

CHAPTER - III

DISJECTED SNAPSHOTS : THE WORLD
OF THE WAR STORIES

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The present chapter seeks to provide a detailed critical analysis of the war stories of Elizabeth Bowen so as to bring out her significant contribution as a short story writer to the collective traumatic experience of war.

The number of stories dealing with the socio-historical experience of war and its aftermath is twenty in all. The following analysis addresses itself to all these stories, bringing out their individual distinctiveness as well as the total thematic pattern underlying them. For the sake of convenience, each story is subjected to textual analysis as a separate unit.

1) 'Ivy Gripped the Steps': This story, certainly a major one dealing with the war -- has received special critical attention from Jocelyn Brooks, Angus Wilson and Victoria Glendinning. Describing the story as one of Bowen's finest pieces, Brooks has commented on the precision with which Bowen has created the atmosphere of war in the story. Angus Wilson has pointed out the strange but effective combination of 'boyhood trauma' and 'boredom' in this story.

Victoria Glendinning has also made a fine comment on this story when she says that memory here has the texture and colour of actuality while the present is fragmentary, impossible and illusory. Equally significant is Bowen's own

statement on this story. She says:

"In 'Ivy Gripp'd the Steps' a man in his early '40s peers through the rusted fortifications and down the seaside town at the Edwardian episode that has crippled his faculty for love¹".

In 1944, Gavin Doddington visits the seat of his childhood -- Southstone- then Mrs. Nicholson's house. She had died in 1912. Gavin had been eight years old when he met her, "ten when she died". He had not been back to Southstone since his last stay with her.

The actual story dates back to the friendship between two young girls, Edith and Lilian, who had kept in touch from their "Dresdon finishing year" throughout their later lives by letters. This was admirable, as their later lives" ran very widely apart". Edith marries a country gentleman whilst Lilian a businessman, Jimmie Nicholson, who bought the Southstone house for his wife in 1907, before he died of a stroke. Being fifteen years senior, they had one child, a daughter, who dies at birth. Edith often visits her widowed friend, but not as often as both would have liked, as her own married life is one of "contrivance and anxiety". She is especially worried about the health of her second son Gavin, who has been delicate from birth. The dampness of his native place, inland and low lying do not suit him; till his health stabilizes he can not go to school. What he needs is a change of air and it is natural that Lilian should

invite Gavin to stay with her. She says that her maid Rockham was "good with children".

Gavin arrives in "a blazing June". He sees the grandeur of the "sea blue drawing room", mirrors framed in ivory brackets, cut crystal vases- a far cry from the home he has left behind and awaits Mrs. Nicholson. She comes, to his surprise does not kiss him, but looks down at him from her tall charming frame. She is elegantly coiffeured, and dressed in a summery light dress. She welcomes Gavin, asks after his mother Edith and sends him to his room on the second floor, near Rockham the maid's quarters.

For the poor Landowner's son, Southstone is enchanting. Everything is 'stamped with style'. The society Mrs. Nicholson moves in is so different from what the young Gavin has seen earlier. The style of living is lavish - "A word to the livery stables brought an imposing carriage to any door". There are meetings for good causes, afternoon concerts in hotel ballrooms. Best of all, there are no poor to be seen.

Southstone's architect is ostentations "bays-balustrades, glazed in balconies". "Thicket" Jummie Nicholson has bought the house for his wife. "Southstone is the high dream of his particular world".

Gavin's own family has lived an austere life. The respect they command as the squire's family can not compensate for their lack of funds. They were poor gentry.

At the end of a stay at Southstone, Gavin dreads going back into the other world which was the home he was born in.

Mrs. Nicholson smothered him with love and attention. She enjoys spoiling him. She would allow him to stay up late, despite Rockham being "the arbiter". She works out Gavin's daily routine, because "Madam is not accustomed to children" she would say.

Rockham used to take him to play by the sea; the beach. These "relegations to Rockham" annoyed and unsettled Gavin. He also begins to cling to and long for Mrs. Nicholson's company only. When with Rockham, he experienced "a literal feeling of degradation as if he had descended from the plateau to the cliff's foot". Gavin used to walk with Rockham down the cliff path, but the ascent was made in the lift. One day, Rockham forgets her purse so they have to undertake the ascent on foot. Whilst doing so, he looks up to see Mrs. Nicholson's face above him. Her face is shaded by her parasol. She is talking to someone. Gavin grips the handrails, leaning backwards in the hope of intercepting her "line of view". He suddenly feels a deep wave of despair. He feels that all his life his doom must be never to reach her, not only now, but ever. His feeling of attachment for her has the power of youthful adoration and passion as far as he could understand passion at his tender years.

Mrs. Nicholson's companion is Admiral Concannon of

severely clear cut features and a nervy spare figure, possibly due to his retirement. The Concannons had settled at Southstone for Mrs. Concannon's health sake. Their two daughters attend school. He escorts Mrs. Nicholson home from parties. She is playful and flirtatious with him. He addressed her as "my dear".

The three of them walk around the promenade together with "the dignified aimlessness of swans". Mrs. Nicholson begins talking of her belief of how "we live in the present day". She adds that she never cared for history at school. The conversation steers towards how England is preparing to fight with Germany. This "existence mortgaged to necessity, was an inheritance of uneasiness, tension and suspicion". "Its repetitive harshness and its power to scar" were of supreme importance.

At Doddington Hall, Gavin now sees his mother as Mrs. Nicholson's friend, wearing Lilian's cast away gowns in which Gavin's mother assumed a grace with the pathos of unkindly hollows in her face and throat. During his short trips to his parents' home, Gavin takes "stock of himself". He has a quickness of mind and his masculinity gave him unexpected command over small situations. He can even deal better with his elder brother's jibes at his "pretty prettiness". Yet he is never really at home when home. He is "by seven leagues strides, onward to his next visit" to Southstone. At home, his nights were not wasted as he "attached himself to his thoughts". Using his mother as a

model, he practises all kinds of gratuities of behaviour", which makes her exclaim, "Why, Lilian has made quite a little page of you!" Next time, he goes to Southstone it is early January. Rockham is in bed with "a nasty cold". So Mrs. Nicholson is at the station to meet Gavin. As they go into the waiting carriage she remarks how different this is from the last time he was with her. She also tells him that he has been invited to several parties. Their exchanges have the intimacy of lovers meeting. When she drops her muff on the sofa, he picks it up and strokes it. This gesture is suggestive of a caress.

The next event of importance in Gavin's life is the Concannon's dinner party, where he is included at the last minute to make up even numbers. This suggestion, which is outrageous, symptomizes the highest point of their intimacy. Gavin "exercised over Mrs. Nicholson's mornings what seemed a conqueror's rights to a terrain". He is with her at tea time. His bedtime is becoming later. He dines downstairs more than twice. When the curtains are drawn, Gavin lit "the piano candles". He stands by her side to turn over the music but watches her hands instead. He is as if in the throes of calf love. Mrs. Nicholson encourages all his attentions. At the Concannon's dinner party, they are placed to face one another across the table. Even the Concannon's daughters are not allowed to dine with the adults. Mrs. Nicholson's "caprice of bringing a little boy" is not acceptable to society. In fact it scandalizes them. Other

gentlemen who have hoped to be seated beside the alluring Mrs. Nicholson are disappointed.

When Gavin and Mrs. Nicholson return home, she remarks that the Admiral was angry with her because she had upset his wife. She then callously says that if the Admiral were not so silly, his poor unfortunate wife "would either get better or die". She adds, "if people give a party for no other reason but to show off their marriages, what kind of evening can one expect?" This shows her shallowness. She asks if he has enjoyed his evening. Gavin can only reply by saying "That is your most beautiful dress. She says, "you say such sweet things Gavin. What fun we have!" She turns and invites him closer to her side. "Her arm stayed round him". "Aren't you glad we are back?" She said, "that we are only you and me?" She adds eagerly that both of them should go right away somewhere-- To Germany, or into the Sun? Then she realizes that he is after all, only a child, and that he must "go to bed".

This whole incident leaves the adolescent boy "overcharged and trembling" and he grips his way, flight by flight, up the polished banister rail, as if he were pulling himself away from her.

After that visit, Mrs. Nicholson goes abroad and Gavin goes to school. Once he overhears his father voicing his disapproval of Mrs. Nicholson and Gavin being invited together to the Concannons' party.

At school, his indifferent health secures him rests, periodically, in the sick room. He spends Easter at home and it is not until September that he is sent to Southstone for a week before resuming his school routine.

Here Bowen describes September as an "extension of summer". Gavin once more feel the warmth of Mrs. Nicholson's love. Bowen describes, in detail, the lawns, trees and promenades of the place. As always, she creates an atmosphere for the action of the story to take place in. Gavin is now "quite a little man". Yet there is no change in him despite his exposure to school. "The change if any was in her". He fails to connect her new languor. She is battling with the illness that is to claim her life. She rises late and on their afternoon drives through the country. They are accompanied by Mrs. Concannon of all the persons. When Mrs. Concannon returns to Mrs. Nicholson's house for tea, the Admiral makes it his practice to call for her. The Concannons are busy with another social event--a Southstone branch of the "Awaken Britannia League", folding and posting leaflets. Mrs. Nicholson promises to send cakes from her kitchen, but does not agree to any further co-operation in the venture. She tells Mrs. Concannon, "I know what it is about and I don't approve". The Admiral replies "Then, logically, you should not be sending cakes". Mrs. Nicholson retorts saying that cake "makes everything so much nicer. You can't offer people nothing but disagreeable ideas". This ends with Mrs. Concannon saying, "You are too

naughty, Lilian. All the league wants is that we should be alert and thoughtful".

Mrs. Nicholson turns to Gavin, trying to envisage him as alert and thoughtful. The Admiral, however, fixes his eyes on Gavin saying, very suggestively, "What may come is bound, before it is done, to be his affair". Here the insinuation is that Mrs. Nicholson involves Gavin in all her concerns, despite his tender age. Eventually the meeting is held on the day Gavin is to return home, so he is spared any embarrassment of having to attend a meeting his Mrs. Nichollson does not wholly approve of.

Due to her failing health, Mrs. Nicholson "dines out less, so the evenings are "wholly theirs" (Hers and Gavin's). After tea time, "he began to reign". The frustrations of the "preceding hours" and the "occasional dissonances" between him and her due to these, send Gavin into a feverish pitch as time for his departure comes nearer. When she rests on the "chaise longue" he seats himself on a stool at her feet looking at her adoringly. This is his last evening and the air is charged with an emotional current. Their exchanges assume an intimacy never arrived at before. Gavin opens his heart to her by saying "Here, I always feel. I just mean, here, I feel. I don't feel anywhere else". "And what is here?" She asked. "Near you"² he replied.

This is the crux of the whole story. Gavin's

ability to "feel" is there only when he is in Mrs. Nicholson's orbit. Outside it, his feelings cannot encompass even his own home or parents. No relationship means as much to him as the warmth of Mrs. Nicholson's presence.

"Now, I wonder if they were right -- Rockham -- The Admiral. She's always hinting, he's always saying, that I'm in some way thoughtless and wrong with you", says Mrs. Nicholson. Gavin is taken aback. He dismisses all these disturbing thoughts. That night the Admiral comes to "fetch the cakes". Bowen describes the wood fire which is lit at dinner but is still "blazing languidly", making it necessary to sit at a distance from it. It is implied here that Mrs. Nicholson is playing with fire and that she had best distance herself from Gavin.

Gavin is packing in his bedroom with Rockham's help. He thinks of his departure which was to be early next day. As he looks into the rooms on every floor, he wonders "how long it would be before he saw them again". He silently enters the hall where he smelt "fresh baked cakes" on the table. As the drawing room door stood ajar, Gavin could hear the Admiral speaking to Mrs Nicholson. He says something which is very potent to their relationship. "You must see, there is nothing more to be said. I am only sorry I came. I did not expect you to be alone".³

Mrs Nicholson cries out, "Then this is to go on always? The Admiral replies that "There's nothing more you can do. And all you must be is, happy".⁴

Bowen's descriptions always give weight to the actual plot of her stories. Gavin he adds that she has "misunderstood" him from the beginning. He has no intention of being her prey. He wishes to have no part in her life. He agrees that she has charmed him with her looks and gaiety but adds "I'm not that sort. Flirtation's always been off my beat, so far off my beat, as a matter of fact, that I didn't know what it was when I first saw it"⁵. He then accuses her of being unable to live without the excitement and danger of flirtations, irrespective of the emotional damage it causes. He advises her not to go for this kind of game "Don't, my dear girl, go for that to the wrong shop". He adds that it is bad enough her trying to catch him, the Admiral as a victim, but she has made a "ninnie of that unfortunate boy, too". Mrs Nicholson's cruel reply, heard by Gavin, is put into these words "Who, poor little funny Gavin? Must I have nothing? I have no little dog"⁶.

As this juncture Gavin pushes open the drawing room door. He sees Mrs. Nicholson and the Admiral "standing before the fire". They are close together, and she drops her lace edged handkerchief on the hearthrug. The Admiral averts his head from her and imprisons "one of his own wrists in a handcuff grip that shifted only to tighten". This gesture, is suggestive of the Admiral trying to control his exasperation with a woman who is an incorrigible flirt and wants to have her own way always.

When Gavin enters the room, Bowen describes the

tense atmosphere very effectively. "Not a tremor recorded the moment when Mrs. Nicholson knew Gavin was in the room". It was as if he was an intruder, 'a detrop' in that emotionally charged atmosphere. In effect, he was. To Gavin, it is like the day of reckoning. He realises that his idol is made of clay. She has only used him like a dog and he, in his youthful earnestness has given his soul for this faithless woman. He has wasted himself.

Years later, Gavin, as a middle aged man, returns to the place of his childhood. "Ivy gripped and sucked at the flight of steps" of Mrs. Nicholson's house. He plucks a leaf of the ivy, and studies it. There veins appear like "fate lines". He had seen ivy "carved round marble monuments to signify fidelity". It is ironical that Gavin, who remembers how he was "used emotionally in his youth" by Mrs. Nicholson should now see Ivy, symbolising fidelity, clinging to her house. He walks down memory lane, past the very places where he and she had so often driven". The path and steps up the cliff face have been destroyed. The entire corner where the florist was has gone. He then makes his way to the Concannons, as he had twenty minutes or so before the 'black out'. On his way there he passes houses and former hotels which are now occupied by soldiers. His return here is around the time the place has been freed from military control, but the signs of "recent military occupation" cannot be ignored.

The Admiral dies in the war. As Gavin looks

into the dining room window of his house, he sees an A.T.S. (Auxiliary Territorial Service) girl at the table. When she comes out, "dressed for the street", he tries to talk to her. She discourages his attempts at conversation, in spite of the fact that he tells her he used to know the people who lived in "that house you came out of". To this youthful girl, it seems incredible that people could ever have chosen to live here. "I'd sooner live in a tomb", she says. She is further shocked when he tells her he is on holiday. Eventually she looks at him, thinking that he is a "civilian - too young for the last war, too old for this". She is moved momentarily, when he says, "I've got nobody to talk to". What really halts this girl in her tracks is the feeling that "she had seen the face of somebody dead who was still there". She feels that he represents "a whole stooped mechanism for feeling". From his features, she feels that once his face must have been lit with hope. He seems to her a prey, a person that falls victim to someone.

The girl suddenly snaps out of her pity for the middle aged man and comes back to the present, telling him she has a date and therefore, cannot keep him company. She advises him to go to a place where he knows someone, and not "pick on this dead place".

The irony is that this is the place where Gavin not only knew someone very well, but gave his heart to. He cannot free his lonely soul from his boyhood trauma when he finds that Mrs. Nicholson's dalliance with him was of no

value to her. However, she has created havoc with a young boy's feeling and incapacitated him for life. He is like a 'dead man' now, unable to give of himself anymore.

This powerful story of Bowen's is a deep psychological study of the far-reaching consequences of childhood trauma. In Gavin's deadered emotions we see "The Death of the Heart" which to Bowen is the chief poetic truth. Gavin is an innocent victim in the hands of a rich, practised, coquettish, philandering woman. Her childhood friend had bequeathed her son to her for protection and nurturing. Instead she shatters his personality at an age when it should have been developed properly. She does this only to amuse herself but succeeds in devastating the soul of a lonely human being forever. This devastation takes place in the shadow of the savage destruction and the ravages caused by the war.

"Ivy Gripp'd the steps" is a frame story which encompasses a full evocation of a past time. The present Gavin Doddington has been damaged by a past experience which he has never forgotten but which he has never been able to⁷ bypass emotionally".

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's terms, Gavin has been victimized by the worst of all sins; the manipulation of one human being by another.

II Unwelcome Idea

This is a story set in Dublin during the war. The description of 'a Sunny July Morning' in Dublin where the Dalkey tramline is, looks bright. The 'chalk-blue' sea is on one side. Howth Head is higher and after "Inland Ballsbridge" the tram from Dublin speeds up through the residential areas. At one point one can see "the whole bay open". Bowen has lovingly lingered over descriptions of Dublin, where she spent so much of her childhood. "Red, low-lying villas" can be seen from the tram. The tram passes through the Dun Laoghaire" - where there are shopping centres. Housewives with "burnt bare arms out of their cotton dresses" are talking among themselves, knocking their shopping-bags on each other's thighs".

At the Ballbridge stop Mrs. Kearney steps abroad with all her parcels "because she sees no bus". There are only four other people there. Suddenly "she shows interest in someone's back". She discovers it is her friend Miss Kevin, also travelling. They are both about thirty-five years of age. They both wear printed dresses and have "high, fresh, pink-colouring". Bowen describes them clearly saying "Mrs. Kearney could do with a little less weight and Miss Kevin could do with a little more". They are out early. Miss. Kevin has been in town "for the July sales" and is returning home to her mother. She has compact parcels with her. Mrs Kearney has been saying goodbye to her sister Maureen in Ballsbridge, as she is going "to Cantry Caven

this morning with the whole family and the maid". She informs Miss Kevin that her sister is "evacuating". So she has asked Mrs Kearney to keep a few things for her.

Miss Kevin inquires whether she would not "find it terribly slow down there". Mrs. Kearney, to whom the idea of her sister's evacuation is an "unwelcome idea" further elaborates that they have gone in the car with "all her plate (silver) with her in the back, with the maid". They discuss the pros and cons of the move - how in the papers they have been told that they'd be shot if "they don't stay where they are". They speak of the instructions given by the wardens and also remember that it is of "the first importance to keep calm". They discuss the war preparations, the earth they have to keep in the house and the buckets. "We haven't a refuge, though. Have you one?" asks Miss Kevin. They also console themselves that they are better off than their counterparts in England, who get even more strict instructions to follow.

Mrs. Kearney's nervousness about her sister's safety does not abate. In fact her nerves are overplaying the dangers of the situation. She asks Miss Kevin "wasn't it you said we had to keep off the roads?" Miss Kevin replies "That's in the event of invasion. In the event of not it's correct to evacuate".

She then asks Miss Kevin what her father's opinion of the war is. Miss Kevin says "he has a great contempt

for the whole war" and never lets us refer to it. You'd think that the two of us (her mother and herself) originated the war to spite him. He doesn't seem to blame Hitler at all!"

The tram grinds to a halt in Dun Laoghaire street. Both of them declare that the tram journey was a slow one. They go to their respective homes -- Miss Kevin with her neat parcels and Mrs Kearney loaded with all the "castaways" which her sister Maureen has offloaded onto her before evacuating.

The story projects the war situation in Dublin and shows how people are reluctant to evacuate and leave their homes. The story thus deals with the psychological sense of unsettlement caused by war.

III Oh Madam is the dramatic monologue of a maid in a London house, after the house she has served in for years suffers destruction during the war bombing. She is numb with shock, stunned with what has befallen. Yet when her mistress comes to see the damage that has been wrought, she addresses her in the correct form "Madam". Whatever happens, she does not lose her sense of duty and propriety. She tells her mistress that she looks 'quite white'. She says "all things come to an end" and proceeds to dust a chair for her mistress to sit on. She makes an effort to pick up the broken pieces everywhere. The damage wrought has been on the windows, the drawing room, the dining room and the plaster

on the second floor. She speaks of the bomb which was that one they dropped, "in the Cinema that did our damage". The attack was so sudden that it seemed the whole house would be razed to the ground. Fortunately, it has survived. Whilst the bombing raid was on, the staff sat in the sitting room which had a strong basement. She added, "I said a dozen times, to the others, well, thank goodness Madam's not here tonight; thank goodness madam's away"⁹. Otherwise she would have had to witness this destruction herself.

The maid makes a reference to the Bible where they say "not to set your heart on anything on this earth". This implies that the destruction of material things are of no consequence: they have no permanent value.

She speaks of Hitler "the maniac" who is behind all this wanton destruction. The little houses which "aren't strong" have been totally destroyed, whilst the strong ones have remained.

She tells her mistress to "turn up" her "coat collar" as the drought can come through the broken windows now. She asks permission to go to her sister's place this afternoon as "that always has been my home".

Then she starts adopting a positive attitude towards what has happened. She says "The clock's going" -- meaning, time never waits for anyone or anything, but just goes on. She tells her mistress that she'll get to work on re-organising and repairing the house. "I'll have the

drawing-room fit for you in no time", she reiterates. She becomes optimistic about the future and says, "But now you're back -- such a difference I feel, Hitler can't beat you and me, Madam, can he?" She is then told of her mistress's intention of going to stay with "her ladyship", in the quiet countryside. This upsets the maid who is so attached to the house that they would never open the house again. The mistress is insistant on going, as London is the target of the German air raids and she feels that it is safer in the country.

The maids tells her mistress that she would stay in the ruined house and get it back into order with the workmen.

She then dutifully starts reminding her mistress about packing up her things for her long stay in the country. She tells her that all the dresses are intact. She also says "there's not a mirror got cracked" during the raid.

When the time for Madam's departure comes, the maid breaks down, upset at the thought of the loneliness ahead of her -- yet she feels that "nothing goes on for ever, does it?" She apologies for crying, and says, she'll have "a good nap" and then stay on in the house 'the whole night'. She tells her mistress that she knows that she too will have to leave the house until her mistress comes to occupy it again. She says emphatically that she will not

only manage everything but would not feel lonely as "this never did feel to me a lonely house".

In this Dramatic Monologue, the presence of the mistress is only felt, not seen and certainly not heard.

Bowen is trying to make a valid point about the spirit of the English people in the face of all adversity. A disaster such as the one described in this story was a common occurrence in those war-ridden times. In spite of these trials and hardships, the spirit of the people remained undaunted. Both maid and mistress together present a united front of defence against Hitler's assaults. The maid refers to the impermanence of material objects. She also says that "nothing goes on for-ever" meaning that there is a feeling of hope that the war will end. Then all things will resume normalcy again. The present is dislocated due to these hardships. All will be well again.

But will all be well again? Is the maid being too optimistic? Is her mistress really well and alive and listening to her? Or is she merely imagining her serene restful presence? In the light of these questions, we can say that Bowen is dealing in this story with an ambivalent, unresolved psychological situation. It is not surprising therefore that this story was made into a stage monologue by John Perry and performed at a war-time charity theatrical.

|V£ Sunday Afternoon : Angus Wilson's comments on this

story are pertinent. He says:

"In the superb 'Sunday Afternoon' the bringing together of her two sides -- the Urban, the loyalist of London however horrible the blitz years, and the cultured gentry world of Inland's countryside - shows her at her best. Here we are at once in a marvellously evoked moment of place and time and in the never changing conflict of youth's hopeful imagination and the regretful doubts of the ageing".

"Bowen raises the possibility that living outside the war can also be painful. And, to see both sides at once is to feel split at the core"¹⁰.

Henry is the forty-three year old man who has come from London and Mrs Vesey asks about his experiences - "Please tell us. But nothing dreadful: we are already feeling a little sad". Henry Russel joins these old friends here in Dublin, "in the brilliance of the afternoon" on a late May Sunday. His look travelled "on to the screen of lilac whose dark purple pink-silver and white plumes sprayed out in the brilliance of the afternoon". Seeing his friends whom "he had grown up with" he felt with a shock, how he had "deserted" over these last few years, "the aesthetic of living that he got from them". He remembers "the democratic smell of the Dublin bus" which has conveyed him to them. Mrs Vesey's chestnut avenue, and her house with its tall windows was "a villa in the Italian sense". The

"sensations of wartime" that were "locked" inside him began to be dispelled as the beauty of this afternoon seeps into his very being.

Mrs Vesey tells him that all of them have friends who have died lately. So Ronald Cuffe tells Henry that they were relying on him to distract them from their sadness. He wanted to know if what they hear about London from a distance is true. In fact, they are infinitely relieved to see Henry alive in the midst of all the destruction there.

Just then, young Maria, Mrs Vesey's niece, joins them and immediately fixes her attention on the newscomer. He is an object of interest to her as he represents a different world from hers. The talk steers to the bombing and how difficult it is for Henry to express his feelings about it, as "there is no language for anything so preposterous". Yet he tells them that he has to go back. His trip here is only a holiday. Miss Ria Store, the patroness of the arts, cautions Henry telling him not to be surprised if "you find Maria stowed away in your baggage".

This immediately tells us of Maria's interest in the world beyond her normal sphere of things. Sir Isaac feels that it would be dangerous for Maria to go to London but fears that "this is the journey Maria wishes to make". Miss Store adds that "Maria has no experience, none whatsoever; she hopes to meet heroes - she meets none. So now she hopes to find heroes across the sea. Why Henry, she

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might make a hero of you". This indicates her desire to "seek a newer world" (Tennyson's Ulysees).

Lady Ottery asks Henry if it is true that he has lost everything. He tells her, albeit unwillingly, that he lost his flat and everything in it. Yet he takes this calmly as "it happens to many people". His friends are amazed with his attitude. They asked him why, in the face of danger, he had not sent his valuables to them for safe keeping. Henry answers, "I was attached to them. I wanted to live with them". He also astonishes them by saying that despite everything he is grateful to be alive, "to exist". Ronald Cuffe says "that is a cynicism one cannot like in you". Yet that is the way Henry has become due to circumstances.

He now turns to the enjoyment of the Sunday Tea and the "chocolate layer cake" for which the Vesey cook had been famous since Henry was seven or eight and used to come here with his mother. He remembers Mrs. Vesey's beauty when he was nineteen. In Maria, her niece, he now sees that beauty. At his age, he feels caught between two generations.

Mrs Vesey then asks him about his work in the Ministry, where he has been wrking since the war.

On his way back to the bus, he finds Maria "between two chestnut trees". She tells him he has ten minutes before the bus arrived. She tells him of her intention to "go away". She adds "They will have to make up

something without me". Henry is moved to say "Maria, I can't like you. Everything you say is destructive and horrible". She replies that she thought he wouldn't mind. He surprises her by saying "I still want the past". At once Maria pounces on him saying that she has admired him at tea-time but now finds he is weak willed, wanting the past!

She hurriedly asks for his address, and when he gives it to her "off a page of his notebook" she warns him that she might turn up if she wanted money or anything. She also adds that she can drive a car.

Henry firmly tells her that he would not aid and abet any scheme which takes her away from the safety of Dublin and her people. He sincerely tries to make her see how dangerous her scheme could be.

"You will no longer be Maria. You will have an identity number but no identity. Your whole existence has been in contradistinction". He tries to tell her that she thinks the grass will be greener on the other side of the fence. He kisses her face and calls her 'Miranda' indicating that she would be someone else in wartime London. "This is the end of you" he says as he gets on to the bus. Miranda dismisses all his advice, saying "the trouble with you is, you're half old".

Bowen has shown two dimensions of the same reality -- in the blitz years and Ireland's countryside very effectively. She has successfully juxtaposed maturity

against youthful idealism, urban wartime against the country, the cultured gentry against the Londoners who have had to adapt to a new way of life.

V 'Careless Talk'; this is an account of different people meeting at a London restaurant in wartime, their topics of discussion and the problems they confront in their daily lives. The conversation or "Careless Talk" is vividly described. Bowen creates the atmosphere in the restaurant very accurately "The waiters had to melt to get past the backs of the chairs"; the crowded place is effectively displayed. She adds "every European tongue struck its own note, with exclamatory English on top of all". "Most of the customers were uniformed people".

Joanna has not lunched in London for four months and she remarks this to her friend Mary Dash. She also brought 'three eggs' for her friend, all the way from Shepton Mallet in the train. Her friend is overjoyed with the gift. "I can't tell you what a difference they will make" she said. This indicates the food scarcity in war time, especially where fresh foods from the country were concerned. Mrs Dash immediately signals to a waiter and asks him to keep them carefully away "till the end of lunch" when she could take them away with her.

Mrs Dash then badgers Joanna for news of various people, to which Joanna has no answer to give.

Eric Farnham joins them for lunch; he is in

uniform as he is now at the war office. Joanna asks him "how do you think the war is going?" She is immediately cut short by Mary, who says "we musn't ask him things; he's doing most frightfully secret work". This is lost on Eric, who, consulting his wristwatch informs them that Ponsonby is late and that they should begin their lunch.

Ponsonby joins them when they are well into their middle course. The men discuss the rationing of cigarettes, and ask if Joanna gets any at all in the country. Joanna says that it is difficult but not impossible. Mary continues the conversation by saying "I just get twenty out of my hairdresser".

Their talk continues around the scarcity of wine and how some varieties have already been "scratched off the wine list" at the restuarant.

Eric tells Joanna to come back to live in London as "we all miss you very much". Joanna tells them that her house in Belmont Square is not livable now, probably due to the air raids. Eric, however, pursues the subject of her residence and tells her to move into a flat with someone, like all others are doing these days. Mary says that it is very difficult to live with anyone these days as there are no permanent arrangment possible. As Bowen describes it: "Mona moved out almost at once and moved in on Isobel, but the worst of that is that now Isobel wants her husband back, and meanwhile Sylvia's taken up with a young man, so Mona

can't move back to her own flat". She adds that for Joanna with her "hens" it would be almost impossible to live in a flat. Joanna also informs her that her country house is now housing 'evacuees'. Joanna also says that in the country these days, "everyone gets so wrapped up in their own affairs".

Mary feels that in London "one lives in a perfect whirl of ideas".

They discuss everything from "veal" to the "poles" and the French, until Ponsonby says he must leave as he has an appointment. Eric says he can wait a little, so he waits with Mary and Joanna. Mary is worried about her eggs which she has given to the waiter for safe keeping. She is already conjuring up visions of the omelette she wishes to make. "One seems to think of twenty things at one time" she adds and hopes the waiter has not disappeared with the eggs, as he "hasn't been near this table again". She requests Eric to call the "maitre d' hotel" so that she can trace the waiter as she says "I don't know how I'd feel if I lost three eggs".

Bowen has, very effectively, through the inconsequential chatter of these people, placed before the reader true life situations existing in wartime England. There was a paucity of funds, shortage of essential commodities like food and luxuries like cigarettes and wine were heavily rationed. People had to somehow manage to live. Their bombed

houses were creating shortage of accommodation in the city. This led to flat sharing and its embarrassing consequence. This is a realistic presentation of distorted life in wartime England.

VI 'The Demon Lover':

This is the harrowing account of a woman in wartime, who comes to her London house from the country; the house has been shut for sometime as there is an exodus to the country for safety against air raids; here, in the London house, she gets the distinct feeling of being watched, not by any "human eye" but by a supernatural being. Every incident lends "heightening apprehension" to the tale, until the climax brings to a halt every vestige of sanity she may have left.

Mrs Drover comes to her "shut up" house to look for several things she wanted to take back home to her husband, her little boys and her sisters. It is late August and had been "a steamy, showery day". As she turns her latchkey in "an unwilling lock", "dead air came out to meet her" as she goes in. Bowen creates a weird and gloomy atmosphere, with every movement and action suggesting impending doom.

Mrs Drover sees all the "traces of her long former habit of life" in her London house, the "yellow smoke stain up the white marble mantelpiece" and "the ring left by a vase on the top of the escritoire". Mrs Drover put down her parcels (she had been shopping) and proceeds upstairs, as

the things she wanted were in a bedroom chest. She was anxious to see how the house was, as the part-time caretaker who was away on holiday, was someone "she was never sure that she trusted". There were cracks in the structure "left by the last bombing".

She stopped dead and stared at the hall table - "on this lay a letter addressed to her". Her first thought was that the caretaker had returned. Yet why should a letter be dropped in a closed house? Everything that came by post was redirected to her country address! She is astonished to find that the letter "bore no stamp". Then how had it come? She took the letter to her former bedroom upstairs and read it:

Dear Kathleen: You will not have forgotten that today 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 in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged. Until
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then..."

When Mrs Drover looks at the date "it was today's". She picks up the letter to see the writing again - her lips began "to go white" as she recognizes her old lover's hand. In the mirror, she sees herself as she was "a woman of forty-four", the pearls her husband had given her

on her marriage hanging loosely round her now thinner throat. She unlocks the chest where she has kept her things locked, opens the lid and begins to search. Outside it has started raining. The clock strikes six. She suddenly remembers the words of the letter "The hour arranged". -- "My God" she said. What hour? How should I? -- After twenty five years --.

Her mind goes back to events a quarter century ago. Here Bowen uses the 'flash back' technique so routinely used in films.

There is a young girl talking to a soldier in the garden. The author here emphasises that the girl "had not ever completely seen his face". She, in fact "verified his presence" by putting out her hand on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform. This hand was "pressed painfully", so the "cut of the button on the palm of her hand was what she carried with her as a physical wound which then became a memory". The soldier was at the end of his leave from France in August 1916. There was something about her lover that was frightening, for even then she wanted to run back into the safe arms of her mother and sister. Yet he was her fiance, and he kept telling her to await his return. He extracted a promise from her which she felt compelled to give. She felt that she could not have "plighted a more sinister troth". From this it can be interpreted that there was something overpowering in the demeanour of the soldier. He extracted a promise from a girl who feared him rather than loved him.

There is something sinister about the way she never sees his face. What could have compelled her to accept him, in spite of no encouragement from her own family remains a mystery.

Some months, later, her fiance is reported missing, probably killed. Her family supports her and praise her courage in face of adversity, but they do not regret as to what has happened, as they hardly knew the man.

It seems strange for a young girl to enter into an engagement in those days of this century, without her family knowing the man. For Kathleen, behind her grief, is "completely dislocated" from everything. There is some fear psychosis she is suffering from vis-a-vis the man who is now presumably dead. She waits and waits but neither her soldier--fiance nor other suitors appear. It is with relief, eventually, at the age of thirty-two, that she accepts the hand of William Drover. They live in this Kensington house, where her children are also born. They migrate to the country only when the bombs of the next war drives them out.

The flashback recedes as she brings her consciousness back to the present. Was the letter writer a live person? Could he be watching her? How else did he refer to her leaving London for the country? Had he sent her a letter to pin her down to her promise given years and years ago? Had she not waited long enough before she had married Drover? It must be her former lover's ghost who had written

the letter and she must have imagined it. But no - the letter "lay on the bed". It was a tangible thing after all. Who, in London, could have known she was to come today? Evidently this had been known and the letter has been planted by a human hand. She remembered that the caretaker had a key. Could this lover of hers have connived with the caretaker to plant the letter there on this day? She also realizes that a house could be entered without a key by a thief or a person with a sinister intention. Why, she may not be alone this very minute. The clock strikes six. She might be waited for downstairs. She again thinks of the letter and its contents.

She rises from her chair and locks the door. She realizes that she must catch her train. She makes a number of parcels out of the items she has taken from the chest. Her movements are rapid, yet she is fumbling. With her shopping parcels her luggage becomes too much to carry by herself. She decides to ring for a taxi, till she realizes that the telephone is cut off.

Her overwrought nerves get the better of her. She wishes to run away from the letter, the letter-writer and the mess he might land her into. She had been attracted to his devilish charm, but he was never kind to her. He had desired her with a peculiarly frightful intensity, but did not give her love. He made her promise marriage to him and she did promise it.

She remembers with "dreadful acuteness" the events of twenty-five years ago; she instinctively feels for the weal left by the button on the palm of her hand. Yet she cannot remember his face. She is in an irrational mood. How can she feel a weal on her hand after twemt~~u~~-five years? She consoles her fears by saying she would not know him even if she saw him. This is her guilty conscience. She must have seen his face - she only says she has not, to assuage her fear of meeting him and being confronted by him about the promise she did not keep.

She wishes to run away. She is behaving in a manner alien to her 'prosaic' self. "Utter-dependability was the keystone of her family life". Then what is wrong with her today?

She unlocks the door and goes outside. A draught of air travels up to her face from the basement. A door or window is being opened by someone who "chose this moment to leave the house". She is petrified.

The rain has stopped. The damages of war can be seen all round, intermingling with the 'ordinary flow of life' -- "women, a perambulator, cyclists". At the corner she sees only one taxi. She wants to take the taxi back to her house to pick up her luggage. The one taxi she sees appears to be "waiting for her". Without looking round, the taxi driver start the engine as she "panted up from behind" and "put her hand on the door". Just then the "clock

struck seven" - "the hour arranged", of the letter. The taxi is facing the main road; to go back to her house, it would have to turn. As she settles back on the seat, the taxi has turned before she recollects that she has not told him where to go. The driver seems to know her destination! This is unbelievable! So she leans forward to scratch at the glass panel dividing the driver and passenger.

What ensues is truly dramatic. The driver brakes to a halt, turns around and slides the glass panel back. The jolt of this flings Mrs Drover forward, till her face is almost in the glass. When the driver and passenger are scarcely six inches apart, they "remained for an eternity eye to eye". The petrified Mrs Drover sees her 'demon lover' of twenty-five years ago, in the face of the taxi driver, and she screams and screams, beating her "gloved hands on the glass all round" as the taxi gathers speed and drives off with her into the remote, deserted streets.

Mrs Drover has broken a promise which in those days had the sanctify of a serious commitment. As she sees the letter, she fears meeting the man. He must have been a diabolical fiend who has pulverized the young girl into accepting his hand in marriage, by the force of his magnetic personality. Since he has extracted the promise, he is sure to see that she keeps it, as he says nothing has changed.

The horrendous climax is due to the irrational fear built up in Mrs Drover because she sees and reads the

letter. Though she says the date was today's, could it be possible that the year of the letter was a figment of her imagination? The fear that the letter-writer is alive and will come and confront her, sends her into a state of terror. It is the malign, vengeful ghost of her 'Demon Lover' which is playing havoc with her nerves. Though she is married and settled, being alone in the old empty London house and finding the letter sends her into an imaginary psychic state. She feels he will ask her for an explanation. Angus Wilson says that in this story 'a woman's fickleness breeds its own horror'. She sees in the face of the taxi driver the face of the ghost of her lover and thinks she is being abducted. She loses all control and becomes a hysterical woman with no reasoning capacity left.

In Bowen's wartime stories, ghosts often make an appearance - benign or vengeful. She is dealing with fear psychosis and frayed nerves in wartime, rather, than individuals. Her ghosts are a 'certainty'. They make 'sense of life, not nonsense'. The point of view in this story is from Mrs Drover's side. The atmosphere which inspired the story - the shutup, blitzed house on an August afternoon demanded some kind of a 'ghost' as a "raison d'etre". The story also shows how Bowen makes a deliberate use of Gothic elements like ghosts to portray the crisis brought about by the war.

Allan E. Austin has written "The Demon Lover" is a

ghost story that builds up and then culminates like an Alfred Hitchcock movie" Hughes says that it is "a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion and the culmination of pananoia in wartime". The title is taken from the English Ballad 'The Demon Lover' where an inconstant woman betrays her absent lover and marries another. When the wealthy lover returns years later, the woman is quick to abandon both husband and children. Too late, she discovers that the lover is, in fact the devil. Bowen's story only superficially resembles the ballad.

The beauty of 'The Demon Lover' lies in the skill with which the author in the shortest possible space, reveals how Mrs Kathleen Drover loses her way on the path leading from a crumbling present to a permanent but terrifying past.

"After her fiance was reported missing and presumed killed in action, Kathleen Drover suffered a severe nervous breakdown. So when the story opens, her mental health is fragile".¹⁴

The shock of what she encounters on her return catapults Mrs Drever into a hallucination that conjures up the First World War. She returns to a mirage of August, 1916, when she was bidding farewell to her soldier lover at the end of his leave. The piquancy of memory compels her to imagine that this man has written a letter to her, addressed to her London house, reminding her that he is still waiting for her. As she struggles to escape his hold on her, the

reader realizes that what she is really trying to flee from are demons created by her own mind. Her helpless surrender to this nameless demon suggests the impersonal power of the war to invade the depths of her inner life".

VII 'Sons^g My Father Sang Me', exhibits the trauma of a young man who has returned alive from the war, to his wife and child, hoping to have a peaceful, loving home life after the throes of wartime. Instead he finds himself 'jobless' and this frustrates his wife, who wants him to earn money for the family's upkeep. She is not kind or considerate and is insensitive to his emotional needs. She is enamoured of her rich sister's crowd of friends. Eventually she gets a job for her husband which in no way befits an ex-officer of the British Army. He starts working only to keep his family's 'fires burning', but when his wife accuses him of not earning sufficient money, or perhaps spending it on another woman, he revolts. He takes his daughter with him, gives her a birthday treat, then leaves her and abandons his wife and disappears, never to return. Perhaps he does this because he realizes that his daughter is not 'his' but the child of another man, with whom his wife had an affair with in his absence.

He also goes away from an atmosphere where he receives no peace of mind. When he says "how I loved her" he refers to the woman he loved and England, the country he loved and fought for. He has lost both. The woman he loved turned out to be faithless and the country he loved could

not give him the peace he needed. The child he loved was also not his - when he leaves, it is significant that in his last letter he labels her as "the property of Mrs So and So of such and such" (his wife's Name and Address).

On the other hand, the child has always loved the father and has noticed how her mother has been jealous of their relationship. The child too is shattered when she learns, inadvertently from her mother, that her father is not her real father.

To the child, who is later abandoned by her mother as well, the warmth of that relationship remains in some corner of her heart. She remembers him with affection and recalls even the songs he used to sing. His singing signified his need for freedom of expression, which was denied to him by his wife. So he sang in the child's company instead.

Bowen's short story is a moving account of how war creates abnormal situations in human relations. Perhaps the child's mother also turned unfaithful to her husband in his absence, as the uncertainty of war creates an uncertainty about her husband's return. Her husband's frustrations are caused by unemployment and the lack of understanding and cooperation from his spouse.

The child grows up as a crippled being where affections are concerned. She learns to live for the moment. She is even afraid to display her feelings for her man-

friend, in case she is rebuffed or treated cruelly.

War dislocates normal human relationships. They fail to blossom in the uncertain atmosphere it creates. This is shown in this short story.

VIII 'Pink May': This is the monologue of a woman past her prime ("I should never see thirty again") who is speaking, in a way, to her inner self, her own conscience. Her conscience is giving her counsel when necessary. She is convinced that there is a ghost present during her stay in "that house", rented by her husband Neville. The 'ghost' used to make its presence 'felt' whilst she was dressing up to go out to meet her lover.

The title 'Pink May' denotes the Hawthorn (may) blossom. The title has nothing to do with the month of May, otherwise the author would have used capital letters for 'May'. The word 'Pink' denotes passion. The atmosphere created by the pink may blossom pervades the whole story. The questions asked are in 'Italics' -- suggestive of the ghost's presence. Unlike 'The Demon Lover' this ghost seems to have a benign presence. The woman, guilty of her immoral past, is now past her prime, living alone in a hotel and speaking to a friend. She reminisces about the house they used to live in when they (Neville and she) were together. They now are 'living apart'. "We broke up" she says. She is a shallow, worthless woman who is not willing to shoulder the responsibility of her own actions.

She cannot take criticism. Therefore she finds a 'whipping boy' in the ghost, and blames the ghost for her misdemeanours. She says the ghostly presence was responsible for her being late whenever she had an assignation with the man who was supposed to find her "restful". The "throaty smell of the may blossom was" also associated with her preparations to leave the house.

The woman and her husband had lived in this house, which they treated "like a flat". She says that "we were practically never in". She had no servant and Neville did the morning chores of percolating the coffee, while the "char" (charwoman) cleaned up the house after she left for her work at the depot. In the evening she would take a taxi back from the depot. She was very particular about returning to the house for a "bath and a change". She could not, like the other girls she knew, "go straight from the depot on to a date". She said "I can't go and meet someone unless I'm feeling special". So she would "hare home". The important fact was that "Neville was never in".

She then describes to her friend (while rapidly smoking) how when she was bathing or pottering about in her bath or busy with her toilette, a queer feeling of being watched would come upon her. When she went to see if she could spy someone, there would be no one. Perhaps it was the effect of the 'silence' of "an empty house?"

This experience repeats itself whenever she is

alone, dressing to go out. She feels she is "up against something". She feels that the ghost is that of a jealous woman.

Whenever she comes home, Neville is "like the dead". He is "abnormally done in". Even in the mornings his spirit is low; he is "exactly like someone walking in his sleep". They both exchange a few friendly words but there is no real communication between them. The shallow wife never seeks to reach out to him or try to break through his reserve. In wartime, perhaps he was troubled by something at work, or perhaps he was unsure of his wife's fidelity, but could not find any proof of it.

The woman's lover is also becoming a problem. Her unpunctuality at their appointment times begins to irritate him. He starts admiring girls who were younger. His interest in the woman was waning.

The story reaches its climax when a letter from the lover arrives when Neville is at home. The contents of the letter are unknown, but the letter perhaps helps Neville to crystallize all his earlier doubts about his wife's fidelity.

The monologue ends on a dramatic note with the woman saying that she is sorry she told her friend this story, as she seems to be doubting her veracity. She says she definitely saw a ghost repeatedly, and it "ruined my whole life".

"Don't you see, can't you see there must have been something? Left to oneself, one doesn't ruin one's life!"

Bowen shows the shallowness of the speaker, laying the blame for her personal crisis on the presence of a ghost. Bowen herself says that "the worthless little speaker in 'Pink May' found the war made a moratorium for her married conscience".

The woman is now living in a hotel. The hotel symbolizes impermanence and the lack of a home. Her vanity has been the indirect cause of her marriage breaking up. She is now leading a rootless existence. The war has given a death blow to yet another person's life. The symbolism of pink may blossom turning to 'brown' -- suggesting the decline of her life not only in years but in its substance -- is certainly a product of Bowen's concern with the universal tragedy of war affecting an individual.

The speaker of "Pink May", published during the long middle period of the war on October, 1942, invents "the Puritan 'other' presence" to make the young female character's drab life seem more exciting to her friend.

ix 'The Dolt's Tale': This is a first person narrative account of a man who was made a 'Dolt' (fool) of. The striking difference in this narrative as compared to the other war stories is the diction. It is the speech of an ordinary middle-class person using colloquial words and

slang words of common usage. The syntax is different from Bowen's usual, as most of her other stories deal with aristocratic people of 'the upper crust'. In this tale Bowen has shown another aspect of war - how in those desperate days when people were having a rough time with food supplies (rationing was the strict order of the day) there were some crooked people who indulged in underhand dealings. There were smugglers, blackmarketeers and others who conspired in illegal economic activity, taking advantage of the war to line their own pockets. This is an account of one such situation, where a trusting, innocent man is made a 'Dolt' of. His gullibility is his only fault.

The tale is an account, very realistically narrated, of how in wartime a simple trusting person could become a pawn in the hands of experienced crooks. These anti-national elements were the internal enemies England had to contend with in wartime. In writing this account, Bowen has given us another realistic aspect of wartime dilemmas.

X 'Mysterious Kor': This story has its inspiration from, Bowen's childhood reading of Rider Haggard's novel She. "Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it" -- are descriptions reminiscent of She. In this story one character is a soldier. He appears as a homeless wanderer round a city. This is a study of how inter - personal relations are by war climate. The descriptions of the moonlight drenching the city of London and making even "the black-out" futile is very effective. The war is pulsating

in every vein of the story - "The Germans no longer came by the full moon" and "people stayed indoor with a fervour that could be felt" and the "battered - down human life" are graphic descriptions of intensity. Since "not a voice, not a note from a radio escaped", the underground (railway) sounded loudest at this time. Two wardens could be seen coming off duty.

Bowen very poignantly describes how, in this atmosphere "a girl and a soldier" by their way of walking, "seemed to have no destination but each other and to be not quite certain of even that". He was tall, she little. The soldier Arthur is "homeless" on "this his first night of leave". In London there was no hope of any place of their own, where they could find solace in each other's arms. Pepita, the girl is obsessed with "Mysterious Kor" or the ghost city, symbolic of an ideal place. She recites

"Mysterious Kor thy walls forsaken stand,
They lonely towers beneath a lonely moon-"¹⁷

- this is Kor.

She speaks authoritatively about Kor, saying she knows all about it. She feels in her mind that it is "the one city left" which signifies peace and permanence. When Arthur mocks her for being fanciful, she asks him not to destroy her vision of it as she dreams of it as the one place where "We'd be alone". In her mind's eye it is what represents a haven beyond the plane of human existence, where peace reigns supreme.

The rest of the story is about Pepita and the two-roomed flat she shares with Callie her girlfriend. In London, it was considered lucky to get any accommodation at all in those days. So Arthur was to stay with the girls and sleep on the 'sitting room divan! It was an overcrowded little flat, and Pepita is exasperated that Callie does not have the sense to go elsewhere and leave the lovers alone. If only they were in Kor ---" Like glass, the illusion shattered".

Callie had set out three cups and saucers, tins of cocoa and milk and brought the kettle almost to a boil on the Gas Ring. Callie was innocent and unsought - out, unlike Pepita. In fact Bowen says of Callie that "she became the guardian of that ideality which for Pepita was constantly lost to view". Shy and brotherless she "shrank from sharing this flat with a young man". She and Pepita were to share a bed in the small bedroom. She is apprehensive of this also. However, when the lovers arrive she greets them happily and welcomes them.

She says it must have been wonderful for them, having the moon tonight. Callie, an old fashioned country doctor's girl, is juxtaposed with Pepita who is modern and knowledgeable. Yet in some childish corner of her heart, she has room for an illusory world of Kor.

Then the story describes how the three of them have to manage in that limited space. Whatever the girls.

speaking in the bedroom could be heard by Arthur on the divan outside. Finally Pepita falls off to sleep. Callie wakes up suddenly as the clock strikes the hour of four. She hears Arthur stumbling about in the next room. She joins him in the living room and asks if he wants anything. As there is a black out, she uses the torch for light. Arthur then asks Callie if she and Pepita get on each other's nerves. Callie admits "Not till tonight". It was tonight that for the first time they had to accommodate a third in the flat, hence the necessary adjustments had to be made.

Arthur apologises for the trouble he has caused. He then asks if she has a boyfriend, to which she answers "I've never had one". Arthur says perhaps it is better in today's world to be alone. He says of Pepita "It makes me feel cruel the way I unsettle her". He tells her how unsettling war can be for personal relationships. "War's not only just war; its years out of people's lives that they've never had before and won't have again". This is the main point being stressed in this tale.

Arthur continues his narrative regarding Pepita and the evening they had spent together. They could not get near the movies or "any place for sitting". The bars were overcrowded. So they took the tube to the park. It was also crowded, and it was cold too. So he said they began to play - "we were off in Kor". Kor is a ghost city. It is imaginary, but Arthur could almost swear that Pepita saw it. He said it was a hallucination which "gets in you and you

can't laugh it off". He says he too has been affected by this visionary dream of the ideal Kor. He feels that Pepita sleeps well because "that's where she goes" in her dreams. Arthur feels that if both of them want the same dream, there can be no harm in dreaming.

Callie, however, asks him to be realistic and "want what's human" and not illusory. He replies "To be human's to be at a dead loss". To face reality is to witness pain and feel it right to the inner core. He wants to run away from reality.

Callie goes back to bed, thinking of all Arthur has said. Below, the "street had a look of survival". She contrasts this reality to Arthur and Pepita's unrealistic dreams.

Pepita is asleep. She seems to be "in an avid dream of which Arthur was not the end. He was the password but not the answer. It was to Kor's finality that she turned".

Pepita is the epitomy of the young disillusioned hearts of wartime England, where reality was a raw deal and therefore the only refuge to be sought after was in the illusory, hallucinatory world the imagination offered.

"Mysterious Kor" is one of Miss Bowen's final renderings of the hallucinations precipitated by war. It represents the isolation, the withdrawal from time and reality, that are impossible for her and Arthur in an over-

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crowded and war-torn London". By re-creating a mysterious terrain suggested by a book read in childhood, Bowen removed her wartime characters to another time, another place and another country. The real action of Bowen's story, however, takes place in the minds of the decidedly middle-class characters pondering what remains to London".²¹

XI 'Summer Night' : Summer Night is a story set in Ireland. Bowen's descriptive power is at its peak when she tells us "As the sun set, its light slowly melted the landscape, till everything was made of fire and glass". She has evoked the whole atmosphere of Irish "haycocks" which "seemed to float on the after grass" and "the not far distance hills with woods up their flanks which lay in light like hills in another world".

The story begins on the "road" which "was in Ireland" and the "air of evening rushed transversely through the open sides of the car". The big shabby family car is being driven by Emma, with a coat on the back seat and a dressing case being "bumped against the seat" with the car's motion. As she drives she keeps looking at her watch. She is "driving parallel with the sunset". The "sun slowly went down on her right". She lights a cigarette, and "shakes her hair free" from her turban, in a gesture of sensuality. Her present existence is in "her hands on the wheel" and "in the sole of her foot in which she feels through the sandal, the throbbing pressure of the accelerator". Her face is

"enlarged by blown-back hair"; her eyebrows are black and the pupils of her eyes dilated.

She drives on and on until she comes to The A.A. sign of the hotel hung from under a balcony. She edges in to the place where it says "Do not Park". It is symbolic that she parks her car there, as if she is out to break all norms.

She has decided to let herself go! She runs up the steps, breathlessly, upto the receptionist's desk and can hear the people in the bar behind the glass panel. When the receptionist asks if she can do anything for her, Emma replies "I want the telephone - want to put through a call". She is told that this is the 'dog racing' evening. Emma orders herself a drink and waits for her call to come through. The person at the other end is obviously expecting her call. He asks if all is well and if there is anything wrong. When she mentions how far she has come, he tells her to take it easy and not drive too fast. She addresses him with the endearment 'Darling' and he says, "Emma -- How is the Major?"

The next part of the story takes us to the place where the man who spoke to Emma lives. His name is Robinson. He has just hung up the receiver. He goes into the living room where "his two guests were". They are Justin Cavey and his deaf sister Queenie. The room is in this 'uphill' house. The deaf woman gives a penetrating smile. Justin, a city -

man, has come here on holiday to be with his sister. On previous summer -- holidays he has travelled in France, Germany and Italy. This summer, because of the war, he has come to Queenie. His father had been a doctor here and now his sister lives in two rooms in the square. Queenie has accomodated her brother in a hotel to make him comfortable during his holiday. He has to share Queenie's meals; her world was a "solitary and almost fairy like one" created by her deafness. Her other faculties were sharp and it was as if she has an uncanny understanding of human nature. He could not talk to her, so that created a barrier between them.

In her middle age, Queenie was very pretty; in summer she wore dresses with little lace collars and walked up the main street with a parasol. She did her errands as calmly as a cat. She had adjusted well to her handicap -- she enjoyed showing - off her brother at afternoon or evening teas. He enjoyed these outings, for a couple of hours of chatter would help to dispel from "the screen of his own mind" the distorted war images of Europe. "In the heart of the neutral Irishman indirect suffering pulled like a crooked knife"²². So he devours the society around him. He renews old acquaintances and develops new ones. They met Robinson, factory manager, in the hall of the house of the Secretary of the tennis club.

Robinson was a married man living apart from his wife. He worked at "very high pressure" in his factory

office. He had a high - powered car. He had winning ways with women. When Justin met him he felt a "disturbed attraction to the big, fair, smiling, offhand cold-minded man". Somehow, juxtaposed with Robinson, Justin's own piques and weaknesses seemed to come into focus. Once, when talking to Robinson in the hotel bar, he had talked until he burst into tears. "The two men were so far off each other's beat that in a city they would certainly not have met".

Robinson had asked the Caveys to drop in some evening, so tonight they had taken him at his word. Their discussion centres around how there should be "a new form for thinking and feeling". Justin feels that "our faculties have slowed down without our knowing, they have stopped without our knowing". He also feels that "we can no longer express ourselves". What we say does not approximate to reality. He feels that "this war's an awful illumination; its destroyed our dark; we have to see where we are. Immobilized"²³. Robinson gave Justin another drink and Justin said he admired his genius. Robinson, however, says he was in the last war, but does not remember thinking, as one had no time. Robinson feels that Justin should think and he thought he did think from the way he spoke. Justine revolts saying he couldn't think if he wanted as he had "lost" his "motivation".

He asks Robinson if he finds this place a little slow. He also suddenly asks him, "What's love like?" To Justin, Robinson seems an experienced person.

In answer to this query, Robinson "uttered a shortish, temporizing" and "unnaturally loud laugh".

In the meantime Queenie has been at the window sill, looking out at the cyclists and walkers on their way into town. As she feels the vibrations of Robinson's loud laugh, she turns round. She looks at Robinson and Justin.

Justin begins to feel irritated with Robinson and says "Anything I may have said about your genius I do absolutely retract". Robinson says he is sorry if he has offended Justin in any way. He also says that regarding his sister Queenie, he never realizes she is deaf. She seems to emanate sensitive understanding. He asks if she is fond of children. Justin says "you mean, why did she not marry?" He went on to explain that there was some fellow once but nothing progressed, possibly because of her handicap.

Robinson then gets up, takes from the mantelpiece two of the photographs in silver frames and shows them to Queenie. Queenie seems really happy to see his children's photographs. Justin sees his sister bent forward in study and Robinson leaning against the window. They seem to communicate with one another in a special way. This is because Queenie is sensitive to the smallest nuances made. Surprisingly she speaks to Robinson saying "Aren't they very like you?" Pointing to one picture, Robinson holds up ten fingers and eight when pointing to the other. This indicates their ages - ten and eight. Queenie seems reluctant to part

with the photographs. To Justin the two of them seem "wedded and welded by the dark". Justin feels an outsider in their company. He intuitively feels that Robinson has a special communication with Queenie. It is a communication of warmth. Justin suddenly feels left out and lonely and thinks "They are both against me. She does not hear with her ears, he does not hear with his mind. No wonder they can communicative".²⁴

Queenie suddenly says "Its a wonder that you have no little girl". Robinson had shown her his sons photographs. Now he takes another photograph, passes his hand over it, but hesitates to show it to Queenie. "She's quite right; we did have a girl" he said, "But I don't know how to tell her the kid's dead".²⁵

Sixty miles away, Emma's husband, the Major is making his last round through the orchards before shutting up the house. He had watched Emma, his wife, drive away. He is a tall, un-military looking man with a stoop and thinnish drooping moustache. He has a "slight frown of doubt" which has intensified in the last month. Just then his wife rings up and says she has rung up to wish him goodnight. She asks after the children. She tells him the car is running "like a bird". She tells him that she is calling from a hotel where "dog racing" is on.

He asks his wife if the people she was going to visit would be sitting up for her at this late hour. She

replies in the affirmative. He thanks his wife for calling. She replies "I was thinking about you". This he does not seem to hear. He tells her to take care of herself and "have a nice time".

Aunt Fran is in the drawing room. She is elderly and lives with the Major in this obscure country house. When her nephew the Major comes in she asks if all is well. When he tells her the call was from Emma, she tells him that Emma had "seemed undecided up to the very last" about going on this trip. In fact, in the afternoon it seemed to Aunt Fran that Emma was having second thoughts about going. The Major tells his aunt that "its nice for her, having this trip". He is referring to Emma. He then unloads the fallen apples from his pocket, which he had picked and places them in the house.

The Major goes to see his daughters. Their "two beds creaked" and "their room smelled of toothpaste". When their father entered their room, his daughter Di asks him to sit on her bed on "It;'s my turn to have a person tonight". This shows the loneliness the girls are experiencing in their mother's absence. They wanted to know why their mother had telephoned and whether she had reached her destination. Di says "it seems years since she went" and tells her father about Aunt Fran's apprehensions that "something will happen". The Major reassures them that their mother was returning tomorrow and all would be well.

When the girls, Vivie and Di, are left alone they talk about their father and what "makes him so disappointed" and decide that it is because "he thinks about the war". Di fell asleep but Vivie is unsettled. There is some animal like quality in this child. She gets up, "stepped out of her nightdress and set out to walk the house in her skin"²⁶. She walks around from room to room, and through the door to the kitchen, sees a maid in a man's arms. She goes to the schoolroom, and then straddles the rocking - horse they had not ridden for years. She then "got out the box of chalks" and began "to tattoo her chest, belly and thighs with stars and snakes, red, yellow and blue"²⁷. Then, with the box of chalks she goes to her mother's room and there in front of the mirror she attempts "to tattoo her behind". The electric light over the dressing table illuminates Emma's "left-behind silver things". The noise she makes when she climbs on to the bed, causes Aunt Fran to remark, eyes raised to the ceiling, "something has got in". The Major tells her not to worry as it was probably nothing. Whereupon his Aunt "wheeled round on him" and said, "It's never me, never me, never me! Whatever I see, whatever I hear its "nothing", though the house might fall down. You keep everything back from me. No one speaks the truth to me but the man on the wireless"²⁸. Her pent-up frustration at being an unimportant member of the family spills out. She feels she is not a part of it, and is only cosseted and looked after. When she tells her nephew all this he allows her to go and have a look to satisfy herself.

Aunt Fran goes to Emma's room and with a shock takes in "the child and the whole room". Vivie is on the bed, breathless, with legs apart. She says "I am all over snakes". Aunt Fran is speechless for a moment and then says "The bed you were born in---- Do you not know what is wicked? She then begins to tidy the bed. She asks Vivie if she has prayed tonight. When Vivie says 'yes' she answers, "They didn't defend you. Better say them again. Kneel down and say to our Lord---" In my skin?" says the child--²⁹ Suddenly Aunt Fran looks away from Vivie's naked body, as if the sight is too much for her Victorian morals, and gives her "the eiderdown" to "Wrap up" in. Vivie is not willing to listen, for she does not want the "snakes" that she has drawn with chalk on her body to be wiped off.

Aunt Fran is undaunted and "as though the child were on fire" put into motion "an extraordinary strength" and wrapped the child in the eiderdown, making her look like a sausage, saying "Now say to our lord---"

This experience has a shattering effect on the old Aunt, as her very foundation of values are rudely jolted. She never felt free to pray "until they were all prostrate" (asleep) and that is when she felt they were "loaned for at least some hours to innocence". Tonight, she cannot pray, as she feels "The blood of the world" poisoned. Her encounter with Vivie's naked body has shaken her.

She feels that "There are no more children; the

children are born knowing". Actually, Vivie has only played an innocent prank which is misconstrued by Aunt Fran. Aunt Fran also disapproves of Emma going off all alone. She somehow feels that "This is a threatened night". Aunt Fran is "undone". The war and its generation of men, women and children are a far cry from the generation of Aunt Fran's vintage.

The story then goes back to Robinson's house where Queenie is seeing the photographs of the third child. She can, with her deep inner sense, make out that the child is dead. Justin asks Robinson if his children come to him. Robinson says they are at present with their mother, but that he wishes to arrange to have them with him.

Justin then tells him that the local ladies thinks he keeps "a Bluebeard's castle" in his house. This refers to the old tale of Bluebeard murdering women. Robinson is surprised that he has got such a reputation. He asks whether he should throw a traditional tea party and invite people over, to dispel their imagined picture of him as a rogue. He asks if Queenie would do him the honour of pouring out the tea (being the hostess for the party). He also asks if Queenie has this bad impression about him. Justin says "you're forgetting again; she misses the talk" (local gossip). He also adds that her sister has never been happier, as she has built up a romantic image of Robinson's house.

Robinson seems to be waiting for some one. Justin connects this with the telephone call he received. Somehow it strikes Justin that Robinson had been "marking time" with them whilst waiting for someone. "Stiff with anger" Justin rises to leave. When he makes gestures to Queenie to leave with him, she innocently asks "Why, does Mr Robinson want us to go?"

"That's the last thing I want" Robinson shouts. Justin snubs him by saying "she can't hear you". In the light the faces of the three of them wear a "different face of despair". "My brother thinks we've kept you too long" Queenie says. She looks a little shaken and unsure of herself. Robinson did not wish to hurt. He took and nursed her elbow, which was tensed earlier but began to relax with his tender touch. Just then "a car pulled up at the gate". The driver, obviously "alarmed by the lit window" cut off its lights, and wanted to drive in quietly. "Your friend is arriving" Justin says.

The person in the car is Emma. She sees "down the drive, a man and woman almost in flight". Emma came to Robinson's living room just as he turned off the top light. She embraces him in relief after her long tedious car journey. She asks him who his visitors were. Robinson replies "They are just people in this place. He's a bit screwy and she's deaf, but I like them, as a matter of fact".

Emma then asks for a drink. There is no one in the house besides the two of them. Though she has come to meet Robinson for a romantic interlude, "you could feel the whole of her hesitate". Robinson "then spread the broad of his hand against the small of her back". Emma tells him she has very little time at her disposal as she "must go on to - where I'm supposed to be". This immediately tells us everything about Emma, her secret assignations, her ability to lie and deceive her steady, decent husband. Yet there is "her naivety as a lover". She is probably experimenting with danger and has not mastered the art as yet.

She sees the photographs of his children and says, in a perverse way that she wished he didn't have them. She adds that her own children are "not so much like children". Robinson then tells her "If they're like you, those two will be having a high old time - with the cat away³¹". This important statement reveals Robinson's true opinion of Emma. He considers her easy game, and is only attracted to her physically. She does not penetrate his inner being.

Emma is impressed with Robinson's affluence ('what a whole lot of gadgets you have' --- 'they must cost a lot of money') calm air and easy sophistication. Emma gets the feeling that she is not really needed by him. She asks him if she was wrong in coming.

To this he firmly answers "That's for you to say", making it clear that the decision to have illicit relations

with him would have to be hers. She replies that she hardly knows him whilst Robinson says "we'll be getting to know each other". When he finds her hesitating, he again tells her that if she cannot go through with this it is better to return to the safety of her home. He also adds that she could do this and she would. Emma tells him of her frustrations.

They go to the garden. Somehow she feels that "he had broken her fairytale". He seemed so experienced "on the subject of love". Somehow, there seems to be no consummation of their love, because they do not really reach out to each other - Emma, because of her inhibitions and Robinson because she does not really touch his inner being.

In the meantime, Justin drops his sister to her house in the square and goes to his hotel. In his "small harsh room" he began to look around at his belongings, and then started writing a letter to Robinson. In his letter he apologises for having gone to his house tonight. He thanks him for his hospitality to his sister and himself. He said he did not know that he (Robinson) was expecting someone and neither did his sister realize how 'de trop' (unwelcome, not wanted) they were in that situation.

He refers to the conversation they had and says it is obvious that they are not one another's type, so it would be best to end the acquaintance. He adds that it will be a matter of indifference to him (Robinson). He said that his

inefficacies must have been revolting to him. He says that he himself has fine notions of love but no one seems to respond to him, whereas Robinson attracts all women. He tells Robinson that he will not know "any more about love" because he treats women as easy prey. He adds that if the "being outside your gate" had come to him (Justin) instead, she might have found out about the sentiment of genuine love. Regarding his sister, he requests Robinson not to discontinue his kindness to her as she would be perplexed if he did.

He then goes to post the letter. It is past midnight. On his way to the letter box he was walking towards Bellevue (Robinson's residence); later, on his way back, "he still heard the drunken woman sobbing against the telegraph pole".

Justin feels that the woman has been treated shabbily by Robinson and it serves to confirm his earlier picture of him as a heartless Romeo, trifling with women's affections. There is a jealousy roused in him by Robinson; as no woman approaches Justin, he has to live only with his illusions of true love.

The story ends with Queenie undressing and getting ready to go to bed. She is happy because she is reminded of "just such a summer night, once only" when "she had walked with a lover in the demesne". His hand, like Robinson's, had been on her elbow, but she had guided him, because "she had

better eyes in the dark". They had sat by the lake. She had then been deeply contented. She never saw her lover again and soon forgot his face. This incident took place twenty years ago, "till tonight when it was now". "Tonight it was Robinson" who took the place of her lover. The kindness that Robinson shows her and their intuitive understanding of each other, makes Queenie transpose Robinson for her lover of long ago.

This long short story exhibits many aspects of Bowen's thinking processes. The understanding between Queenie and Robinson is intuitive, despite her handicap. He feels a gentleness and desire to protect her. This feeling is not inspired in him by the willing Emma, towards whom he is only physically attracted.

Justin's way of thinking has been crippled by the war neurosis he is undergoing. He therefore feels jealous of Robinson who is all that he is not - materially well off, confident, poised, sure of himself and attractive to women.

The Major, although he has some doubt in his mind about his wife's fidelity, does not prevent her from going off alone on an adventure. He allows her the freedom of choice between the stable life he offers, and the adventurous world outside.

Aunt Fran is a representative of old values and she tries to maintain them, despite having to struggle for their survival.

Bowen is at her best when describing disturbed children in this story. Vivie's innocent prank displays her animal spirits and her restlessness and insecurity in her mother's absence. She can sense that something is wrong, somewhere.

Emma - the choice of her name is significant as Bowen may be referring to "Madame Bovary's" (Flaubert) Emma, who also stepped outside the safety of her home to seek new pastures. She is selfish, leaves her children behind and yet, when she is faced with the situation, she is unable to go ahead on that path. Before she leaves the house even Aunt Fran notices her hesitation. So she drowns her sorrow in drink and leaves Robinson's house, sobbing against the telegraph pole. She has decided to go back as she finds no adequate response from Robinson. May be her conscience gets the better of her. She is basically shallow by nature, but not an evil person.

Robinson is an interesting, wellsettled man. He loves his children' understands Queenie and even wishes to nurture her. Though Emma is easy game for him, he does not pursue her further. He sees through her shallow nature. With Queenie, he establishes a special rapport. He is tolerant of Justin and his ways because he understands how the war has ravaged his inner self. He is mature enough to handle all these situations he finds himself in with finesse.

Queenie is the handicapped person who is extra - sensitive. She understands small nuances in human nature. Bowen wishes to show us that she is perhaps the happiest person in the story, as she cuts herself off from reality and lives in a world of silence, which gives her ultimate peace.

"Summer Night" is an exploration of the relation of the ego, the self, to a world in which values have been destroyed and the dependable patterns of social and familial relationships dislocated. As William Heath has pointed out, the entire story is played against the backdrop of the ultimate dislocation resulting from war. But the war pense is only one chaotic and destructive element among many in this story and they are all symbolized by the "summer night" which dominates the story from its opening at sunset to its bitter and dreamlike close at midnight".³²

"Bowen dramatizes her sad conviction that there can be no escape from war, not even in neutral Ireland. The title echoes, 'A Summer Night', Auden's poem about the summer of 1933, which was published in 1934. Emotion rules 'A Summer Night' in a manner and intensity reminiscent of some of D.H. Lawrence's short stories. 'A Summer Night' also unearths a core of Lawrencian sexuality that she rarely invokes in fiction".³³

~~XII~~ 'The Inherited Clock': This is an unusual story about the inheritance of two young people who are joint - heirs to

their aunt's property.

Cousin Rosanna Detter, now sixty-five was a wealthy woman who owned a house called Sandyhill. During the war, her servants, who were young, were conscripted, leaving her to live her life with a few old servants and a huge house which was more or less shut up except for a few rooms. Her two young heirs were Paul Ardeen and Clara Detter, respectively son and daughter of two of her first cousins. They were therefore second cousins to each other. Clara lived, as a child, with her widowed mother in a small house in Ealing; Paul with his "not prosperous" doctor father on the outskirts of an industrial town. Rosanna had named her heirs in their infancy and insisted their expectations should be discussed freely. Apart from bequests to charities and legacies to old servants and £ 5000 for Addie Detter, her whole fortune was to be divided equally between the co-heirs. However there was an old clock that "not stopped ticking for more than a hundred years". This she had told Clara she was leaving to her.

As an only child herself, Rosanna enjoys seeing these highly spirited children quarrel among themselves. Their co-heirship had not created a happy tie" In fact "the children worked on each other like two indestructive pieces of sand-paper". Maybe Rosanna had entertained some "romantic spinsterish notion" that the two would eventually marry.

This is dispelled by Paul's marriage at twenty-

two, to Edmee, a blond like Clara, but of a different type. Two years later, at twenty-one, Clara meets her fate "in the person of Henry Harley", a married man who is forced to tell her that here is no prospect of changing his way of life. He is not well off, his wife has been irreproachable and the payment of alimony would cripple him financially and ruin his career. Clara chooses to continue the alliance. This has gone on for nine years, so Clara at thirty is unmarried. She is busy with war work and cannot visit Sandyhill often. The position of Sandyhill near the coast disqualified it as a hospital or repository for children. So far no soldiers had been billeted there.

In the will, Sandyhill is to go to Paul which he intends to sell. He expected it would do for a private asylum when peace would bring happier days.

Rosanna has inherited Sandyhill from her Great Uncle with substantial wealth. It also contains objets d'art. which are kept 'specklessly' when the servants have been around.

Clara comes to visit Cousin Rosanna. Inside where an ante-room leads to the library, Clara hears a clock expectantly ticking. Rosanna asks her if she is looking at her clock. In daylight, through its glass, one could see cogs, springs and tensions. Clara could not look at the clock without some kind of fear or neurosis.

For the "the anatomy of time" seems shocking.

Somehow, as far as she knows "She had not seen the clock before". Yet her Aunt Addie seems to keep telling her of an incident, when she was only six, with her mother, at Cousin Rosanna's. At that time Rosanna had told her mother of her intention of giving the clock to Clara. Just before returning, Aunt Addie and Clara's mother notice how Clara has "hurt the poor little forefinger" of her right hand. It is a shocking sight - black and blue with several small ugly cuts. Hoping to cheer her up, Clara's mother tells her "when Cousin Rosanna goes to Heaven she is going to send you her lovely skeleton clock". As soon as this is said, Clara bursts into tears and became hysterical. Even since that time, there is something about the clock that unsettles her, but she cannot remember seeing it or anything else.

She does remember, however, how Paul used to tease her and play games with her as a child. He is quite a horrid child and enjoys telling her gory stories of how in the Kiosk near the lake "they" kept "the headless ladies locked up in there".

Cousin Rosanna tells Clara how a man from Southstone has been winding the clock for the last twenty-four years. She also suddenly warns Clara to keep a careful watch on Paul as "he'll get his hands on it", since he has always wanted the clock.

As events turn out, this visit of Clara's to Sandyhill proves to be her last. Cousin Rosanna suddenly

dies and all of them attend the funeral except Paul, who "missed the necessary train".

A week later, Aunt Addie staggers into Clara's "St John's Wood" flat with the clock "embraced inside her exhausted arms". It is not packed, in case it may have stopped. Fortunately, it "Struck twice in the train" and "once again in the lift". So it is in working condition. Then Aunt Addie puts it down and tells Clara "I should not be surprised if this changed the course of your life". This baffles Clara. She cannot understand what is being referred to.

Clara is looking forward to a change in her life's prospects, when her inheritance would arrive. She has an obsessive love for Henry; he is the centre of everything. She looks forward to her inheritance money as she feels she could do something about Henry's divorce and then her marriage to him. She feels she could help him to give his wife alimony and compensate him for any damage his career would suffer with the scandal of a divorce. She feels that the minute she comes into money, Henry would divorce his wife. Does Henry require "the breath of financial summer" from Clara? That remains to be seen.

The newly arrived clock is ticking away. She turns away from it, as it reminds her of the time she has waited for Henry to become hers wholly. She telephones him, but as others are in the room, he can only give cryptic answers to

her. She tells him that the clock which Cousin Rosanna was to give her had arrived. From Henry's replies, it appears that he is not interested in this part of Clara's inheritance. He is interested in the money only.

Clara then rings up two friends of hers, but they are out. Then she puts on her overcoat and goes for a walk in the black-out. She walks and walks until she loses her way. She is restless inside herself - not satisfied with Henry's responses and also, she cannot understand why she has some fear psychosis regarding the clock. She is never comfortable in its presence.

Two mornings later, Aunt Addie rings up to announce that she had succeeded in finding an old man to wind the clock. She said, "Providentially, however, I am in time". When Clara asked her to explain she told her, "For the day it is always wound".

When Clara goes to work, she tells the porter to admit an old man who is to wind the clock, into her flat.

That evening, when she comes home, there is somebody 'beside the clock'. This turns out to be Paul! He is in his Khaki uniform. He seems quite comfortable in her flat, having arranged the black-out and turned on the lights. Clara asks him how he got into the flat. He tells her that someone who had come to 'wind the clock' let him in.

Paul's uniform fitted and suited him and gives him

an air of being "on excellent terms with the war". He asks Clara if she does not find the clock too large for her little room. "I shall be moving soon", Clara replies.

He then comes to the point and outright offers to buy the clock "off" her, in cash. Clara revolts. She says "why should you take it simply because you want it?" Paul replies "why should you keep it when you don't want it, simply because I do?" He also adds "Is it really worth going crackers?" He tells her to look at herself in the glass. Clara says she can see nothing wrong with her. Paul insists that this has had a fearful effect on her and is all for "keeping this in the family". Clara, suspecting his intentions being anything but honorable, tells him he could not get the clock out of her with any such ruse. She would rather "drop it out of the window" than surrender it to him. Paul says "In fact, I expect you've tried?" He was right. She had wanted to one night, but again was besieged with doubts. If she dropped it, the chance was that somebody passing by would raise the immediate alarm, as if a bomb had fallen. She feels, "suppose the tick stayed up here without the clock?" So she has not done anything.

Paul persists in saying that he is "simply stuck on this clock", and that Clara seems to be "stuck on the past".

Clara suddenly bursts out saying that she has no idea what he means by this. Neither did Cousin Rosanna, or Aunt Addie. She asks if the three of them had plotted

something to make her go mad. She says, "Everytime I am told I remember something I don't remember". "The first time I saw that clock was the last day I spent with Rosanna at Sandyhill. Then what is it about the clock she detests? "Did you, for instance, once put the clock O glass over my head, and did I get stuck inside it?"³⁴

Paul says he could enlighten her with the whole story. That part of the 'glass over the head' came later.

He then tells her that he has popped that thing over her head to stop her from blackmailing him.

He relates the story of how they were both very close to one another when they were young. They spent every holiday together at Sandyhill. If Rosanna had suspected their fondness for one another, she would have cut them out of her will.

He then tells her something about Cousin Rosanna that she did not know. He says that the clock signified time and when one is waiting one always looks at the clock. This clock has been Rosanna's obsession since childhood. She has experienced the pain of 'waiting' and is therefore obsessed with the clock which symbolized Time. Rosanna's life story runs thus. Her Great - Uncle, from whom she got Sandyhill and the money, did not die for a long time. So Rosanna had to wait during 'her best years' not only for her money but for her young man. The young man would not marry Rosanna without her money, and by the time she inherited it, he had

lost his patience and married another. In those days, divorce was a rarity. So Rosanna had to sacrifice romance and therefore found her consolation in money. She then looked around for fun. Clara and Paul were "her fun". The younger the heirs you name, the longer they have to wait and the more damage waiting can do to them. She had expected love and money, but had got only the latter. So she was embittered. So she did not want either of them to have both. She was happy that they loathed each other as children. Then Paul got married and Clara went into a 'stalemate' over Henry. This suited her. She could see that they were not really happy. Paul also tells Clara that Cousin Rosanna thought of her as a 'fellow-woman' and wanted her to have the clock. It was Rosanna's way of saying "Over to you". She also wanted Clara to have the clock because Paul had asked her for it 'point-blank'. Because Paul wanted the clock, Clara was to have it. Paul liked the clock and he was only nine when he asked for it. That was the day trouble began for them both.

Clara, her mother and aunt had come to Sandyhill for the day. Rosanna saw Paul watch the clock. She said "you like that, don't you" to which Paul said "Yes, I should like to have it". Just then Clara came prancing in (she was about six years of age) and Rosanna turned to her and said, "Clara, one day I intend you to have that clock. Do you know it has never stopped and never will?"³⁵

Clara says she remembers nothing. Fear envelops

Clara suddenly and she says "Paul you're simply making me worse. Leave that alone; its mine! (The clock). Paul then insists on allowing him to make an experiment or else she should go to a psychiatrist. He says he cares about what happened to Clara and does not want her to face this fear of the clock all her life.

The time shifts to their childhood. Paul is telling her how to see a minute go by wriggling one's hand inside the clock. So Paul takes out the glass dome and selects a finger of Clara's and forces it into the wedge of the springs. Her finger gets bruised, bitten into and eaten up by the cogs. Then Paul says jubilantly "we have stopped the clock". At that moment Clara starts crying because of her bruised finger. Paul tells her to be quiet.

The time is the present. Paul withdrew Clara's finger with a painful jerk. The clock stopped ticking. Her finger, which is grown now, does not get bitten so badly, as it cannot go in "so deep this time". Paul makes her repeat this childhood incident to expel her fear of the clock.

Then again the time switches to their childhood incident. It is a Friday. Paul puts back the glass dome over the clock and walks away. Half an hour later, the man from Southstone turns up to wind it. Paul trails him. The clock has stopped and this makes the man go pale with shock. He asks Paul to find Cousin Rosanna but he is unable to. Upstairs the ladies are attending to Clara's injured hand.

They cannot comprehend what has happened to it. In the meantime the man sets the clock going. He says he would report the occurrence to Rosanna next week. Unfortunately for him, he perishes under a bus coming the other way. "Any evidence perished with him", so Rosanna never got to know that the clock had once stopped. In gratitude, Paul and Clara both spent sixpence on the wreath for the poor man's funeral.

At the end of this tale Clara says she wishes to sit with her memories. She tells Paul to have the clock by all means. She thanks him for his help in exorcising the ghost of the clock forever from her subconscious. She asks if he will take the clock away with him.

Paul thanks her promptly, requesting her to keep it for him for a while till he came for it. He hoped it would not be in her way.

Clara tells him that she was expecting to move to a larger flat soon. She says "It is not very useful at present to tell the time by, but apart from that I should never know it was there".

This is an unusual tale, where a girl is led to find the key to her own neurosis inside a timepiece.

Bowen has excelled herself in her portraits of Cousin Rosanna (as an embittered woman who has been denied love and does not want others to enjoy it) Paul (as a wicked young child) and Clara the neurotic woman; who is gullible

regarding Henry's intentions.

Henry, it appears, intends to let things remain as they are, as he get the best of both worlds - wife and Clara. So Clara's fate is like that of Rosanna's--money without love.

The clock is Rosanna's life line. She keep track of time and while she 'waits', she watches it always. She leaves the clock to Clara out of perversity, but it appears that Clara is also going to face the same 'waiting' in her lifetime. The clock symbolizes time, and the tide of time which flows, irrespective of events and their consequences.

XIII 'The Happy Autumn Fields' : In this story one finds a woman projected from flying - bombed London, with its day and night eeriness into the key emotional crisis of a victorian girlhood. Despite the fullest war horror, the wife in this story finds relief from the dreadful sight of her bombed London house by reliving the events of a family of hundred years ago, found in an old diary in her house. It is a story occasioned by flashbacks to the Victorian past. This is due to the discovery of a box of old letters, diaries and photographs. It is a long short story, and the switch in time is very effectively shown.

In the beginning we are with the family walking party - Papa flanked by Constance and little Arthur, Robin and Cousin Theodore. Then come Emily, Digby and Lucius. Henrietta and Sarah are at the rear. They are landowner's children and it is the "eve of the brothers return to school". Constance is the daughter whose hands has already been sought in marriage. Sarah is feeling sorry about the boys return and Constance's forthcoming marriage, which will make her also leave them.

Henrietta and Sarah are twins, deeply attached and could almost instinctively read each others minds. Sarah does not wish to "ever wake in the early morning to any other sound except to the birdlike stirring of Henrietta". The attachment is so deep that Sarah thinks that "rather than they should cease to lie in the same bed she prayed they might lie in the same grave".

During their walk they meet their brother and their father's heir, FitzGeorge, who is in the army. He is accompanied on horseback by Eugene his friend, the young neighbouring squire. The narrative reveals that Sarah loves Eugene and he too is responding to her. Unfortunately Henrietta also fancies him, so Sarah is in an emotional crisis. They have never allowed anything to come between them so far.

Years later, Mary finds solace from the trauma of seeing her bombed house, in the emotional crisis of Sarah, described in a diary found by her. The war and its air raids are in full swing. A man called Travis looks after Mary as he is her fiance. He tells her that her London house is now unlivable. He tells her about "the alerts and more than alerts" that have been taking place all day. He cautions her about what would happen if there is "one more bang anywhere near, which may happen at any moment", and bring the rest of the left over house down.

He tells her she needs to sleep and that he has taken a room for her in a hotel. He knows she is experiencing an emotional trauma as she has called out "Henrietta" in her sleep. He asks her who Henrietta is but she does not answer. She does not want to scorn Travis for his "ignorance of Henrietta, Eugene, her loss". This is a result of what she has read when looking at an old leather box containing relics from the past. Travis asks if this is family stuff. She has no idea. She says "They may not even

be mine". Looking at these illegible letters and yellow photographs, she wants to be left alone to muse over them; she has found a photograph of "two young ladies, hand-in-hand in front of a painted field". Mary is told by Travis that he would come back for her in two hours. Seeing that these Victorian relics have upset her he took the box away, under his arm. She does not see him do this. He does this to prevent any further emotional problems she might superimpose on herself by her fertile imagination. He wants to spare her any further trouble after her recent trauma over the loss of her home.

In the second flashback to the Victorian close knit family circle, we see the girls with their mother, who is busy with her needlework. Eugene, beloved of both twins, is also there, after his foreign tour. Whilst addressing himself to Mamma, he seizes every moment to look at Sarah. He can see undeclared love in her eyes.

The sisters were very close and it was taken for granted they could comprehend one another intimately. So Henrietta guesses that Sarah loves Eugene. Sarah, who has never hidden anything from her twin, is in a state of 'dislocation'. Her secret is too great a burden for her to bear. Her Mamma guesses her secret. In the meantime, Eugene picks up from the carpet something that has fallen from Sarah's hand. He conceals it in his fine white handkerchief and keeps it in his breast pocket. He then tells Sarah that he would be back tomorrow. Sarah, steeped as she is in

nervous apprehension, replies, "But something terrible may be going to happen".

"There cannot fail to be tomorrow", Eugene said gravely. Suddenly Henrietta reacts and replies "I will see that there is tomorrow". Sarah asks Henrietta, "You will never let me out of your sight?" Eugene, addressing Henrietta said "Yes, promise her what she asks".

Henrietta's jealousy suddenly surfaces. She wants no one to come between her and her twin. So she cries out "She is never out of my sight. Who are you to ask me that, you, Eugene? Whatever tries to come between me and Sarah becomes nothing. Yes, come tomorrow, come sooner; come when you like, but no one will ever be quite alone with Sarah. You do not even know what you are trying to do. It is you who are making something terrible happen - Sarah, tell him that this is true! Sarah!"

The others in the room on the chairs and sofas, turned their eyes upon Sarah, who could not speak.

The time is the present again. The bombing is continuing. "The house rocked, the calico window split, and more ceiling fell". The enormous "dull sound of the explosion died"; Remembering the box, Mary finds it missing. Travis must have taken it.

There seemed nothing left to stay for here. She may as well go to the hotel. Since she has survived the fall

of the ceiling, her soul cannot go back to the fields of that Victorian story.

Eugene and Henrietta are lost in time to the woman weeping now, for she is in a great hour of crisis in her life in wartime London. She hears Travis come - Travis who is such a comforting presence. She tells him that in the world of today, people have deadened emotions - so they cannot relate to the sorrow of the people of bygone days. Today "we only know inconvenience". In olden days, blood flowed through peoples veins. Now the source of feeling has dried up, "so little flows through us". She tells Travis that, "All we can do is imitate love or sorrow".

She tells Travis that reading the old diary has been such a realistic experience that she can almost identify herself with those events and dream that she has had a sister called Henrietta.

Travis then tells her that in the last two hours he had been through the contents of the box. It appeared that Eugene had made some notes on Scientific Farming for his friend FitzGeorge. He also tells her that he has sorted out all the papers and that a lock of "ash blond" hair had tumbled out. Due to age, it had dessicated.

They leave the house in a taxi. Mary asks Travis if in his reading of these old papers, he has been able to find out if she is a descendant of Sarah's. Travis says that though there must be some reason for the papers being in her

house, that is not the reason. This is because from the evidence in the box, Sarah and Henrietta remained unmarried. There is no mention of either, after a certain date; in the letters of Constance, Robert or Emily. So Travis presumes they both died young. FitzGeorge, in a letter written to Robert, (in his old age) has referred to some friend of their youth who was thrown from his horse and killed, after riding back from a visit to their home. The young man whose name does not appear, was alone. The evening is a fine one in autumn. FitzGeorge says "he will always wonder what made the horse shy in those empty fields".

The trauma Sarah faces is that she and her twin love the same man. He begins responding to her, arousing Henrietta's jealousy. She (Henrietta) does not want anyone coming between them. Henrietta's outburst in the midst of her family assembled in the drawing room, must have wounded Sarah deeply.

Sarah's crisis lies in her having to choose between Eugene and Henrietta.

Rather than upset Henrietta, one can hazard a guess that Sarah committed suicide in the fields and later, when Eugene is riding home after a visit to their place to inquire after Sarah, the presence of her buried body made the horse shy. It can be further deduced that Henrietta could not bear the news of her twin's suicide, as she knows she is basically the cause of it. Unable to bear the

separation from Sarah and in remorse for the tragedy occasioned by her, she probably followed suit. They may have been "buried in the same grave", as this sentiment was voiced by Sarah many a time.

The very fact that there is no mention of the girls (FitzGeorge's friend's name is not revealed in the letter to Robert) means that something of a scandalous nature occurred which shook the morals of that Victorian family. Therefore they were never mentioned again.

This story in the diary has an emotional effect on the housewife of the wartime. Mary may have been a descendant of some other member of the family. These twins were perhaps her Great-Aunts, or else the old box would not have been found in her home.

Henrietta is always "so hopelessly out of order" that it is Sarah who was the more sensitive and understanding twin. She knows Henrietta is fond of Eugene and is jealous of the attention he pays Sarah. Eugene's love remains undeclared.

Mary experiences a psychic closeness to Sarah, almost as if her ghost is a benign presence in her London home, which is reeling under the air-raids. She begins to identify herself, for a period of time, so closely to Sarah that she regrets being in the present, where she has to carry the burden of being saddled with Mary's body and lover.

Bowen has juxtaposed the fullest war horror with an emotional crisis of a Victorian girlhood.

In 'The Happy Autumn Fields' she persuades us to believe that Mary, ignoring the danger that the bombed house is likely at any moment to collapse and bury her, merges her persona with that of the Victorian Sarah".³⁷

The central intelligence of "The Happy Autumn Fields" is a young woman, Mary. Mary has returned to the bomb-weakened residence that was home before the blitz, despite the protestations of her fiance Travis. Mary is one of Miss Bowen's chief illustrations of "fighting fear with fear".³⁸ "The powerful hallucination that infuses the story 'The Happy Autumn Fields' supplies a bond between Bowen's two primary landscapes of war: bombed-out London and the neutral green expanse of country cork".

XIV 'The Cheery Soul' : This is a first person narrative, account of what befalls an 'invited' guest at the home of the Rangerton - Karneys.

The household consists of two sisters, a brother and an elderly aunt who has been turned out of Italy. They are local people "of the most solid kind" and are on good terms with "bigwigs of every department". They are active in the promotion of every war effort. Yet in their personal lives they live austerely.

The guest, working in an Industrial town, twelve

miles distant, has been invited to spend Christmas with them. She is delighted, firstly, because she was not generally sought after and secondly, she dreaded spending Christmas alone in a strange town. She is looking forward to "the cheery welcome ahead" of her, but to her utter amazement finds her hosts absent, leaving no message for her. The elderly aunt is all alone there. On further investigation the guest finds no evidence of dinner being cooked in the kitchen for her. The kitchen is completely dark, and on switching on the light, a message "I AM NOT HERE" is seen inscribed on a piece of white paper.

The poor guest is at a loss to understand where her hosts are or why she has been subjected to this. On questioning the aunt, she is told that the last cook they had left a year ago last Christmas eve.

There is no evidence of any Christmas festivity. In the guestroom, which appears to be somewhat in readiness to house a guest, a message on the mirror, written in soap reads -- "DEARIE, DON'T MIND ME". Twisted around the cord of the hanging electric light, the guest finds "a spring of mistletoe".

The mystery does not show any signs of unravelling. Suddenly the door bell rings and there is the sound of 'imperious' knocking. When the guest opens the door, a policeman comes in and starts checking on the guest's identity. He asks when the absent hosts had issued the

invitation to spend Christmas with them. When the guest explains that this was given three days ago, the policeman says, significantly, "Just what they reckoned on. Not a soul was to guess they had planned to bolt. As for you, you're a cool hand, I must say. Just walked in, found the place empty and dossed down. Never once strike you there was anything fishy?"

The surprised guest is further told about the last cook who stayed for four days and left last Christmas Eve. The cook had given evidence that she could not tolerate "certain goings on". She had maligned her employers as "dirty spies with their noses in everything". Further investigation, the policeman said, was hampered as the cook died! It seems she left the house in an inebriated state and was last seen hurrying in the direction of the canal. Her body was recovered from the canal on boxing day. The policeman told the guest that she was lucky, or else she might have landed in "a nasty mess", as the Rangerton-Karneys were crooked people who had succeeded in running away from the scene of their misdoings.

The story suggests that the Rangerton-Karneys are people who do everything under the guise of respectability. The disappearance of the cook seems sinister. Perhaps she was done away with by them as she knew too much of their affairs and would have given them away when under the influence of alcohol. The cheeky messages left for the guest to read and imagine the existence of a ghost, were written

by the hosts themselves. They had the last laugh, giving their guest a taste of their hospitality in absentia.

The guest is made a fool of as she is gullible enough to fall prey to their plans. Indulging in unlawful activities, the Rangerton-Karneys made a getaway as planned, very effectively.

This story of Bowen's does not appeal much to the reader, as it does not really succeed in being a humorous tale or a ghost story.

XV 'In The Square' : This is an account of a few people living on in a partially bombed house in a ravaged London square. Magdela is living in a house with her husband's one time secretary cum mistress, Gina. Her nephew Bennett also lives there. In the basement lives another couple who have a policeman son and a school girl daughter. She meets Rupert after two years but finds that the war has altered him. They remember the last time they had spent a delightful evening together.

Little happens in it, but enough strands are gathered together to give a sense of tension, climax and relief. The relief is achieved mainly by atmospheric descriptions.

The principal feeling one has about them is their terrible inter-dependence of each other; all of them have mysterious, irregular relationships, unhappy and furtive.

One has a feeling that what remains in the house is not what a house is meant to enclose. This is what the war has done to houses, to people. The time of day is changing and a shift in the emotions of all the characters is coinciding with this. This is a familiar Bowen trait. It is another picture of wartime England, its people and their wartime environment.

A mere observation has become a story, quivering with life. Bowen wrote "In the Square" during "a hot-raid-less patch of 1941 summer, just after Germany had invaded Russia; the story photographs the disturbing quality of life ³⁹ in a London terrace house after the Blitz".

XVI 'Green Holly' : This is a story of intelligence workers in the last war living in dreary isolation and the effect it has on them. Mr Rankstock, Mr Winterslow and Miss Bates are busy putting up holly for Christmas. They had been together for forty years. Their confinement dated from 1940. They were experts doing something 'frightfully hush hush' which nobody knew. In fact, due to their mode of living in isolation they "had dropped out of human memory". In their former circles they rarely re-appeared.

This Christmas there was no question of any leave for them. Four others composed their high - grade skeleton staff.

Years before Miss Bates had, for some months, been engaged to Mr Winterslow. Before that, she had been friendly

with Mr Rankstock. Though it was their fortieth-Christmas in each other's society, it was their first in "these particular quarters". Their previous accomodation was wanted by the Army. So they were bundled into another one six miles away. It was called Mopsam Grange. They were even further away now from the market town with its few distractions.

Here, their intense isolation causes them to have hallucinations about ghosts. For a while they flirt with fantasy until they all come back to earth and its reality with a bang. They have enjoyed their temporary interludes with the ghosts that haunted them! The ghost of a young lady is Mr Winterslow's dream of an ideal woman. Miss Bates sees in the ghost of a young man, what she has always longed for in a man. The house they were staying in was reputed to be haunted by the ghosts of a young man who had committed suicide some Christmas Eve, due to a faithless woman, who had flirted with him merely as a diversion from her dull marriage. Both the ghosts represent ideal images which have been conjured up in the minds of Miss Bates and Mr Winterslow.

Eventually Miss Bates, Mr Winterslow and Mr Rankstock are together again, celebrating Christmas. They are getting on each others nerves due to the necessity of being together, for forty years. Their frustrations are diverted by the appearance of the ghosts in their mind's eye. They know they have to tolerate one another, so they eventually make a decision to compromise on certain things;

the men ask Miss Bates to have her hair set, and she asks them to smarten up by having haircuts. They will then be tolerable to one another. Even their physical presence irritates one another due to enforced proximity.

The story also reveals that both Mr Rankstock and Mr Winterslow have been paying Miss Bates a good deal of attention. Bowen describes this humorously by making Miss Bates say she remembers "how both of you had in common that way of blowing your noses before you kissed me!"

This is a different picture of wartime England, where intelligence workers had to live in isolation from others. Their frayed nerves result in their seeking escapism in the shape of illusions of ideal beings in ghostly attire.

The title 'Green Holly' is appropriate as Christmas is being celebrated. It also applies to the tragedy that has taken place on some previous Christmas party.

II

In the four post-war stories that Bowen wrote, we see emanations of peace, which kept people puzzled and infatigable, because it was a new experience for them. There is incredulity at the turn of events. People could not believe that the world was made for happiness, anymore. After all the suffering the people had been through, nothing seemed real. There were widows, orphan children, crippled soldiers

and people exhibiting neurotic systems, as a result of the war. The rehabilitation of these people into a society which was already weary from war and its emotional upheaval's was a big task ahead.

I 'I Hear You Say So' : This is an account of the week after V.E. Day (Victory in Europe Day). Bowen has given a refreshing, original kind of turn to this account. She has said "the nightingale came to London - unnoticed until it began to sing". This happened to be a week after peace had been declared. The nightingale's song is symbolic of the return of beauty into the torn, war - weary human hearts. The nightingale is in a tree in a north-west park. Just as peace is a new experience, keeping people "puzzled and infantile", the singing of the bird is also like a soothing balm to the bruised hearts of many.

As Bowen describes the scene, people are walking in the park after sunset. Couple ~~are~~ together, either walking or lying down, in the grass. There is a boathouse near the Lake, where waterbirds are settling down. Everything wore a peaceful look - "just now no miracle seemed impossible". Outside the park, along the terraces victory flags are still hung. Householders were unwilling to take them in and passers-by were unwilling to see them go. The most striking feature after the war was the end of Black-out Days. Bowen has captured this here by describing the "fearlessly lit-up windows" which are like "exclamations" of peace. There is thus an "intensified element of life".

One wireless which has been turned on, is turned off a minute or two before the nightingale begins singing. Violet, who hears the first notes thinks the nightingale is singing "on the wireless". She is lying on the grass slope beside her friend, her one arm stretched to rest her hand against his forehead. "That's not the wireless" the man says. In fact, it must be "a thrush". They are completely relaxed, lying together, he in his khaki uniform, she in her dress which smells of the last drop of "scent he had sent from France".

Both argue about the bird, as the man says "how could it be a nightingale really. Its flown away, anyway. He says he does not mean that nightingales have died out, but only that they do not come round. He adds that as nightingales "can't sell us anything" why should they come? They discuss between themselves that now the war's over the world should be made for happiness. Yet no one can wholly believe that this happiness will be within their reach. They are still reeling under the shock of the war years.

The nightingale sings into 'incredulity' like "the first nightingale in Eden". There is nothing but note after note of its song. It sings from a planet "beyond experience" "drawing out longings, sending them back again, frozen". Here Bowen is trying to show how the happiness of Eden can be had if belief in happiness can be restored in the people. If one is incredulous, then one cannot grasp the happiness of peace time. This is what is happening to Fred,

Violet's friend. Violet thinks "we're not made for this, we can't take it".

In the lake, an aimless man throws a lit cigarette which splutters. He patrols the park as if somebody or something is hidden there.

From the bridge, a family party is staring down the lake. Their elbows rest on the bridge rail. They also hear the nightingale but the man remembers "many of them" that they had "in France in the last war". His memories of the nightingale are associated with how it had kept them awake for three nights and how they were fed up of it. The young boy on hearing the nightingale, began to whimper "But I thought the war was over". Being so used to the sounds of air raid sirens and the deafening noise of the bombs he has never heard the sweet notes of a nightingale's song. Another girl called Kathleen finds its singing funny "after everything we've been through". All sounds seem the same to her and she has still not been able to collect herself from the ravages of war. Another little girl belonging to the same family begins to imitate the nightingale.

A car sweeps round the road that goes around the park. Its headlamps light up the seats on which two middle-aged women in "whitish coats" sit. They too discuss the nightingale. Naomi says that the bird has not flown away but "has stopped to listen".

Her friend Mary cannot understand how a bird can

stop to listen. What can a bird expect to hear? The woman Mary feels sorry for the singing bird whom no one wants to listen to. "It's our fault; its ourselves we hear" she says.

No one has time to 'stand and stare' and listen, because they are busy getting adjusted to the new turn of events. Naomi and Mary have shared all confidences together. So they have nothing to regret unless they begin to regret that they have nothing. The nightingale's singing tells them to listen to its notes which symbolize the better side of life; if one cannot appreciate the finer notes of the nightingales song, you will only exist, not live a full, meaningful life. If, when the nightingale sings, she does not pierce your heart, you have become hollow from within.

Naomi says that it is too soon after the war for people to open up their hearts and forget the old wounds. The "Victory" has been overwhelming. To hear the nightingale and to respond to it, so immediately after the Victory, is a difficult task. First, people have "to get everything organized" before they can afford the luxury of listening to the bird's notes.

Life is moving on. Late-night London traffic is going on. People make their way home from pubs and cinemas.

In a front room of one of the grander houses a young woman called Ursula stands in the middle of the carpet. She asks herself to what room the "carpet belonged this time".

She is a fugitive, never staying long under any roof. Tonight she is in Rolands grandmother's house. She is "a young widow staying with an old widow". Ever since the telegram arrives announcing Roland's death, she only wants to join him, as he has not even left a "child in Ursula's body". She has nothing to live for or look forward to.

In this room where she is, probably Roland had slept as a boy. Their short marriage and the savage, tiring war have both ended. Roland's grandmother also looks forward to her death. When she sees courting couples 'shamelessly' rolling on the grass, she wonders whether their sacrifice of Roland (for the country) has been worthwhile.

Standing in the middle of Roland's room, Ursula hears the nightingale and she feels profound happiness, as if its notes held the promise of better things to come. Lines from Keat's 'Ode to the Nightingale' flash through her mind - "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet". Naturally, at night it is too dark to see anything.

Bowen hopes that the song of the nightingale will be a symbol of hope for the future and that peace will be permanent. Bowen's strongest postwar story, "I Hear You Say So", takes place a week after VE day and was published in 'New Writing and Daylight' in September, 1945. Here Bowen again displays the compression and talent for illumination evident in her other wartime stories. It also begins with a single moment, widening its scope to record the emotional

touchstones anchoring a group of people's lives, until the camera narrows to scrutinize the emotions of a young widow. The loveliness of the song of the nightingale in the park unifies the story by delighting its listeners. The cultural context of the nightingale had already been established by the very popular song "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square":

I may be right,
I may be wrong,
But I'm perfectly willing to swear,
There were angels dining at the Ritz,
And a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square".

II 'Gone Away' : Here Bowen is showing how peace is not easy to digest and how England is slowly limping back to normaly. In 'Gone Away' we see a village, Brighterville which has been abandoned. Most of the people have 'Gone Away', except for the Vicar and Mr Van Winkle, who are two old friends from 'College days'. Mr Van Winkle come's to the Vicar for tea. He is a little late. The tea is "an abundant spread" - a change from wartime meals. There is butter on the toast; Van Winkle has been sleeping, that is why he was late. His eye travelled over the "muffin dish, rock cakes, seed cake and strawberry jam. Van Winkle sees that his friend's room is replete with pipes and old golf balls - he has not changed his habits.

There is a hush surrounding the vicarage. Both

friends go for a walk together. Outside the garden gate Van Winkle is struck by the "almost hallucinatory old-worldness of the scene". It is like stepping into a picture postcard. He sees a "pub with a Lion sign", "a row of creeper draped cottages, a smithy, a gabled post office" and a village hall, a general shop and a cinema set-up. Much of this is a set-up, the greater part of the buildings are only facades, supported by "struts behind".

They go to the churchyard where there is "the hyper-congestion of antique gravestones". There is also a Board of Arts which says "one cannot go into that". The Vicar keeps telling the Board of Arts that their capacity for graves is not infinite. Yet they keep on sending lorry loads of the dead.

Young people age quickly due to war stresses. There has been an exodus on a large scale from this village. The few inhabitants left are Miss Chough, Mrs Ramsey and Lady Issenbist. "Miss Chough is getting very deaf" said the Vicar".

From the church yard they are brought head on into the Reserve boundaries, demarcated by high wire fencing. It was at the centre of Brighterville. They are hailed by a lady on a bicycle, "laden with bags and parcels". She is Mrs Ramsey.

Brighterville is described as a cut-open fruit, with no life, not so much as an insect stirring. Briefly,

it is a ghost town. From inside buildings there is a bursting silence. The Vicar and his companion go from building to building, whizzing from floor to floor by lift. The culture centres house reproductions of the world's masterpieces. They have been kept here for safety during war. All machinery remains animate; in cafeteria and in the gymnasias.

Mr Van Winkle cannot adjust to "the monstrous enigma of evacuation". The Vicar then enlightens him. He says:

"It all happened suddenly, in a moment. The day dawned; the night planes came down, the day planes went up, making the heavens throb like an aching head, a "headache to which one becomes resigned". On the ground the Brighterville traffic proceeded along the ground, the pedestrians along theirs. Everything was going on as usual until it stopped. "Stopped" said the Vicar, as though an inaudible siren sounded a note always dreaded but never heard before. The reaction was appalling as everyone stopped dead in their tracks and stared into each other's faces. The idea of doom got communicated, and the 'psychic blast' travelled through the Reserve".

Suddenly a sharp human cry cuts in on the silence. The Vicar and his friend are electrified. They search for

the repeated cry until they reach the Euthanasia Centre, which, ironically, is situated facing The Lover's Grove. The reception hall contains glass-topped tables, with magazines on it. In the middle, in a wheelchair, sits the old lady who has been screaming. She glares at the gentlemen and says it is about time she is attended to. She tells the lady assistant that she has changed her mind about dying. She wants to live. She wants to go back to normal living and have her cup of tea. She asks them to run her home so that her family can have their Granny back. They roll her chair out and when the Vicar takes her towards his house, she tells him he is taking a wrong direction. The Vicar does not have the heart to tell her that no member of her family was in the village. So he tells her instead that "You are coming to stay with me".

After the dreadful account of the exodus from this village, the story ends on a hopeful note. An old lady who has opted for death willingly now wishes to live a normal life, for that is what peace time will offer. The others have left in a panic which was infectious. Perhaps the planes circling around make the people feel another attack was coming on them. They cannot believe that peace has come to stay.

III 'Hand in Glove' : This story is also set in Ireland. Jasmine Lodge was set in a residential, prettily wooded hillside in the South of Ireland. This overlooked a river and the roofs of a "lively garrison town".

The title "Hand in Glove" is very appropriate to this tale. Right from the beginning, the sisters, Ethel and Elsie are "Hand-in-Glove" (conspirators) with each other in all activities, especially in looting their aunt of her remaining treasures.

Then, when Ethel approaches her aunt in desperation, for help, to ensnare Lord Fred, the aunt and niece appear to Elsie as if they were "Hand-in-Glove". Nothing could be further from the truth. Ethel was ruthlessly tormenting her aunt to give her advice on her project as well as part with her keys to her last trunk. To 'Conquer' Lord Fred, she needs her hand to be "gloved". The irony of the story is that her end comes through the gloved hand of Elsie strangling her. This is one of Bowen's most entertaining stories, where the reader's interest does not flag for a moment. It is rendered in a humorous vein.

IV 'A Day in the Dark' : This story is again set in Ireland, in the backdrop of Irish - blue mountains. Moher is a "milling town", and when coming into it over the bridge, a terrace of houses can be seen by the river. There are six dwellings which unite into "one frontage". On the other side of the bridge is a ruined castle, a tourist attraction. It is a prosperous little place - a market town with a square. The hotel does good business. There are also some obsolete stone buildings.

In the context of this specific locale and using

the first-person point of view, "A day in the dark" signifies the dark deeds of Miss Banderry, vis-a-vis her brother and Barbie and her uncle. She tries to unsettle the young girl by insinuating that she too had evil designs on her uncle. She takes a shot in the dark about the nature of the relationship existing between them. Though Barbie has a feeling, akin to love, for her uncle, she recognizes that it will not come to fruition. So she makes peace with herself as best she can.

This story again shows the interaction of different people and their emotional involvements, when the war has ended and they have time to seek peace. Now that there is a slow return, to normalcy and peace, people have time to dabble with their foibles and weaknesses.

"A Day in Dark", her last story is the last one in the book. It is a growing girls story of the accidental way in which one learns the name of the deepening feeling that one has come to live with --- like many another of these stories, it is its own kind of masterpiece".⁴²

The foregoing analysis of the war stories of Bowen, including those dealing with the aftermath of war clearly establishes her credentials as a short story writer of the war par excellence. The war stories cover an entire spectrum of themes dealing with interpersonal relations, breakdown of communication, marital disharmony, boredom devastation and death. In exploring these themes Bowen uses

her acute sense of the English social class structure and shows how its emotional fabric is torn about by the traumatic experience of war. It is also important to note that while war stories abundantly reflect Bowen's ability to cover a whole range of emotions from lyrical tenderness to wartime angst, they do not in any way even tangentially deal with the romantic passion of love. This is because the war stories deal with a world which, struck by a general catastrophe, has very little space for the romanticization of love.

NOTES

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