

*The Common Frontier:
Fictions of Alterity in Elizabeth Bowen's
The Heat of the Day and Graham Greene's
The Ministry of Fear*¹

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One day something fantastic happened. As we looked at the flats, suspended in mid-air, one of the bedroom doors opened and a young man put his head round. He stepped into the room and went carefully over to the cupboard and began to take suits from their hangers. It was as if, by some strange X-ray, we were looking through the wall of his flat into his home, for the young man was quite at ease taking the clothes from the cupboard. Once he looked out into the road and shouted to someone below:

‘Which of these two?’

And the man in the road shouted back and the man made up his mind. He put several suits over his arm and then walked back to the bedroom door, opened it, walked into the corridor beyond, then carefully shut the door behind him. He had done it all so smoothly and naturally, as if there was nothing strange about walking into his flat on the third floor, with the back wall all blown away.

Hilde Marchant, ‘A Journalist’s Impression of the Blitz’²

One of the clichés of the myth of the Blitz is that Londoners carried on regardless: anything else would have been an acknowledgement of suffering and defeat. The incongruity – some might say the absurdity – of maintaining a mundane routine in the face of catastrophe became a collective coping strategy, officially encouraged and publicly extolled. In this myth, the strangeness of war seems to have consolidated familiar national virtues rather than resulted in collective trauma. Yet for the journalist Hilde Marchant the Blitz bewilders her with thoroughly fantastic or surreal moments. The young man’s highly theatrical behaviour in the quotation above produces a kind of

Brechtian V-effect: on the one hand the man acts as if his privacy were still intact and as if shutting doors ‘carefully’ still made sense in a blitzed house; on the other hand, his dialogue with the passer-by in the street acknowledges that he is aware of being watched. What Marchant describes as ‘fantastic’ and ‘strange’, we could also call uncanny, in the Freudian sense. The young man contemplating his suits can *and* cannot acknowledge that the private has become public and the familiar, strange: his behaviour indicates that these opposites have collapsed as a consequence of war.

This article is very much concerned with the uncanny effects of war and their fictional representation in the 1940s, with intellectual uncertainty about the shifting or collapsing boundaries between otherwise distinct categories of the strange and the familiar, the past and the present, the other and the self, the enemy and the ally. War is uncanny not only because it literally opens up the home to the strange experience of public conflict, but because it reveals the Freudian *Unheimlichkeit* at the core of this home. Some of the strangeness of war has by now been neutralised by our overexposure to Blitz iconography which endlessly rehearsed these incongruities and helped to construct via documentary reportage what Angus Calder has called the Barthesian myth of the Blitz: the grand homogenous narrative of British resilience to Nazi aggression in the Second World War.³ However, when we examine some of the *literary* representations of the Blitz, we find little myth-making and certainly no propagandist celebration of ‘strange’ and ‘fantastic’ behaviour. In the war fiction of Virginia Woolf, Stevie Smith, Graham Greene, Henry Green (the pseudonym of Henry Yorke) or Elizabeth Bowen war *is* the uncanny. While they all describe an insane, incoherent world in which everyday reality has become surreal and disorientating, Graham Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* (1948) particularly highlight the fictitiousness of (wartime) reality. Although primarily remembered for their evocative representation of the Blitz, Greene and Bowen depict a world that can only be made sense of through a retrospective revision that produces new meanings because it is a world of consistently indeterminate or contradictory signifiers. Therefore their narratives in fact *predict* the myth of the Blitz. For Bowen and Greene, war is not something from which the self emerges unvanquished or redeemed; war undoes the self, it erodes its boundaries and perforates its alleged core. The feeling, so common in wartime fiction, that the self is fragmented and its experiences unlikely, is not merely an objective correlative for – literally – mindless destruction; rather, it represents an erosion, or at least redefinition, of tradition, history and culture – those discourses that anchor the individual in time. It stands for a deeper fear of ideological instability, fascist contagion and the loss of ‘Englishness’ – all the fears that myth glosses over. In *The Ministry of Fear* and *The Heat of the Day* people suffer from history as they would from a nervous disorder. History here is, of course, not merely the grand narrative of selective events in their retrospectively shaped

sequence of cause and effect but also, and maybe even principally, the individual fictional construct of the self as defined against a perceived other. Greene and Bowen offer us two different fictions of alterity only to challenge them again: fascism as ideological otherness and the otherness required by love. As we shall see, neither of these alterities can be sustained as genuine; they have always been auxiliary constructions of the I and eventually collapse with it in the same manner in which the *heimlich* ultimately coincides with the *unheimlich*.

War, however, depends on distinct constructs of ipseity and alterity (self-sameness and otherness), and their short-circuiting has political and ideological implications: if it is not altogether clear what distinguishes the self from the (inimical) other, conflict is neither justifiable nor feasible. Spy stories in particular, with their double agents and double crosses make the lack of distinction between self and other uncannily clear. In *The Ministry of Fear* and *The Heat of the Day* the protagonists get involved with spies and therefore become liable to blackmail and manipulation: their loyalties are divided between their country and their lover. Most importantly, however, in both novels the main plot of ideological betrayal is grafted onto an earlier story of (self-)deception, which accounts for peculiar instabilities of character: if the self is so unstable as to require fictions of subjectivity, how can any sense of alterity (whether amorous or inimical) be 'real'? By eroding the boundaries between the self and the other, Bowen and Greene pose a range of uncomfortable questions about national identity and the nature of subjectivity, and in that sense their uncanny books are 'strange' and 'fantastic'.

Propaganda and the Alter(ed) Ego

In this essay I am concerned with definitions of selfhood and otherness, not least because the Second World War is also a war permeated by imperialist metaphors and ideologies. What we call the 'other' here is consequently only a term for a perceived (as opposed to an actual) alterity. This other is artificially constructed and temporarily maintained for the purpose of delineating an ideologically useful boundary for the self. I am interested here in the negotiations of identity that happen along what Emmanuel Levinas calls the 'common frontier' with the other: how are these negotiations represented in Bowen's and Greene's war novels?⁴ And how does their work fit into the historical context of wartime British propaganda? That identity is negotiable rather than simplified as a clear definition of good-and-evil, friend-or-foe, is of historical significance. Lessons had been learnt from the First World War of how *not* to run the propaganda machine. Exaggerated and unsubstantiated reports of German atrocities would not mobilise broad support from the general population because those fictions had long been discredited by an entire host of studies on the subject in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁵ Indeed as a consequence of atrocity stories the term propaganda acquired its current

pejorative semantics. In the first instance propaganda was used to influence morale and prescribe model behaviour to the civilian population, yet it also attempted to construct and consolidate the nation's identity in opposition to the enemy's. This posed a problem: while poster designers readily captured Nazi aggression through Hitler's distinct features or gigantic swastikas, it was less clear (at least for the senior members of the administration) who 'the people' actually were and how they should be addressed. Unsuccessful early campaigns became notorious for their patronising tone, errors of taste and general misjudgement of the intended audience.⁶ Waterfield's 1939 poster campaign ('*Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution, will bring us victory*'), for instance, with its them-and-us dichotomy emphasised class differences and power structures within the country that alienated 'the people' from 'the government'. Similarly ill-judged results were achieved by Churchill's order to produce propaganda against defeatist talk and rumours after the Dunkirk debacle with the Silent Column campaign which many found patronising and tantamount to a gagging-order.⁷ Nor was there general agreement over the identity of the enemy even in political circles: was it all Germans or just the Nazis? The simple solution to this problem was 'Vansittartism' (after Lord Vansittart, Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the British Government, whom Duff Cooper permitted to make a series of special broadcasts in the autumn of 1940 published as *The Black Record*), which broadly declared that all Germans were Nazis – at a time when some politicians were still seriously hoping for a successful German uprising. The utility of simplistic logic was not lost on Dr Goebbels, who swiftly launched an anti-British poster campaign with excerpts from *The Black Record* that denounced the Germans as criminal butcherbirds.⁸ What came to be known as 'black propaganda' (the fabrication of rumour and documents) or manifested itself as voluntary self-censorship in the strategic withholding of information was deployed on both sides. While one could argue that a book-burning, mendacious and totalitarian regime could legitimately be beaten with some of its own weapons, those weapons might also undermine the liberal democracies they are meant to defend.⁹

When propaganda was not employed to consolidate myths in the making but to remind the home front of who the enemy was, it focused as much on the monster abroad as on the foe within. The difficulty of keeping the two apart poses problems for propaganda and the very space in which Bowen and Greene will construct their uncanny amalgamations of the foreign and the familiar. Pictorially, this interior foe is often represented as a cunningly or unwittingly treacherous *femme fatale*, be it the prostitute's skull in Reginald Mount's famous poster campaign against venereal disease, the series of female gossipers in 'Telling a friend' and Fougasse's 'Careless Talk Costs Lives', or the glamorous spy in 'Keep Mum' (Figs 1–3).¹⁰ Exaggerated fears of spies and fifth columnists appear to indicate that the united front of the 'people's war' is more a product of mythmaking propaganda than part of an



Figure 1 'Telling a friend may mean telling the enemy'. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum London, Poster Collection (LDP 149).

actual, heterogeneous reality. Fougasse's 'Careless Talk' posters are powerful reminders of borderline negotiations between alterity (Hitler) and ipseity (the person who looks at the poster and watches Hitler watching the gossiping women). The careless talkers, while they are not enemies, are not meant to be models of identification for the onlooker. They are conceptually and visually in between the two, a potential I as well as a potential other somewhere along the common frontier. What interests me most about these posters is that they actually *create* this in-between space (rather than merely acknowledge it) and make it quite alluring. The anti-rumour campaign implies that gossip relies on either a comfortably intimate, homosocial space or a glamorous, sexually charged identity. In 'Telling a friend' (Fig. 1) the power of betrayal and the potential for action clearly lies with the men as the starting and end points in the chain of whispers and casual remarks; but it is the women who are the leaking vessels of gossip. They become increasingly glamorous, from the innocent blonde to the impressionable brunette with the pearl necklace to the seductively heavy-lidded, black-haired *femme fatale* who passes on vital information to the thin-lipped, stern traitor. While this poster clearly identifies the last couple as 'the enemy', it challenges innocence (telling may be mean, words may have more meanings than one can tell) as well as the ability to know one's friends, or be a true friend. It is not surprising that many found this sort of campaign produced fear, panic and paranoia by suggesting that friends could not be trusted – nor could one trust oneself – not to become an unwitting fifth columnist. One of Fougasse's 'Careless Talk' posters features a couple in a restaurant whose conversation is spied on: not even the most romantic space should be thought of as 'safe' (Fig. 4). In 'Keep mum, she's not so dumb' (Fig. 3) the scenario of seduction and eavesdropping is meant to alienate the female onlooker from the *femme fatale* provocatively smiling at her, but the obvious affluence of the spy and the lavish attention she enjoys among the three officers also make her a glamorous model for identification. This kind of propaganda rather precariously relies on the fact that the average woman, asked whether she'd rather be Rosie the Riveter in a munitions factory or the glamorous spy, would naturally be drawn to overalls rather than sparkling diamonds and male attention. (In a similar fashion it would be rather difficult to imagine a male onlooker resisting identification with the suave gentlemen vying for the beautiful spy's succumbing.) Women have no tenable position in relation to this discourse, whether they talk too much, not at all or to the wrong people. And if they become involved in adventure and secret war work they are definitely in the precarious territory of the common frontier between friend and foe.

Yet adventure and secret war work was just what Bowen and Greene had first-hand experience of, and their war fiction makes ample use of woman as the destructive element in war work. Well-acquainted and often moving in the same circles in London during the war, both Bowen and Greene worked for the Foreign Office. In his memoir *A Sort of Life* (1971) Greene recounts



Figure 2 'Don't forget that walls have ears!'. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum London, Poster Collection (MH 7356).

his sympathy for the defeated Germany during his Oxford days: 'the thought of being a double agent had occurred to me'.¹¹ The Foreign Office in Berlin even paid for a propagandist journey on which he visited the Palatinate Republic. Much later, in 1941, Greene left for Sierra Leone to work for MI6, and Bowen, shuttling between Dublin and London from 1940 to 1942, sent astute reports to the Foreign Office about the mood in Ireland.¹² Both Greene and Bowen worked as ARP wardens during the Blitz, and both conducted extra-marital affairs in the heightened atmosphere of bombings and air raids. They tremendously enjoyed London during the war as a kind of amplification of experience: 'whatever you are these days, you are rather more so. That's one thing I've discovered about this war' says a character in one of Bowen's wartime stories, 'Pink May'.¹³ Bowen's letters and essays and Greene's wartime journal also speak of heady excitement and surreal impressions.¹⁴ Although they both clearly belonged to an age of Empire and show a marked dislike of totalitarian regimes, they felt decidedly ambivalent about their own country. In their private lives, they enjoyed secrecy and shared a Jamesian obsession with evil and betrayal throughout their work.

Bowen and Greene's novels and stories of the 1940s often explore the perilous space along the common frontier between the self and the perceived other. They are fascinated by the conflicts of interests and the crises of identity that come with betrayal, secrecy and lies. 'Who exactly is the enemy and how do I know?' is the question their protagonists keep asking themselves, and this is of course always the key issue in spy fiction. The other assumes a range of different guises: an enemy, a lover, a mad person and eventually even an estranged form of the self. But ultimately we always remain strangely familiar with this other, who does not exist other than as an uncanny version of the self – a highly controversial way, if not altogether ideologically unsound, of conceptualising identity in the face of Nazi aggression. The common frontier, it seems, covers too much common ground.

Friend or Foe?

In *The Ministry of Fear* Greene's innocent hero Arthur Rowe unwittingly and repeatedly disrupts a Nazi conspiracy but ends up getting framed for a murder he did not commit. That he falls in love with the Nazi villain's hapless sister Anna complicates matters further. Riddled by guilt for the mercy-killing of his terminally ill wife even after years in prison and disoriented by the careful scheming of the conspirators he loses the memory of his adult life through shell shock. The conspirators dispose of him in a fake asylum where his amnesia proves counterproductive for them: happily confined to the heroic aspirations of his youth symbolised through Charlotte Yonge's *The Little Duke*, he finds the courage to overcome his adversaries. When his memory returns and with it the guilt over killing his wife, he decides to pretend that he is still caught in the bliss of amnesia for the sake of Anna's happiness.



Figure 3 'Keep mum she's not so dumb!'. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum London, Poster Collection (LDP 586).

Greene's Nazi villain is a young Austrian 'refugee' called Willi Hilfe (German for 'help'), who together with his sister works for the Mothers of the Free Nations, a charitable organisation that serves as a cover-up for a group of fifth columnists, chiefly made up of artists and intellectuals – Greene's jibe at Bloomsbury élitism. Hilfe, far from alien internment and trying hard to look like a naturalised Englishman, suffers from a melancholic form of anglophilia evident in his obsolete idioms, tweedy joviality and fake chivalry:

It was as if he had come from an old-fashioned family among whom it was important to speak clearly and use the correct words; his care had an effect of charm, not of pedantry. He stood with his hand laid lightly and affectionately on his sister's shoulder as though they formed together a Victorian family group.¹⁵

Hilfe helps himself to what he believes to be an English identity, complete with clipped vowels and a borrowed past as if he had read too many English crime novels and modelled himself on some of the dapper upper-middle class detectives therein. He tries too hard to be an Edwardian gentleman with a Victorian past, literally offering a series of studied representations of national identity that are like tableaux in a charade. In contrast, the man who will bring about Hilfe's downfall, the counter-espionage officer Prentice, is old enough to be a 'real' Edwardian gentleman with expensive tweeds and antiquated turns of phrase that 'ring true'. Greene's work with clichés emphasises the performativity of national identity but it also establishes degrees of authenticity: while it is grotesque to be a Nazi, it is positively insane to dare to enact Englishness. To imply that the Nazis should want to recycle elements of Englishness for their own ideological purposes is surely quite alarming, if not uncanny. The Third Reich, which modelled itself upon previous versions of Germanic empires (the Holy Roman Empire and the Hohenzollern monarchy), saw sufficient similarities that invited adaptation and amplification in the British Empire, with its global expansion and its dominant ideology of complacent superiority forged from 'monarchism, militarism and Social Darwinism'.¹⁶ In *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain*, Gerwin Strobl demonstrates the surprising level of affection for Britain and British culture among ordinary Germans. The Nazi movement, however, was more focused on emulating the strategies of the British Empire particularly in their pursuit of *Lebensraum* (room to live) from 'racial inferiors' in Eastern Europe.¹⁷ This may put into perspective the enormous fear of fifth columnists as well as the considerable number of fascist sympathisers in Britain during the war: what made the fascists uncanny, was that some of their ideas were unacknowledgably familiar. The old order of the British Empire and the new Nazi regime appeared to share a preference for clearly defined structures and a range of more or less arbitrarily defined, undesirable forms of otherness as opposed to the hodgepodge heterogeneity of democracy.



Figure 4 'Of course there's no harm in *your* knowing!'. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum London, Poster Collection (MH 7369).

In her polemic *Three Guineas* (1938) Virginia Woolf sceptically noted the similarity between authoritarian structures in England and Germany in the treatment of women – an argument to which she was to return two years later in her essay ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’. In response to a typical letter in *The Times* demanding that employed women return to home and hearth since they take away jobs from men, she argued:

There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do And what right have we, Sir, to trumpet our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our most respectable newspapers any day of the week [fascist] eggs like these?¹⁸

Woolf sees the beginnings of totalitarianism as firmly rooted in the complacency of superiority upon which the Empire rests and cites the discourses of religion, ethnicity, social-Darwinism and gender as stereotypical building blocks of this core ideology. Its seeds or ‘eggs’ are already there within imperialism; continental fascism is merely an aggravation, an evolutionary higher stage of the same evil.¹⁹

Greene’s 1940 short story ‘The Lieutenant Died Last’ – more familiar in Cavalcanti’s film version *Went The Day Well* – also blurs the boundaries between Germany and England as German parachutists invade the Deep England popularised through Frank Newbold’s pastoral wartime posters. During the Blitz the fear of foreign invasion seemed real enough: in spring 1941 the government issued a leaflet instructing the population in capital letters about proper behaviour (‘STAND FIRM’ ‘CARRY ON’).²⁰ Standing firm and carrying on, however, did not gloss over the fact that for the enemy to have crossed the lines, they must have been standing at least as firm and carried on as admirably as their British counterparts. The standard closure of spy fiction or invasion films like *Went the Day Well* or *The Next of Kin* relies on the fact that ipseity and alterity can be re-established. At the same time these genres are also fantasies of the common frontier: the plot depends on the difficulty of telling friend and foe apart. This kind of confusion is partly a result of the nature of the threat from the air and via the ether. Sensory perception is no longer reliable to establish identity. It is impossible to unequivocally assess the truth of a broadcast given the level and nature of home propaganda.²¹ Another of Greene’s war stories, ‘The News In English’ (1940) – a variation on the Lord Haw Haw broadcasts – enacts a similar destabilisation of otherness and enmity. For a considerable time, English listeners to Lord Haw Haw’s (William Joyce’s) broadcasts felt his information to be much more accurate than the news they received from the BBC; *The Times* even paid him the compliment of listing his broadcast in its columns.

Greene's short stories imply that it is equally impossible to distinguish between one's own troops practicing or enemy planes attacking; between a traitor spouting propaganda via the radio or a British spy transmitting secret messages via German radio. A diary entry by Virginia Woolf on 28 August 1940 documents a similar type of indeterminacy between friend and foe:

We went out on to the terrace, began playing [bowls]. A large two decker plane came heavily and slowly – L[eonard] said a Wellesley something. A training plane said Leslie. Suddenly there was pop pop from behind the Church. Practising we said. The plane circled slowly out over the marsh & back, very close to the ground & to us. Then a whole volley of pops (like bags burst) came together. The plane swung off, slow & heavy & circling towards Lewes. We looked. Leslie saw the German black cross. All the workmen were looking. It's a German; that dawned. It was the enemy. It dipped among the fir trees over Lewes & did not rise. Then we heard the drone. Looked up & saw 2 planes very high. They made for us. We started to shelter in the Lodge. But they wheeled and Leslie saw the English sign. So we watched – they side slipped glided swooped & roared for about 5 minutes round the fallen plane as if identifying & making sure – then made off towards London. Our version is that it was a wounded plane, looking for a landing. "It was a Jerry sure eno" the men said: the men who are making a gun hiding by the gate. It wld have been a peaceful matter of fact death to be popped off on the terrace playing bowls this very fine cool sunny August evening.²²

Woolf's experience of physical threat from the air quite late in the Battle of Britain is marked by a twofold misrecognition which in the end needs a plausible fictionalisation to make it 'real'. As in 'The Lieutenant Died Last' the invader is not recognised as an enemy until they are literally on the doorstep. Woolf's description brilliantly captures this almost cinematic process of realisation in its pace and syntax that leads up to 'that dawned. It was the enemy.' When later two more airplanes arrive they are not at first identified as RAF planes but as some threatening reinforcement out to ruin an evening's blissful game of bowls.²³ After the Woolfs and their guests had sheltered from their own country's air force they piece together a narrative of the events as 'our version'. George Orwell reports a similar incident of indeterminate signification in his first war diary:

15 September [1940]: This morning, for the first time, saw an aeroplane shot down. It fell slowly out of the clouds, nose foremost, just like a snipe that has been shot overhead. Terrific jubilation among the people watching, punctuated every now and then by the question, "Are you sure it's a German?" So puzzling are the directions given, and so many the types of aeroplane, that no one even knows which are German planes and which are our own. My only test is that if a bomber was seen over London it must be a German, whereas a fighter is likelier to be ours.²⁴

This passage shows an almost identical structure to Woolf's diary entry. Orwell's last sentence sums up his 'version' of events, his narrativisation or deciphering of ambiguous signs. The necessity for interpretation arises because the signifiers – literally 'the sign', as Woolf calls it, of each country painted on the aircraft – are not easily identified. A plane in itself is an indeterminate signifier and what precisely goes on during the Battle of Britain seems anyone's guess.²⁵

In Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* the threat of indeterminacy and misrecognition is even closer to 'home' and invades the bedroom. The heroine Stella Rodney discovers through the shady counter-espionage officer Harrison that she has been having a two-year relationship with a double agent, Robert Kelway. Stella, like Bowen, is Anglo-Irish, and by implication her identity is suspended and complicated in this hyphenated state of shuttling between England and Eire. Most of the novel revolves around Stella's suspended negotiation²⁶ between love for one's country and love for an individual: will she give in to Harrison's sexual blackmail and go to bed with him in order to give Kelway a chance to escape, or will she confront her lover and make him give himself away? Kelway is a survivor of the evacuation of the Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk, which has left him with a disabling limp; but more crippling than that are his middle-class origins in 'a man-eating house' with an army of garden gnomes and 'swastika-arms of passage leading to nothing'.²⁷

At the end of the novel Kelway explains his rationale for treason to Stella:

'I was born wounded; my father's son. Dunkirk was waiting there in us – what a race! . . . [Spying] utterly undid fear. It bred my father out of me, gave me a new heredity . . . Who wants to monkey about? To feel control is enough. It's a very much bigger thing to be under orders.'

'We're all under orders; what is there new in that?'

'Yes, can you wonder they love war. But I don't mean orders, I mean order.'

'So you are with the enemy.'

'Naturally they're the enemy; they're facing us with what has got to be the conclusion. They won't last, but it will.' (p. 272f.)

It is important here that Kelway refuses to collaborate in the retrospective Dunkirk myth that rewrites what Churchill called a 'colossal military disaster' as the defiant victory of the little boats. Like many soldiers evacuated from Dunkirk who believed themselves abandoned and let down by the government and the socially superior officer class, he links this defeat to a generational and, implicitly, a class problem.²⁸ Kelway's weak father, with his mere 'fiction of dominance', stands for a decrepit British Empire whose lack of virility and conviction will logically lead to the disaster of Dunkirk. While the Nazis, Kelway implies, are merely the temporary tool to conclude British imperial history, their ideology will breed a New Order to launch a new imperial age. Bowen leaves Kelway's ideology rather oblique, affiliating him

to neither communism nor fascism, and this significantly shifts the focus of treason from a specific totalitarian ideology to the imperialist element all totalitarian regimes incorporate. Kelway's fascination with totalitarianism is uncanny because his betrayal is motivated by a foreign ideology that utilises *familiar* forms of imperialism. If Kelway's home and home country cannot offer him a convincingly powerful fiction to shape his identity, he will, paradoxically, look for his country's past in a foreign future. For him, the strange has become familiar in the effect of the uncanny I discussed earlier: *'heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*'.²⁹ Isn't the semantic ambivalence Freud mentions here a kind of common frontier between ipseity and alterity, a frontier that once crossed collapses opposition into sameness? As Freud argues in 'The Uncanny', 'the prefix "un" [un-] is the token of repression'.³⁰ Within our metaphor of frontiers and spaces we can think of repression [*Verdrängung*] and its lexical equivalent negation as a dis-placement; literally a border-crossing from the integrative same to the (artificial) space of the other. The *heimlich* then manifests itself in the very *Unheimlichkeit* of middle-class, home-bred ideological madness because the home is always at the core of the unfamiliar experience. Like Woolf in *Three Guineas*, Bowen asks us, how can we sustain constructs of ideological alterity if traitors are bred at home and if our own history lends itself to Nazi adaptations?

Bowen argues that the absence of a past that bestows a firm sense of identity is a particular middle-class problem. It accounts for a variety of crimes, from lack of taste to emotional cruelty and, eventually, treason. As in her earlier novels *The House in Paris* (1935) or *The Death of the Heart* (1938), Bowen's contempt for this section of English society is patently clear when the Anglo-Irish Stella meets Kelway's family and endures the *horror vacui* of having tea with them:

Stella pressed her thumb against the edge of the table to assure herself this was a moment *she* was living through – as in the moment before a faint she seemed to be looking at everything down a darkening telescope . . . The English, she could only tell herself, were extraordinary – for if this were not England she did not know what it was. You could not account for this family headed by Mrs Kelway by simply saying they were middle class, because that left you asking, middle of what? She saw the Kelways suspended in the middle of nothing. She could envisage them so suspended when there *was* nothing more. (p. 114)

The middle class (entirely independent of any determinate signifiers because it is made up of indeterminacy itself: 'middle of *what?*') is only tethered to reality by virtue of its 'Englishness', by the fictions that go with national identity. Englishness itself seems to be a sufficient guarantor of existence, a matrix upon which other fictions depend. Stella's image of the Kelways at tea suspended in a vacuum of space and time is an almost post-modern science

fiction tableau, and yet it is in itself borne out of the anxious exile of Stella's own Anglo-Irishness. She too feels the overwhelming need for an anchor to the past and the prospect of continuity, which is why she helps retrieve for her son Roderick the heritage of a Big House in Ireland. The English, 'so suspended when there *was* nothing more,' simply exist by imagining themselves, Stella implies, unaware that she herself 'envisages' this tableau and that she herself is suspended in the middle of an impossible situation. She constructs the English middle class as constructing itself. But is this more unreal than the permanently hyphenated state of the homeless Anglo-Irish?

Stella's visit to Kelway's family home Holme Dene is intended to psychologize Kelway's betrayal for his lover as much as for the reader: this is 'where rot could start' (p. 131). Robert's mother, Mrs Kelway, as the devouring older woman presiding over a little realm of alarmingly neurotic family members is a well-known Bowen topos. Mrs Kerr in *The Hotel*, Madame Fisher in *The House in Paris* and Matchett in *The Death of the Heart* are earlier versions of the refined Jamesian horror of the matriarchal despot. One of the telling ironies of the tea party is its revelation of authoritarian familial power structures. After a series of *faux pas* from Stella, Mrs Kelway tells her granddaughter Anna that 'Mrs Rodney is free not to eat cake if she doesn't want to: that is just what I mean by the difference between England and Germany' (p. 113). Stella Rodney is of course not free at all to eat or not eat what she likes or does not like, nor is anyone else in this house, just as there is no real difference between England and Germany in Holme Dene.

The middle-class home with its reproduction furniture, its concealed drives and its army of garden gnomes, provides an identity that is clearly recognisable as fiction, as the suspension in nothingness. Visiting his old room, now a shrine to a boyish past, Kelway and Stella find it entirely devoid of personality and life, as if the mementos in it had vampirised Kelway's life (*verunheimlicht* it, as it were) rather than merely represent it: 'Each time I come back again into it I'm hit in the face by the feeling that I don't exist – that I not only am not but never have been' (p. 117). As in *The Death of the Heart*, the furniture has a life of its own; it preserves the past by devouring the people. But that past and his part in it have long been renounced by Kelway: 'If to have gone through motions ever since one was born is, as I think now, criminal, here's my criminal record. Can you think of a better way of sending a person mad than nailing that pack of his own lies all round the room where he has to sleep' (p. 118). These lies, we are to understand, are photographic documents of the aspirations of his class, stereotypical moments of happiness, reminiscent of the artificiality of the 'Victorian family group' tableau in Greene's novel. But unlike Willi Hilfe, Kelway is not an evil Nazi but a likable character, whose suffering in this man-eating house we can understand. As Hermione Lee admits, Bowen's explanation of treachery is 'peculiarly unstable and strange' because it betrays a fascination with spying and secrets and a great deal of sympathy with Kelway's disaffected feelings for his

country, while trying to convey the abject horror of his actions.³¹ The novel does not offer Kelway an alternative to betraying the familiar forms of fascism (Holme Dene) to the foreign ones (the Nazis), when the two have too many common frontiers. While it is not in sympathy with fascism itself, it clearly shares its character's contempt for the middle class and the moral failures of his country.

It is not merely the treatment of treason that is rather strange and unstable, all three main characters in *The Heat of the Day* are to some extent unstable, indeterminate signifiers. When Harrison tries to blackmail Stella into sexual favours, ringing her up 'like the Gestapo' (p. 33) or surveying her flat 'like a German in Paris,' he too betrays fascistoid, imperialist traits (p. 44). Like Bowen herself, Stella is employed in 'secret, exacting, not unimportant work' for the Ministry of Information, and in her choice and ability to keep mum about Harrison's tip-off, she shows nerve and a considerable taste for duplicity and secrecy (p. 26).³² Bowen's double-agent Kelway is not unusual either in his un-English pessimism, postulating a kind of Freudian death-drive for his country which both conservative and left-wing writers at the time diagnosed as well. This had less to do with increased authoritarianism than with ineffective or insufficient authoritarianism, that is with a crumbling Empire and a lack of spirit. Evelyn Waugh commented on a diseased society by romanticising the past in *Brideshead Revisited*. George Orwell in 'My Country Right or Left: 1940–43' portrays a British intelligentsia waiting for an apocalypse as a corollary of a whole range of failures, among them chiefly lack of moral stamina, effeteness of the ruling classes, and the vices of capitalism. Graham Greene states in his 1940 essay 'At Home':

why one feels at home in London – or in Liverpool, or Bristol on any of the bombed cities – [is] because life there is what it ought to be. If a cracked cup is put in boiling water it breaks, and an old dog-toothed civilization is breaking now.³³

This homeliness is apocalyptic gloom, rather than the propagandist *esprit de corps*. *What* is reassembled from the fragments of the past depends on *who* misrecognises them in the present. Waugh, Orwell, Bowen and Greene all remember an imperial England, which is sometimes less real, but more ideological, idealised and ossified by nostalgia. Similarly, Simon Featherstone has identified the myth of a pastoral past in the construction of Deep England as one such construct of nostalgic identity used in home front propaganda as well as in the literature of the period.³⁴ However, unlike Greene's dejection about the state of England (or Britain) Bowen's argument about Irish independence is borne out of a greater, deep-seated ambivalence about this idealised past glory: 'I could wish that the English kept history in mind more, that the Irish kept it in mind less'.³⁵ According to Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', this ambivalence is a precondition for melancholia about a lost love object.³⁶ Aren't the themes of emotional betrayal, moral turpitude and

divided loyalties that we typically find in the spy genre, the symptoms of working through the melancholic conflict with one's own country? And in an essay on the necessity for the writer to explore uncertainties and ignore allegiances Bowen indeed quotes Greene, the contemplator of double agency: "Isn't disloyalty as much the writer's virtue," asks Graham Greene, "as loyalty is the soldier's?"³⁷

The spy who loved me

For Greene and Bowen, love and war seem to happen on the same battlefield of fictitious selves and others. Love is like spying because it relies on a perceived other whose boundaries it strives dissolve and merge with the self into a romantic fiction of common frontiers. Love depends on alterity but strives to abolish it at the same time. *The Heat of the Day* and *The Ministry of Fear* feature rather problematic love stories: Stella Rodney and Arthur Rowe love spies and continue to love and protect them after their cover is blown. Jacqueline Rose argues that the reader holds so much sympathy for Bowen's protagonist that, like Stella, he or she might eventually be quite indifferent to her lover's dangerous ideological affiliations.³⁸ The same is true for Greene's hero: does it matter to us that Anna Hilfe is a Nazi spy masquerading (albeit coercively) as an Austrian refugee? The lovable Nazi spy is maybe a guilt-ridden overcompensation of Bowen and Greene's own intelligence and extra-marital activities during the war, which involved a considerable amount of duplicity. Both novels work hard to make us forget that the objects of desire are Nazi spies, and are therefore rather unsettling in terms of their ideological 'soundness'. What is even more troubling, however, is that in each narrative it is the woman who is willing to favour romantic love over political loyalty: Stella eventually offers herself to Harrison in exchange for her lover's freedom and Anna Hilfe begins to subvert her brother's plots to save Arthur Rowe. The women it seems are the weakest link in the fight against an enemy at home and abroad. They become a perilously ambivalent entity during the war, objects to fight for *and* against.³⁹ Women can't win in this situation: if they admit to attracting a Nazi or being affiliated with one they become enemies through their sexual availability or feminine weakness; if they defend their love, they become traitors by association – how else can they be susceptible to the wiles of a Nazi! Both Arthur Rowe and Stella Rodney can only love spies because it is the very in-between-ness of their love objects that is both an effect of and a stabilising factor to their own identity.

In the end, love becomes a form of doubling, through which those who love spies turn into spies, too. The madness of love is therefore its endless self-perpetuating mimesis. Unsurprisingly, Bowen's heroine and Greene's hero are amorous traitors themselves. They have built their lives around secrets and lies. Rowe poisoned his ill wife, not so much to relieve her from suffering than to free himself from watching her pain. For a considerable

time he deludes himself about the corrosive effects of pity while, as Greene makes clear, indulging in a monstrous form of egotism. Stella Rodney upholds a façade of farouche adultery that accounts for her nervy femininity, although it was her husband who left her for his WWI nurse. What the narrator in *The Heat of the Day* says about Stella and Robert's affair is also true for Anna and Arthur's: 'War at present worked as a thinning of the membrane between the this and the that, it was a becoming apparent – but then what else is love?' (p. 195). In these novels love equals war – not only in the overtly sexual way of Henry Green's *Caught*, but also in a more metaphorical fashion. Love is like war because it relies on an artificial construction of alterity; it thrives along the common frontiers with the other to the extent that boundaries appear to be entirely absent between 'the this and the that'. As Maud Ellmann observes, Bowen's war fiction alerts us to the *leaks* in, rather than the structures of, containment.⁴⁰ Hence when Kelway the spy eventually matches Stella the liar, they both receive our sympathy.

Greene goes even one step further, ultimately 'releasing' his wife-murdering spy-catcher Arthur Rowe into the arms of his new lover, the 'traitor' Anna Hilfe. Anna, who knows about Arthur's past, pretends not to know for the sake of their relationship, just as Arthur pretends to have been shell-shocked out of the memory of killing his wife. This is where Greene also redefines the novel's title. 'The Ministry of Fear' initially describes the machinations of anxiety, suspicion and deceit with which totalitarian regimes operate. At the novel's close the ideological threat has infiltrated the private sphere and the lovers can from now on only talk in censored conversations:

They sat for a long while without moving and without speaking; they were on the edge of their ordeal, like two explorers who see at last from the summit of the range the enormous dangerous plain. They had to tread carefully for a lifetime, never speak without thinking twice; they must watch each other like enemies because they loved each other so much. They would never know what it was not to be afraid of being found out. (p. 221)

The redefinition of seemingly clear boundaries between corrosive pity and egotistical cruelty, treason and loyalty, love for one's country and love for a person, eventually turns the lovers into spies and enemies, not in spite of, but because of, their love. And the 'enormous dangerous plain' of the future really is the minefield of the past. In both novels love depends on gaps, silences, on the 'consistency from the imperfectly known and the not said' (p. 99), on the loss of historical beginnings in the palimpsests of romance.

Myths of Reconstruction

In the 1945 preface to her short story collection *The Demon Lover*, Bowen accounts for the dream-like quality of life during the Blitz with a lack of boundaries and a literal as well as metaphorical sense of fragmentation:

I felt one with, and just like, everyone else. Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and somebody else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other . . . People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves – broken ornaments, odd shoes, torn scraps of the curtains that had hung in a room – from the wreckage. In the same way, they assembled and checked themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk.⁴¹

Amongst the large-scale destruction Bowen counts the traditional values upon which that solid thing, Englishness, is predicated: family history and the demarcations of the class system. Houses now lose their façades and people transcend their material limits; they no longer 'stop' somewhere, but merge into one another, assume hitherto untried fusions, become indeterminate. As the familiar becomes unfamiliar, so the unfamiliar, the literal stranger in the street, assumes intuitive familiarity: 'we felt, if not knew, each other'. We remember the man in the bombed house requesting advice from a passer-by in the street about which suit to pack. To restore boundaries in this hallucinatory disembodiedness one requires the memory of a past wholeness: people 'assemble bits of themselves' from the wreckage, from the fragments of literary history and from the construct of language. In January 1941 Virginia Woolf sought wholeness in the London Library after a disturbing walk through ruined streets where 'all that completeness [had been] ravished and demolished'.⁴² The process of rebuilding lives does not start with bricks and mortar, but through language and fictions of identity, as if the Lacanian mirror stage were relived on a grand scale, with debris as a kind of ersatz-screen. This means, of course, repeating another process of misrecognition in which the solid object becomes an objective correlative for the self.

The sections of Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* re-enact a similar process of explosion, fragmentation and reassembling, reducing 'The Unhappy Man' to 'The Happy Man' (who lost his memory): negation again equals repression as happy and un-happy relate to one another like familiar and un-familiar. Rowe regains his memory in 'Bits and Pieces' until he is 'The Whole Man' again (who fakes being 'The Happy Man'). But we have already seen that ahead of him lies an insane life of marital espionage. However, this should not gloss over the fact that rebuilding identity is bound up with revisiting (and revising) the past. As such, it is inevitably an act of *Nachträglichkeit* and myth-making. At the end of Bowen's novel, Kelway asks of Stella before he attempts to escape, 'if you can come to remember what never happened, to live most in the one hour we never had,' (p. 288). He pleads for a strategy of myth-making Stella is already familiar with. What he requests, in simpler terms, is to forget the complexity of a relationship in which those attracted to spies and traitors become spies and traitors themselves; in which otherness

always gradually and uncannily transforms itself into sameness. If Stella and Kelway's relationship henceforth exists in the mythical hour they never had (like all great love stories) it will exist as a collation of negated potentialities, of ever-present others in a 'monument to absence' that at the same time denies that absence.⁴³ Identity is not just factuality but also potentiality and negativity. If the novel is about 'character in flux' as Phyllis Lassner argues, then this flux is the shifting common frontier between self and other.⁴⁴ As a consequence of this uncanny instability of definitions and boundaries lovers become enemies, and enemies lovers.

Kelway's request to remember what had never been might just predict the process of restoration as a return to a ghostly past, indicating a distinct feature of British post-war culture: a nostalgic obsession with a partly mythical moment of consolidated national identity and the shadows of Empire. The myths we construct about ourselves are as 'true' as the actual irrevocable facts because they describe a mood, a desire. Bowen argues this also for the historic context of the war in her 1969 review of Angus Calder's *The People's War*, when she comments that his debunking of the myth of the Blitz does not create a clearer picture of actual events, but would deprive London of its wartime atmosphere: 'a picture presented in terms of the actualities *only* would be a false one; inseparable from happenings are the mood, temper and climate of their time'.⁴⁵ Both Bowen and Greene suggest that the strange moments we have never had are perhaps the ones we are most familiar with because they have always been at the core of our subjectivity, its central fiction or myth. The otherness we demand of and subsequently deny our lovers (and enemies) therefore merely cloaks the common frontier along which we have moved all along, and this is what makes *The Ministry of Fear* and *The Heat of the Day* so strange and fantastic.

Notes

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1 This paper is dedicated to my friend and colleague Glyn White, whose inexhaustible enthusiasm for war films and documentaries made sharing a house with him in Norwich such a strange and fantastic experience.

2 In J. Hartley (ed.), *Hearts Undefeated: Women's Writing of the Second World War* (London, 1995), p. 101.

3 Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1992), pp. 1–19 *passim*. I am thinking here of one of the most well-known photographs of the Blitz, that of a London milk man cheerfully making his 'round' across a wasteland of rubble after a bombing raid, which adorns the cover of Calder's book. Equally famous is the

image of three male readers unperturbed by the detritus of a collapsed roof, intently perusing the shelves of Holland House Library after a raid in 1941. It became the cover illustration for Robert Hewison's *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939–45* (Newton Abbot, 1978) and summarised in one brilliant gesture that literary life indeed continued productively.

4 In his definition of metaphysical otherness Levinas distinguishes between identity and a merely perceived otherness that helps delineate identity within the system of selfsameness: 'The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same the other would not be rigorously other: by virtue of the common frontier the other, within the system, would yet be the same.' *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh [1961] 1990), pp. 38f.

5 Trudi Tate cites six significant publications between the wars on the techniques and effects of propaganda, some of which were bestsellers. See *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester, 1998), p. 46 FN 17.

6 See M Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939–45. Organisation, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London, 1979), p. 190ff; M. Yass, *This Is Your War: Home Front Propaganda in the Second World War* (London, 1983), pp. 15 and 25.

7 See I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London, 1979), pp. 31, 82ff.; also J. Baxendale, "'You and I – All of Us Ordinary people': Renegotiating "Britishness" in Wartime' in N. Hayes and J. Hill (eds.), *Millions Like Us? British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool, 1999), pp. 305ff.

8 See Angus Calder, *The People's War* (London, [1969] 2000), p. 489f. Calder also makes an interesting point about the wilful forgetfulness implicit in Vansittart's argument about the congenitally belligerent Huns. Vansittart cited Tacitus and Julius Caesar as evidence for the brutality of the early Germanic tribes, conveniently ignoring the origins of the Anglo-Saxons themselves.

9 Calder, p. 501f. As Donald Thomas has recently argued, many civilians indeed felt that the wartime government's way of ensuring equality and discipline increasingly resembled the tyrannical measures of continental fascism with its absurd bureaucracy, its narrow-minded draconian enforcements of incomprehensible regulations and the questionable methods of the Board of Trade inspectors checking on shops and restaurants. Sometimes the Germans are cited as the 'real' force of law and order ('The sooner the Gestapo gets here the better!', 'Fetch Hitler!' 'What's Rommel's transfer fee?') against an often blundering and inefficient wartime administration. Even if these comparisons were, as Taylor suggests, 'an instinctive response to authoritarianism', sarcastically voicing civilian frustration rather than genuine sympathy for the Nazi regime, it is maybe more important here to note the perspicacity with which these responses located the administrative rapprochement between wartime England and fascist Germany: given the opportunity, increased bureaucracy and authoritarianism could transform the ordinary English office clerk into a 'little Hitler'. *An Underworld at War: Spivs, Deserters, Racketeers and Civilians in the Second World War*, (London, 2003).

10 See also S. Gubar, "'This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun": World War II and the Blitz on Women' in M. Higonnet (ed.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987). However, in the Ministry of Information's fight against rumours of any kind, greater effort was made to appeal to men *and* women. Indeed, five of the eight posters for Fougasse's (Cyril Kenneth Bird) striking 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' series depicts gossiping men across a range of social spaces and classes:

in a pub, a gentleman's club, a train, outside a house and in a telephone box. Therefore it is all the more striking that only two of the eight posters are consistently used in academic publications on Fougasse, namely the two representing gossiping women having tea and chatting on a bus.

11 G. Greene, *A Sort of Life* (London, [1971] 1999), p. 105.

12 During the de Valera years of Irish neutrality Britain contemplated the use of Irish ports and was aware that this could not be done without Irish consent, while also afraid that the Irish might be more sympathetic to a German use of their facilities. Bowen did not think of her activity as spying – but some Irish have not forgiven her to this day – although espionage is maybe too strong a word for what she did: keeping eyes and ears open when socialising in Dublin. See R. Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality* (London, 1983), *passim*. Bowen's reports to the Foreign Office are available in the Public Records Office at Kew and are generously excerpted in Fisk's book. The often erroneous reprints in Elizabeth Bowen, "Notes on Eire": *Espionage Reports to Winston Churchill, 1940–42*, ed. Aubane Historical Society (Aubane, 1999) should not be relied on, although in its vitriolic tone it is an interesting little booklet.

13 E. Bowen, *Collected Stories*, ed. Angus Wilson (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 713.

14 See V. Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of A Writer* (London, [1977] 1999), p. 146; E. Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, ed. Hermione Lee (London, [1981] 1999), pp. 21–25; G. Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London, [1980] 1999), pp. 101–113.

15 G. Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 43. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

16 J. M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of the British Public 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984), p. 253.

17 G. Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 59.

18 V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London, 1991), pp. 61f.

19 It may also be worth noting in this context that Churchill's famous rhetoric in the 'Finest Hour' speech of June 18, 1940 is strangely reminiscent of the Nazi phrase of 'The Thousand Year Reich': 'Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour".' In *Into Battle: Speeches*, comp. Randolph Churchill (London, 1941), p. 234.

20 See Yass, *This Is Your War*, pp. 34f.

21 Greene's spoof on propaganda work in the Ministry of Information, 'Men At Work' (1941) comments on the relentless but ineffective regulation of everyday life through a bureaucratic machine. See *Penguin New Writing*, 9 (1941), 18–24.

22 V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols., ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth, 1985), vol. 5, p. 313.

23 Playing bowls was Woolf's panacea during the early stages of the war but this in itself carries connotations of the myth of Sir Walter Raleigh's reaction to the Armada's imminent attack, and maybe we should also read her concluding sentence for this entry in the light of this historic connotation.

24 *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 4 vols., eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London, 1968), vol. 2: *My Country Right or Left: 1940–43*, p. 373.

25 For an exploration of the impact of the aeroplane on (English) national identity see Gillian Beer's 'The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf' in H. K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), pp. 265–291. The examples drawn from *Mrs Dalloway* are particularly pertinent: even commercial peacetime aeroplanes suffer from a 'modest insufficiency of meaning' (p. 275).

26 For an exploration of this suspension from a more intertextual perspective see the chapter on *The Heat of the Day* in A. Bennett and N. Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (Basingstoke, 1995).

27 E. Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (Harmondsworth, 1976), 257f. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

28 Similar scepticism of the mythmaking following Dunkirk can be found in Woolf's diary entry on Harry West of 22 June 1940, where she questions 'the brave, laughing heroic boy panoply which the BBC spreads before us nightly' (Vol. V, p. 298). In *The People's War*, Angus Calder also cites the troops' angry silence over the disappointment and wounded pride over the Dunkirk debacle as one of the reasons that made the retrospective myth of defiance possible (p. 109f.).

29 S. Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *Art and Literature* (Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14), trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 347.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 368.

31 H. Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London, [1981] 1999), pp. 173f.

32 Indeed as Adam Piette argues, the triangle Kelway – Stella – Harrison represents the political and ideological complexities between Germany, Eire and the British Empire of which Bowen was fully conscious; see *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939–45* (London, 1995), pp. 168–172. Initially Bowen viewed Eire's neutrality as 'its first major independent act' and defended the convictions behind it in her 1941 essay 'Eire' (repr. in *The Mulberry Tree*, pp. 31ff.). 'Eire' does not substantially deviate from her reports for the MoI, but by 1942 Bowen had changed her mind once the situation in Europe deteriorated and the threat of invasion became more real.

33 G. Greene, *Collected Essays*, (London, 1969), pp. 447, 450.

34 See 'The Nation as Pastoral in British Literature of the Second World War', *Journal of European Studies*, 16 (1986), 335–377.

35 Quoted in P. Craig, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 100.

36 S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' ([1915] 1917) in *On Metapsychology* (Penguin Freud Library, vol. 11), trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 257, 267. As Roy Foster argues convincingly in *The Irish Story* Bowen's autobiographical works during the war years, the reticent *Seven Winters* about her Dublin childhood and her family history *Bowen's Court* (both 1942) appear to consolidate her Irishness at a time when she moved very much in the space of the common frontier between Eire and England (London, 2001), p. 153. However, in an interview with 'the Bellman' for Sean O'Faolain's *The Bell* she defiantly asserted that 'All my life I've been going backwards and forwards between Ireland and England and the continent, but that has never robbed me of my nationality. I must say it's a highly disturbing emotion' ('Meet Elizabeth Bowen', *The Bell*, 4 (1942), 425). Quite what is so highly disturbing – being Irish or flitting about so much – is not really clear here. Her most important essays, 'London, 1940', 'The Big House' and 'Eire' betray allegiances to either country.

37 Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, p. 60.

38 J. Rose, 'Bizarre Objects: Mary Butts and Elizabeth Bowen', *Critical Quarterly*, 41:1 (2000), pp. 75–85, p. 77.

39 Gubar, 'This Is My Rifle', *passim*. For a more extensive argument about the relationship between war and gender see Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London, 1998).

40 M. Ellmann, 'Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadowy Fifth' in R. Mengham and N.H. Reeve, *The Fiction of the 1940s* (London, 2001), p. 4.

41 Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, pp. 95, 97.

42 Woolf, *Diary*, vol. 5, p. 353.

- 43 G. Plain, *Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 167.
44 P. Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London, 1990), p. 134.
45 Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, p. 183.

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