,. there goes the girl with the stoop".

Francis and Geoff are first cousins, boys of the same age, around twenty years. Unfortunately, matters of health and money created a rather cruel contrast between them.

Francis has money but no health. Geoff hard up from birth, has to work in the family business that should have been Francis's. Francis is very short tempered with him. Geoff is trapped with him - he longs to be out playing golf, but has been given leave to come to this holiday resort to keep his crippled cousin company. Francis seems to think Tibbie "exactly perfect" from a distance and wants to speak to her. He is a difficult person to handle and wants anything he sets his heart on.

So he asks Geoff to invite Tibbie to join them to tea. Geoff does this by meeting Tibbie and forcing an introduction. He tells her honestly that his crippled cousin would like her to join them for tea.

So on Thursday, Tibbie finds herself going up on the Palace Hotel lift to Francis's private suite. Tibbie meets Francis who is a boy of about twenty with brilliant eyes and sensitive hands. Tibbie has gone in her prettiest hat and gloves and when she removes them, the observant Francis sees her engagement ring. He begins to make queries about her future plans. When he hears that she is going to India, he tells her peevishly that she is sure to hate it as the climate is very hot. When plans are further discussed,

Francis stonily says "I don't need to plan; I plot. I don't believe in plans". He tells Tibbie she may not reach India. He, in effect, tries to dampen her spirits. She, however, is not daunted. "I've got my destiny lines all over my hand", she tells him. "I am to cross the sea and live in a sunny clime". Francis startles her by saying she should live in a villa in Italy, for the sun shines there also. He adds, "I'm going to live in a villa in Italy".

When Geoff sees Tibbie down in the lift, he apologises, in case she had found Francis impertinent. She tells him that she is not offended as she understands how things are different for him, being physically handicapped.

Next morning the sun shone and "Francis and his chair went down in the lift". He wheeled himself about, cruising in the sun. He had sent Geoff to play golf. He wore expensive clothes and had a camel-hair rug tucked over his knees. He sat waiting for Tibbie. When she came and stood beside him, he tells her, "here is your sunny clime". He again starts probing into her affairs. He wants to know whether she writes love letters to her young man. There seems to be the emotion of pain on his face as he asks her these questions.

He then pours out his heart to Tibbie. He tells her he could not sleep last night. He calls her a sweet person "with no backbone at all". He wants to marry her. He says he loves her. He says, "I don't ask you to love me; all

I want is that you should be always there". He confesses that upto now he used to torment everyone - now she torments him. He admits that he's always hated to be pitied by people, but Tibbie would surely teach him to be kind. Tibbie is frightened by his over persuasive ways. She is afraid of his possessiveness. She says, "you sort of eat me up". Francis persists in his proposal. "I'm rich", he says I could give you all those small, silly things. Oh, I could shelter you, Tibbie, "it's my life line that is in your hands".<sup>22</sup>

Tibbie brings the encounter to a climax when she tells him "I am going away". Tom's mother, who has never seen her, has asked her to go back to Scotland with her. In a dead voice Francis says "you can't go. you cannot leave me". She replies with a frightened obstinancy, "but its all settled, this morning my aunt's sent the telegrams; she's ordered the taxi, the taxi is coming at three".<sup>23</sup>

Francis again says, 'but you and I cannot have met for nothing. She replies "I can't change what's all settled. Again he say, "You can't go". 'But I can', she says surprisingly. She moved away from him thinking he must not come after me-- She runs away, not looking back till she reaches her aunt's gate.

When the promenade is empty, Francis is shocked with the outcome of this encounter and resignedly drives his chair slowly back to the Palace Hotel.

This is a tale of unrequited passion. We cannot really use the label 'love' for what Francis feels for Tibbie. It is an obsessive desire to possess something and someone he cannot have. They are like parallel lines who will never meet. His persistence lends pathos to the tale. Francis is fed up of pity. He finds Tibbie a change from his usual companions. As she is affianced and therefore, out of his reach, she becomes more of an attractive prey. He tries to bully and dominate her. She too however, shows she has a backbone despite her physical 'stoop'. She is firm in the end and takes the course of action that has been predetermined.

Bowen has once again written about a crippled person, and his desire to cling to someone. It is somewhat similar to the feelings the crippled girl faces in "Look at All those Roses". The dependence of the crippled and the pathos surrounding their lives is a subject which she has taken special interest in.

Bowen's stories of the thirties are more intense, portraying communication problems, fractured relationships, mental trauma and people struggling to live in strained financial circumstances.

#### IV

The foregoing analysis of Bowen's early stories, stories of the twenties and stories of the thirties, clearly defines some of her major thematic preoccupations. It is



true that the early stories characterized as they are by diversity, do not reveal any specific, uniform subject. Despite this, they go a long way in indicating her abiding interest in inter-personal relations, their breakdown, communication gap and human loneliness. The way in which Bowen establishes a meaningful correlation between space and people is certainly a prefiguration of a technique which gets perfected in her later career as a short story writer. In the stories belonging to the twenties, we find that the human landscape as it emerges in them, gets increasingly variegated. Here now we have troubled adolescence, disappointing fathers, dissolute lonely children, complying men. Equally important is the fact that in these stories we witness the emergence of the new woman.

Bowen's stories of the thirties are more intense portrayals of communication problems, fractured human relationships and psychological trauma. Bowen places these themes in the context of changing class structure, thereby giving her stories a substantial measure of social density. In a way, one could say that these stories, with their focus on the disinherited human self and its problematic relationship with the environment, provide a point of transition to the war stories. From the individual trauma as portrayed in these stories to the collective trauma of the war experience is certainly a major advance that Bowen has made as a short story writer. The Chapter that follows is therefore a detailed presentation of her war stories.

## NOTES

1. The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen, London: Cape, 1980, p.24.
2. Ibid., p.45.
3. Ibid., p.111.
4. Ibid., p.226.
5. Ibid., p.223.
6. Craig, W.J. Ed. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, London, Henry Pordes, 1983, p.939.
7. The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen, p.121.
8. Ibid., p.353.
9. Ibid., p.354.
10. Ibid., p.354.
11. Ibid., p.354.
12. Ibid., p.363.
13. Ibid., p.367.
14. Ibid., p.368.
15. Ibid., p.375.
16. Ibid., p.383.
17. Ibid., p.406.
18. Ibid., p.465.
19. Ibid., p.467.
20. Ibid., p.469.
21. Ibid., p.470.
22. Ibid., p.569.
23. Ibid., p.570.