An Unnameable Thing:

Spectral Shadows in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* and *The Last September*

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What spectres hover within, between, and around the lines of texts? Ghostly shadows linger just out of sight, over one's shoulder, in the corner of one's eye, their presence always uncertain. Jacques Derrida has called the study of these spectres a hauntology, a 'classic Derridian "double" gesture' that, as Colin Davis explains, 'supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive.'[1] Derrida's hauntology is defined by its ambiguity; that is, it hovers in the spectral space, the threshold of being and presence, life and death, departure and return. These doublings, binaries, repetitions, déjà vu – Derrida's 'two's'– characterise hauntology and its influences, the Gothic and the Uncanny.[2] Moreover, these patterns of pairings may be seen to circumscribe two important concepts for this essay: the notion of traumatic return, or the return of the repressed, and of the mother-daughter dyad. Victoria Burrows, in her analysis of mother-daughter relationships, suggests that metaphor, or the doubling, ambiguity, and ambivalence in language is central to a specifically feminine narrativisation or representation of trauma, and to women's ability to bear witness to that

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, Trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) 10; Shannon Donaldson-McHugh and Don Moore, 'Film Adaptation, Co-Authorship, and Hauntology: Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998)' in *Journal of Popular Culture,* 39.2 (2006) 225-33 (225); Colin Davis, '*État Present*: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms' in *French Studies* 59.3 (2005) 373-79 (373).

[2] Derrida xviii.

which was hitherto unspeakable. 'Through its ambivalent structuring,' she points out, 'metaphor provides both the safety of a distancing mechanism and simultaneously, a linguistic strategy to speak about something unspeakable, as if by analogy.'[3] In narratives inflected by trauma is metaphor a tool consciously used, or is it a repressed symbol, irrupting unbidden into the text? A hauntological reading of the work of Anglo-Irish author, Elizabeth Bowen, will demonstrate the doubled work of the metaphor in her early novels, and will address the two shadows which loomed over her life: the inescapable presence of war, and the aching absence left by her mother. Taking off from Frederic Jameson's point that spectrality draws our attention to the fact that 'the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be,' and that 'we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us,' I will look at the ways in which Bowen's writing is both influenced by and ignores the memory of trauma.[4] Bowen's own traumatic loss, I will argue, is refigured over and over in the repeated fleeting glimpses and disappearances, the perpetual resurrection and death of the maternal spectre. This feminist hauntology will underscore the importance of siting and of acknowledging the maternal spectre in the construction of female identity.

'Nothing really will ever end,' suggests Nouri Gana, 'without leaving remains, without coming back under the banner of "hauntology."'[5] These are the remains I examine here – the spectres and shadows of times, places, and people past. Tropes of the literary Gothic and the Freudian notion of the uncanny are central to the construction of a Derridean hauntology. The thread running through these concepts is the figure of the ghost, the literal return of the past – an exploration of the collapse of the familiar. Like

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[3] Victoria Burrows, *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamica Kincaid and Toni Morrison* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 22.
[4] Cited in Davis 373.
[5] Nouri Gana, 'Revolutionaries without a Revolution: The Case of Julia Kristeva' in *College Literature,* 31.4 (2004) 188-202 (189-90).

Sigmund Freud's essays 'The Uncanny' and 'Mourning and Melancholia,' Bowen's writing is often a response to war, to the death and destruction pervading Europe during the first half of the twentieth century.[6] Everyday life had become unfamiliar, epitomising Freud's description of the uncanny as 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.'[7] The prefix un-, 'the indicator of repression' demonstrates this inversion of the ordinary to the extraordinary.[8] Indeed, Freud points out, '[i]t may be that the uncanny ["the unhomely"] is something familiar ["homely," "homey"] that has been repressed and then reappears, and that everything uncanny satisfies this condition.'[9] Furthermore, as Freud makes clear, the very etymology of the German for uncanny, *unheimlich*, or unhomely, seems to demand an examination of the home as a spectral space. The haunted house is one of the most common tropes of the Gothic text and one particularly central to Bowen's work. Her novels and, in particular, her short stories, many of them ghost stories, form a major contribution to the tradition of the Anglo-Irish Gothic. The notion of inheritance that links these houses and ghosts also informs much of Bowen's work. Ghosts represent, in part, the power of the past and its inescapable significance in the present. Shadowy hallucinations in Bowen's work may thus be seen to represent the ever-present importance of her own past in her writing; that is, a hauntological reading of these novels becomes at once also a psychobiographical reading of what I suggest is the figure of the absent mother shadowing her work.

The function of lack in *The Hotel* (1927) and *The Last September* (1929), may be read as a response to the early loss of Bowen's mother, Florence, who died when the girl

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[6] See, for example, Hugh Haughton, Introduction to *The Uncanny* (1919) The Penguin Freud, Ed. Adam Phillips, Trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003) vii-lx (liv).
[7] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in Phillips 124.
[8] 151.
[9] 152.

was just thirteen years old. The stammer she developed following this event, and her subsequent refusal to either say or to hear the word 'mother,' also points up the (literal) unspeakability of traumatic loss for Bowen.[10] For example, the staccato stammer of names reminiscent of 'mother' and of 'Florence' proliferates in *The Last September*: the names of several central characters, Marda, Myra and Moira are perhaps stammering attempts at 'mother,' while Francie, Laura and Laurence suggestively echo 'Florence.' Laura was also the name of the aunt who 'had chief care of Elizabeth' after the death of her mother, a mother-substitute.[11] The use of the 'dead' metaphor, 'something,' in Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel*, shows that Bowen's relative literary inexperience is overwhelmed by the traumatic event, so that the mother may only be represented abstractly, or as an unknowable dark shadow, never defined. The spectral space of *The Hotel* surrounds and infiltrates the text, but is never delved into: its contents are too disturbing to reveal. In contrast, the memory of Laura Naylor is inscribed both on the minds of its inhabitants and on the walls and windows of the house. The Big House, Danielstown, its rooms, and Lois's body itself, are all spectral spaces inhabited by Laura's ghost.

An important spectral space of the home in these novels is the doorway or threshold. Indeed, this site may even be seen to exemplify the term 'spectral,' given Davis's assertion that 'Derrida's spectre is a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence and making established certainties vacillate.'[12] The threshold is a liminal site; definably neither one side nor the other, it forms the binary

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[10] Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2003) 24. The title of this essay is in part derived from the title of this study. Renée C. Hoogland, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing*, The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature, Ed. Karla Jay (New York: New York UP, 1994) 97.

[11] Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977) 28.

[12] Davis 376.

divide. Both novels under discussion here open on a threshold, as if Bowen invites the reader in to the spectral, textual space of her fiction. *The Hotel* begins in a doorway, drawing attention to this liminal frame for the nothingness, the 'not there' the Hotel houses: 'Miss Fitzgerald hurried out of the Hotel into the road. Here she stood still, looking purposelessly up and down in the blinding sunshine and picking at the fingers of her gloves.'[13] On what has precipitated the event into which we are flung, however, the novel is as silent as the empty drawing-room.[14] Silences in *The Hotel* highlight the processes of trauma, and its frightful, 'interior quietness.'[15] It is this link to which Bowen returns again and again – literal silence and textual silence echo one another, each compounding the other's effect, and pointing up the importance of what remains unsaid, the void left by what is 'not there.' While this vacancy or nothingness does identify Bowen's work with her Modernist contemporaries – for example, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James – in *The Hotel* it may also be seen to represent unspeakable or, indeed, what Cathy Caruth calls 'unclaimed' experience.[16] As Phyllis Lassner points out, silence, for Bowen, 'becomes both a coping strategy and the guarantor of anxiety, a way of not acknowledging pain and loss and yet reproducing it.'[17] It is this behaviour that produces effects like the spectral maternal shadow. Bowen's refusal or inability to face the loss of her mother shows itself in *The Hotel* through Sydney's traumatised mind and the dark, unknowable shadows lurking beyond the confines of the text. The threshold of the hotel forms an entry to the workings of traumatic memory, yet neither we nor Bowen ever progress beyond its step.

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[13] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Hotel* (1927) (London: Penguin, 1987) 5. Hereafter referred to as *TH*.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ellmann 15; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).
[17] Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen*, Women Writers, Ed. Eva Figes and Adele King (London: Macmillan, 1990) 7-8.

The Last September also opens on a young woman framed in a threshold: 'Lois stood at the top of the steps looking cool and fresh; she knew how fresh she must look, like other young girls, and clasping her elbows behind her back tried hard to conceal her embarrassment.'[18] Here, the threshold may be seen to suggest division and change, so that for at least the first half of the novel Lois is restricted to the grounds of Danielstown – an insider – but her Anglo-Irish identity is made clear – she is an outsider. The implications of these images in terms of the long shadow of the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres are obvious; however, it is important to note that Lois's identity – as understood by the reader – begins in the liminal site: change is inevitable during the course of the novel. This tactic is also part of Bowen's gentle mockery of the hospitable ideals clung to by the Anglo-Irish even during this period of intense unrest, a point further underscored by the echo of the opening scene in the novel's final image – 'The door stood open hospitably upon a furnace.'[19] The presentation of liminality at the novel's end may be seen to point to the change the Naylors have forced upon them. Their refusal to acknowledge the earlier threat and their illusion of peace – 'Behind the trees, pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, the orange bright sky crept and smouldered' – suggests a repression of disturbing knowledge similar to Sydney's.[20] Their wilful blindness results in the unwelcome irruption of the past into the present, conflating the two on the threshold of that which they were trying to protect, their now uncanny home.

So, in both novels, the characters are immediately framed, pinned under the author's gaze. Lois is aware of being looked at; her discomfort at being noticed, at being

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[18] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (1929) (New York: Anchor Books, 2000) 3. Hereafter referred to as *TLS*.
[19] 303.
[20] 26.

judged by her image, is palpable. Miss Fitzgerald, however, is not only watched, but is herself looking, although 'purposelessly.' These convolutions of watching, being watched, seeing, being seen, that is, the power of the gaze, proliferate in *The Hotel*. In this novel, however, Bowen does not always make clear who one is watching or by whom one is being watched; the perforations in the armour of 'the spectral body,' notes Derrida, let 'one see nothing of the spectral body,' permitting the spectre 'to see without being seen.'[21] These notions of sight, visibility and indeed, invisibility, are central to *The Hotel* and its sense of the uncanny. Freud notes in his essay the importance of aesthetics in the uncanny, underscored by the story of the Sandman, a horrific figure who steals the eyes of children.[22] The textual space of *The Hotel* is infiltrated by an unknowable, spectral 'something' so that a conflict forms between this 'something' and the 'nothing' or 'not there' that signifies absence and silences in the text. This resistance demonstrates the doubled nature of spectrality, the threshold of Derrida's definition. The traumatised behaviour of its central character, Sydney Warren, evokes a sensation of being watched. Although this spectre is never acknowledged, its presence signifies Bowen's own traumatic memories, the repressed and unspeakable trauma of maternal loss appearing in the blurred boundaries of the text. This very indefinability of Bowen's hauntedness is recalled in Derrida's philosophy of hauntology:

> . . . the spectre . . . becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. . . . an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, 'this thing,' but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, that concerns us, comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy . . .[23]

[21] Derrida 8.
[22] Freud 123, 139.
[23] Derrida 6.

The unknowable shadow, the unnameable something of *The Hotel* exemplifies the spectre of Derrida's thought; this 'thing' that cannot be named or identified haunts the text, watching and framing its events. Derrida further points out the key dynamic of visuality here; that is, 'we do not see who looks at us.'[24] The subject is pinned under the spectral gaze, yet unable to see to whom it belongs, cloaked in shadow as it is.

The Hotel initially seems a conventional first novel, the story of a young woman on holiday in the Italian Riviera, and of her engagement to another of the hotel's guests. However, the traumas bubbling underneath the novel's surface show its spectrum to be inclined towards darkness, shadow and the unknowable. Sight and visibility are, in this novel and elsewhere in Bowen's work (in particular, *The Last September*) central indicators of identity, almost a proof of one's existence. For her characters, being seen is simultaneously pleasurable and horrific – what Freud calls a fear of the evil eye.[25] While Sydney is unnerved by Mrs Kerr's look at the novel's beginning, when she is dropped by the older woman in favour of her son, Ronald, Sydney is taunted by the echo of Veronica Lawrence's words – 'she has so absolutely given you the go-by . . . now he's come she simply doesn't see you.'[26] Sydney desires to be noticed by the novel's mother-substitute, Mrs Kerr, but fears the power of her gaze, an idea the older woman calls 'sinister! It had never occurred to me that my eye might be evil.'[27] However, in the subsequent description of Mrs Kerr's gaze, Bowen conjures an image of the maternal shadow hovering over and haunting Sydney, her sketch of the link between the two women heavily resonant of the foetal link to the mother: 'From out of the black shadow that hid the rest of her, her scrutiny like a live wire was incessantly tugging at Sydney's

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[24] 7.
[25] Freud 146.
[26] *TH* 101.
[27] 12.

consciousness.'[28] Thoughts of Mrs Kerr are in Miss Pym's mind also linked with the word 'embryonic.'[29] Her body hidden from view, the power of Mrs Kerr's 'evil eye' affects Sydney, so that she becomes 'subject to [a] deplorable kind of paralysis' – indeed, this is one symptom of trauma Maud Ellmann recognises in her, noting that in addition, Sydney suffers from 'strange anaesthesia' and 'insentience, derealisation, suicidal fantasies.'[30] It is these symptoms, Ellmann asserts, which in part suggest the existence of traumatic memory in the young woman.

The spectral shadow haunts not only Sydney: Mrs Kerr is also subject to its influence. This 'something' is returned to as the object of Mrs Kerr's dark stare – a 'certain dark stare of aloofness' that Sydney shares.[31] Intriguingly, Bowen here invites the reader to witness the act of repression, as Mrs Kerr 'brushe[s] it away with her hand and smile[s] with a return of tranquillity.'[32] Sydney, similarly, is 'curiously damned up: there was certainly something *in* the girl,' and when several of the guests visit a church, Tessa keeps 'the others waiting about because she did not like to interrupt Mrs Kerr – she had always known that there was something *in* Mrs Kerr, and at the moment perhaps it was near them.'[33] There is, for both Sydney and Mrs Kerr, an emphasis on what is inside, hidden from external view. Miss Pym, too, gives the 'impression, somehow, of having been attacked from *within*.'[34] Moreover, what the other guests see is unnameable, unrecognisable, and silent. The other female guests at the hotel are baffled by Mrs Kerr:

> 'She must think a good deal,' she decided; 'nobody who was not thinking could do absolutely nothing all day and look so very superior about it, like a cat.'
> 'You mean she has something on her mind?' . . .

[28] Ibid.
[29] 6.
[30] 12; Ellmann 143, 77.
[31] *TH* 13.
[32] 136.
[33] 13, 155.
[34] 21.

> 'I should rather say that she had something *in* her mind all the time, at the back of it. One is never comfortable in talking to her, though she is, I am sure, brilliant. I have said myself over and over again, when I've been with her: "That woman has something at the back of her mind."'
> 'I wonder *what*,' asked someone rashly.
> 'That,' said Mrs Hepworth coldly, 'would be quite impossible to say.'[35]

This passage makes clear the interplay between 'something' and 'nothing' in *The Hotel*. That is, the negativity of the statement 'nobody who was not thinking could do absolutely nothing,' works to ensure the dominance, the superiority, of the 'something' in her mind over Mrs Kerr herself. Moreover, the 'impossibility' of defining this 'something' reiterates Derrida's claim that this 'Thing' is 'unnameable.' The 'something' can never be pointed to; its name cannot be spoken because it is the very thing which Bowen refuses to acknowledge. Its presence is an insistent irruption of Bowen's own traumatic spectre into the text, thus making *The Hotel* a spectral, textual space. The emphasis on 'in' in both this passage and in the earlier descriptions of both Sydney and Miss Pym may be seen to point up the encryption of the spectre in the traumatised mind.[36] The differentiation Mrs Hepworth makes between the location of the 'something' in, on, or at the back of Mrs Kerr's mind underscores the embeddedness of the spectre within the text, inseparable from the text itself, as it might be if merely overlaid or added to it. The spectre in *The Hotel* is elusive, unidentifiable. Its shadow fills the ellipses and lacunae of the text; glimpses of it are fleeting, never direct. In her second novel, however, Bowen may be seen to move towards identifying this spectre, in part through its emergence into the story itself.

Spectral space in *The Last September* takes on a number of guises: existing in the figure of the lost mother, the 'living ghosts'[37] of the Anglo-Irish, and the doomed Big

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[35] 51-2.
[36] 13, 21.
[37] Bowen cited in Ellmann 15.

Houses whose fate is foreshadowed by the skeletons of those already fallen, like the 'dead mills – the country was full of them, never quite stripped and whitened to skeleton's decency: like corpses at their most horrible.'[38] Most important, however, is the way in which the absent presence of Laura Naylor looms inescapably. Lois is overshadowed, not only by war, as Bowen has noted – 'world war had shadowed [Lois's] school days: *that* was enough – now she wanted order. Trying enough it is to have to grow up, more so to grow up at a trying time' – but by the memory of her mother.[39] The atmosphere of uncertainty present in the Ireland of 1920 forms a ghostly and uncertain background to this consideration of the development of female identity in the absence of fixity. Homeless – 'I don't live anywhere, really' (*TLS* 229) – and motherless, Lois adopts Danielstown as a replacement for both mother and home, finding here a space of naïve stability in which she can endure this season of change.[40] The ultimate conflagration of the house represents the apocalypse of innocence and, for Lois, the end of her need for pre-Oedipal symbiosis.

I have discussed how *The Hotel* represents an early attempt by Bowen to demonstrate the spectral presence of her lost mother, one that culminates in a representation of Sydney as haunted, disturbed, and pathologically traumatised. Lois's psychological state is less abnormal, and is therefore useful in light of Freud's interest in the representation of traumatic memory in an otherwise healthy mind.[41] Lois is, ostensibly, very similar to Sydney – both are typological Bowen characters: orphaned, adolescent, uncertain. Both girls attach themselves to and idealise an older woman, in

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[38] *TLS* 178.
[39] Bowen, from the Preface to the American edition of *The Last September* (1952) cited in Spencer Curtis Brown, Foreword to *Pictures and Conversations*, by Elizabeth Bowen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) vii-xlii (xxviii-xxix).
[40] *TLS* 229.
[41] Haughton ix.

what may be seen as a direct response to the loss of their own mothers, and their search for female identity. Lois, however, is comfortable in this stage of uncertainty, and actively resists definition. This may in part be read as an angry response to consistent comparisons to her dead mother; Lois is left in the shadow of, and as a shadow of, a spectre. This may be seen, for example, when Lois accidentally overhears a conversation between her aunt, Lady Myra Naylor, and her aunt's guest, Francie Montmorency, which she reads as a matriarchal attempt to define her identity.

> But when Mrs Montmorency came to: 'Lois is very –' she was afraid suddenly. She had a panic. She didn't want to know what she was, she couldn't bear it: knowledge of this would stop, seal, finish one. Was she now to be clapped down under an adjective, to crawl round life-long inside some quality like a fly in a tumbler? Mrs Montmorency should not!
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> She lifted her water jug and banged it down in the basin: she kicked the slop-pail and pushed the wash-stand about . . . It was victory. Later on, she noticed a crack in the basin, running between a sheaf and a cornucopia: a harvest richness to which she each day bent down her face. Every time, before the water clouded, she was to see the crack: every time she would wonder – what Lois *was*. She would never know.[42]

Here the voices of Lois's Aunt Myra and her friend Francie Montmorency 'flood' Lois's room and mind.[43] Try as she might – even suffocate herself with pillows and heat – Lois cannot escape the floating, fluid grasp of their womanliness, their attempt to make her one of them. She listens until the conversation reaches a point of definition, of certainty, for in being named, not only will she become the adjective Francie selects, she will be '*very* –'much so. The name will 'seal' her fate, define what she should be, and end her uncertainty, indecision and adolescence. Lois violently responds to this forceful and singular pinning down of her identity, attacking the physical symbols of womanhood and purification – the water jug, basin, slop-pail and wash-stand. Aggressively rejecting the

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[42] *TLS* 83.
[43] 82.

solidity and certainty of these water vessels she refuses the finality of an identity formed by others.

In so doing, Lois cracks the basin 'to which she each day bent down her face,' where she would indeed see her reflection each day. As 'the image of Laura,' 'just like Laura, poor Laura's own child in fact,' in attacking her reflection Lois also attacks the spectre of her mother, thereby demonstrating her aggression towards her absence, for without Laura, how can she be certain of her identity?[44] Indeed, with Laura's spectre lurking behind her own image, defining the boundaries of her self, how can she know where she and Laura begin and end? Her daily wonder – 'what Lois *was*' – can be interpreted in two ways: either, the crack regularly reminds her of the overheard conversation, and she wonders what word Francie would have used to define her; or, it symbolises to Lois her irresolute, fractured, and twofold identity, so that she wonders how to delineate *herself*. The final sentence of the chapter – 'She would never know' – reiterates the ambiguity of a fissured identity. Neil Corcoran sees this crack as foreshadowing those that uncannily disfigure the mill later in the text: 'Cracks ran down; she expected, with detachment, to see them widen, to see the walls peel back from a cleft – like the House of Usher.'[45] The crack between the sheaf of her sexual identity and the cornucopia of gratification, the point of stasis between past and future, he suggests, marks the site through which Lois's identity might fall, as the House of Usher falls 'after its terrible secret has been revealed.'[46] This foreshadows, I believe, the fall of Danielstown and the dissolution of the encrypted 'alter identity': Laura.

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[44] 4, 17, 84.
[45] 180; Neil Corcoran, 'Discovery of a Lack: History and Ellipsis in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*' in *Irish University Review* 31.2 (2001) 315-33 (327).
[46] *TLS* 326; Corcoran 320.

As I have discussed above, the novel's characters insist upon Lois's likeness to her mother. The point at which Lois and Laura seem most connected for the reader, however, is when Lois hides in the box-room, a place also 'familiar' to her mother.[47]

> Meanwhile Lois was very melancholy in the box-room. The window was dark with ivy, she could not see out. The room was too damp for the storage of trunks that were not finished with anyhow; mustiness came from her mother's old vaulted trunks and from a stack of crushed cardboard boxes. On the whitewash, her mother, to whom also the box-room had been familiar, had written L.N., L.N., and left an insulting drawing of somebody, probably Hugo. She had scrawled with passion; she had never been able to draw. Lois looked and strained after feeling, but felt nothing. Her problem was, not only *how* to get out unseen, but *why*, to what purpose?[48]

The dark, damp, womb-like oppression of the room is filled with the musty air of the past, and is literally inscribed with Laura's presence and belongings. Laurence, too, feels Laura's presence in choking atmosphere of the house: 'her confusion had clotted up in the air of the room and seemed, in that closest darkness under the ceiling, to be still impending.'[49] Moreover, her signature also marks the 'flawed pane' of Laurence's bedroom window, 'across which Laura Naylor had scratched her name with a diamond.'[50] Indeed, Ellmann believes Laura 'occupies the house so palpably that the living suffer from her presence, rather than her absence.'[51] Lois's feeling of 'melancholy' here results from her own ability to see the differences between she and her mother, despite the refusal of others to do so; for example, Laura cannot draw, while Lois can – although they do both hate Hugo Montmorency.[52] Indeed, Lois's clear-sightedness is matched by her realisation that she has become used to being 'unseen,' to avoiding and hiding, an existence she now rails against: 'She did not mind being noticed because she

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[47] *TLS* 192.
[48] Ibid.
[49] 154.
[50] 234-35.
[51] Ellmann 59.
[52] *TLS* 139, 140, 192.

was a female, she was tired of being not noticed because she was a lady.'[53] By hiding herself, remaining unnoticed, however, Lois has literally locked herself in Laura's place, the space she used to inhabit. This point at which Lois feels 'nothing,' her first attempt to think beyond the ideas of others – 'When you have to think so much of what other people feel about you there seems no time to think what you feel about them' – results in the revelation that towards her mother, she feels nothing.[54]

In order to move beyond the maternal spectral space, the house that encrypts Lois's mother and houses her surrogate parents, the Naylors, it is necessary for Danielstown to burn. Thus, the ultimate event of the novel, the death towards which the book works, is the conflagration of the house. This apocalypse, the razing and erasing of the house may be seen to enable the dissolution of the mother and, for Lois, the development of her independent female identity, a rebirth. The apocalyptic 'execution' of Danielstown marks the end of innocence, not only for Lois, who has left (independently) for Europe, but for the Anglo-Irish as well.[55] Thus, the gentle autumn afternoon is firmly replaced by 'the dusk of oblivion' and the view of that which they had refused to see is, for the Naylors, now 'too [distinct].'[56]

Bowen's first two novels, *The Hotel* and *The Last September* provide insight into the function of traumatic memory. Tracking the spectral shadow or maternal ghost across these texts reveals the Freudian 'compulsion to repeat' and the return of the repressed, and the beginning of a working-through, or mourning for the lost mother. While the maternal spectre elusively haunts *The Hotel*, Bowen attempts control of this shadow of trauma in *The Last September*, seeking its destruction. The absent mother affects Sydney

[53] 143.
[54] 140.
[55] 301, 303.
[56] 141, 303.

and Lois in different ways; what these novels share, however, is a focus on the dependence of the present upon the past. Our identities are unavoidably shaped by our own histories, or as Bowen wrote in her essay 'The Bend Back': 'One might say, one invests one's identity in one's memory.'[57] The acknowledgement of spectral inheritance in *The Last September* and its avoidance in *The Hotel* play against each other, and demonstrate the hauntology of Bowen's work: the traumatised present shadowed by, ghosted by the unnameable past.

[57] Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Bend Back' (1950) in *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, Ed. Hermione Lee (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 54-60 (56).

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