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# Intriguing the Domestic: Exploring the Connections between Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang's Novels and Short Fictions

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INTRIGUING THE DOMESTIC: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN  
ELIZABETH BOWEN AND EILEEN CHANG'S NOVELS AND SHORT FICTION

A Thesis

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Modernist studies often focus on the period's trend towards violence and revolution. The realm of the domestic was something that needed to be defeated and overcome. The preoccupation with change and the focus on stylistic violence overshadows the work of women authors whose wartime writing in the 1940s offers a new way of linking literary style to the confusion of the conventional, feminine domestic sphere. Women writers whose work does not conform to the anti-domestic aspects of "modernist sensibility" are left in between literary periodization and fall between the cracks of literary modernism and post modernism. Due to these restrictions, authors like Bowen and Chang are also unmoored from the literary period of modernism. I wish to argue that Eileen Chang, like Elizabeth Bowen, should be studied as a writer of intrigue fiction and modernity. My assertion is based on an exploration of the similarities between Bowen and Chang: specifically the close attention to details, the agency of things in their prose, the ways in which they portray issues of; war, women inside and outside of the domestic, and how the past haunts the present in dangerous ways.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Modernist studies often focus on the period's trend towards violence and revolution, and a male literary perspective of modernism ultimately seeks to defeat and overcome the realm of the domestic in an effort to "make things new." Michael Levenson states that in regard to women, modernism "did not stand on the basis of a traditionalism that looked to return women to the domestic circle [...] On the contrary, the far more common modernist impulse was to see the free woman as the desirous woman, a phantasm dreaded and longed for" (234). Authors such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce radically pushed away from the traditional conventions of style in writing, and often employed themes of destruction. They were as Ricardo J. Quiones says in *The Modernist Sensibility*, "The Moderns, on the other hand, were willing to accept and exploit the features of disunity. Just what Nietzsche condemned in modern society – its cosmopolitanism and fragmentation – the Moderns made into virtues in their works." (121). Daniel Bell, on the other hand, states, "What is clear... is that what defines the modern sense of openness to change, of detachment from place and time... and a readiness, if not eagerness, to welcome the new, even at the expense of tradition and the past." (123). The preoccupation with change and the focus on stylistic violence overshadows the work of women authors whose wartime writing in the 1940s offers a new way of linking literary style to the confusion of the conventional feminine domestic sphere.

The authors who write from this period are alienated by these parameters when they do not conform to them, unmooring them from the literary period of modernism. Eileen Chang and Elizabeth Bowen fall into the cracks due to this unmooring. Bowen's literature has been given a place within modernism, as Phyllis Lassner says: "Ranging widely from staid Edwardian homes

to a world Blitzed into disarray by a second world war, [her] stories dramatize the exuberance and anxiety that accompany social upheaval in any age” (Lassner, 25). The acknowledgement of Bowen’s modernity allows her to join other writers from this period. Another area of study that Bowen’s fiction becomes entangled with is the study of intrigue fiction. Intrigue fiction is defined by Allan Hepburn as, “a cultural formation [that] refers to twentieth-century reinforcement of spying as an activity through novels and films, as well as through laws, secret defense services, defections, the digging of tunnels, the building of walls, the evolution of technology, and so forth” (Introduction, 15). While Bowen’s fiction ranges farther than that of the spy narrative, its place within the genre allows it to rise above being looked at as middlebrow popular fiction. Eileen Chang’s fiction hasn’t gained this same status. Chang is not part of the May Fourth movement writers who, “operated on the premise that it was they who were the subversive ones, and that the writers and readers of Butterfly narratives could only be regarded as unenlightened minds indulging in feudal ideology and urban book-market consumerism” (Chow, 87). Eileen Chang’s writing is thrown into the sphere of Butterfly fiction because of her tendency to shun conventional revolutionary themes, she is kept from the predominant literary movement. Haiyan Lee says in her essay on *Lust, Caution* that, “Some point to her unrelenting focus on the urban everyday in an age when ‘serious’ literature overwhelmingly rallied to the cause of nationalism” (641). Chang’s fiction does not push for the communist ideal that other Chinese writers in the 1940s were, instead her dissent from what constituted as modernist Chinese fiction put her into a similar place as Elizabeth Bowen. Unlike Bowen though, Chang has remained in the realm of middlebrow fiction, popular but not heavily studied. I wish to argue that Eileen Chang, like Elizabeth Bowen, should be studied as a writer of intrigue fiction and

modernity. My assertion is based on the similarities Bowen and Chang share in the closeness of their prose.

An example of this can be seen in how they both describe important interiors. In Elizabeth Bowen's novel *Heat of the Day* the description of Stella Rodney's flat is as follows, Stella Rodney stood at the window of her flat, playing with the blind-cord. She made a loop, through which she looked at the street, or coiled the cord round a finger, making the acorn tap on the pane. The harsh black-out blind, its roller hidden under the pretty pelmet, was pulled some way down, throwing a nightlike shadow across this end of the ceiling; the blind of the other window was, on the other hand, right up. She did not correct the irregularity, perhaps because the effect of it, *méchant*, slipshod, was in some way part of her mood. (Bowen, 20)

In Eileen Chang's short story, *Lust, Caution*, another close description appears,

Though it was still daylight, the hot lamp was shining full-beam over the mahjong table. Diamond rings flashed under its glare as their wearers clacked and reshuffled their tiles. The tablecloth, tied down over the table legs, stretched out into a sleek plain of blinding white. The harsh artificial light silhouetted to full advantage the generous curve of Chia Chih's bosom, and laid bare the elegant lines of her hexagonal face, its beauty somehow accentuated by the imperfectly narrow forehead, by the careless framing wisps of hair. (Chang, 1)

These descriptions spend valuable time pouring over the interior taking great care describing the interior, and the ways that the things within that interior are placed. The way they portray issues such as war, women inside and outside of the domestic, and how the past haunts the present in dangerous ways further strengthens their similarities as writers just as their descriptive style.

I propose that Bowen and Chang wrote provocative war fiction that pushed against the predominant modernist trend of exploding the conventional ways of writing and; instead, used their focus on inanimate objects to explore the domestic. I will be focusing, in the first chapter, on scenes from Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* to illustrate how Bowen deals with espionage and war displacement. In Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, which was published in 1948, Stella Rodney walks a tightrope between her lover, Robert, and the man accusing him of spying for the enemy, Harrison. Stella grapples with the possibility of her lover's deception while also maintaining her life in war-ravaged London. Bowen writes a war story from the perspective of a woman living in a London flat, whose life is touched by war in every way.

In the second chapter I will show how Bowen presents the danger and allure of losing the barrier between the past and the present, and the ghosts that haunt the domestic. For the third chapter I will be using Bowen's *Death of the Heart* to look at how upheaval in the domestic can be damaging to the people involved in strange ways. Bowen dives into the domestic, and remains within that sphere for the entirety of the novel. Unlike *The Heat of the Day*, *Death of the Heart* stays focused on the microcosm of the domestic, and how a young girl's first romance can expose the importance of a balanced domestic.

My first chapter will concurrently examine how Chang's style of intrigue writing coincides with Bowen's in its confusion of the role of the feminine and using the domestic to depict war. Chang's *Lust, Caution* takes a young student and throws her into the center of a dangerous plot to assassinate a prominent member of the Japanese puppet government in World War II China. This student, Wang Chia-Chih, is recruited by a student group to spy on a man named Mr. Yee who is working for the Japanese government in World War II Shanghai. Wang

Chia-Chih becomes embroiled in this assassination plot that carries her into the dangerous waters of committing to a revolutionary cause. Chang's work falls solidly into the category of intrigue fiction. Along with its place as intrigue fiction, this piece looks at the issue of war encroaching on the domestic space. Wang Chia-Chih uses the domestic to get closer to her target. Endangered domestic becomes a prominent theme in Chang's writing, sometimes existing alongside other narrative structures.

For the second chapter I will be using Eileen Chang's short story titled *Jasmine Tea*. In *Jasmine Tea* the main character, Chuanqing, becomes obsessed with a letter his deceased mother had sent to a former lover. A dangerous fascination with fantasy compels Chuanqing to attack the daughter of the man mentioned in his mother's letter. This narrative deals with the fluidity of time, and the danger of becoming trapped in fantasy. Chang illustrates the dangers of a person losing their grip on the present.

In the third chapter I will use *The Golden Cangue* to examine how Chang deals with a domestic situation in which the domestic can be used to help or hurt those in its grasp. The complicated domestic that appears in *The Golden Cangue* focuses on how women's positions are complicated because of the toxic nature of their domestic environments. While the possibility for escape is present, the problem comes from the protagonists' compliance and even active participation in the decay of the home around them.

In my concluding chapter I will look at Chang's narrative about communism titled *Naked Earth*, and how the loss of safety in the domestic sphere under the rule of communism in China creates an atmosphere of secrecy. This novel deals with the need for secrecy at the most personal level. Secrecy, while not for the purpose of espionage, creates the same feeling of danger that Stella Rodney experiences in *The Heat of the Day*.

The tension that is found in the works of both Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang fascinates me because the modernist writers I have encountered before now fit into the conventions of modernism, and its theme of, as Edna Duffy says, "... defamiliarizing shocks, stunning their users with the shock of the new"(5). Bowen and Chang fly into the face of this modernist principle by writing about war and other modernist topics through the lens of the domestic. This difference matters to the study of modernism because it is often presented as a period of turbulence that could only be written about in a turbulent way. The fiction of Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang proves that this assumption is false, and that the violence these conventional modernist authors employed shouldn't define all of modernist literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRIGUE

In *Intrigue* Allan Hepburn observes that, "...spy narratives allegorize civic responsibility by figuring competing loyalties to one's country, one's family, or oneself" (15). My aim in this thesis is to expand this argument in the following three ways; by examining narratives of intrigue that invade the domestic, comparing the ways that Bowen and Chang subvert traditional literary modernism, and closely reading how these narratives contribute to the study of modernism and the domestic. In this chapter I will be looking at how Elizabeth Bowen takes the intrigue narrative and places it in tension with the domestic. I will also explore how Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang create a new type of literature that touches on intrigue but uses the domestic to change it into something different.

This strange transgressing of the line between the outer world of war and the domestic has led critics to focus on only one aspect of Bowen's writing, her intrigue. Elizabeth Bowen's works elicit many different responses. One response from Nels C. Pearson considers this strange blurring of the outer world and the domestic saying, "Indeed, few things are more characteristic of Bowen than mobile characters, transient lives, and the exaggerated distances and proximities of war-time played out at the level of the personal" (324). Pearson points to Bowen's association with the personal to touch on what sets her apart as an author. While the use of the domestic is lost in Hepburn's analysis of Bowen, Phyllis Lassner directly addresses Bowen's use of the domestic, and how that fits into the study of modernity. Lassner strengthens my claim that Bowen is primarily writing about the domestic, and is using intrigue to highlight as Lassner says that, "While war and the end of Empire coincided, British women writers salvaged what was left of home and family to create from the rubble of the Blitz an art that has been largely ignored"

(30). Kristine A. Miller goes further exploring why Bowen uses the domestic in her writing saying, “Bowen employed domestic metaphors to explore war’s parallel assault on the gendered categories of public politics and private emotion” (138). Miller makes an interesting point that takes Pearson’s and Lassner’s ideas another step further, by looking at how the domestic is being employed by Bowen. It is unmistakable how Bowen weaves this important domestic into the tension and danger of intrigue.

In works of intrigue, the domestic becomes yet another battle ground for war-related fighting. Intrigue narratives are obsessed with national identity and that identity’s limits. The domestic space which is defined by the interior, the idea of “the home”, and is often considered feminine would seem utterly removed from the issues of intrigue and national identity crisis. In *Intrigue*, Hepburn asserts, “The policing of boundaries became a means of calculating differences between natives and aliens. By traversing borders, the spy paradoxically challenges frontier mentality” (11). This tendency to cross boundaries in war-time also applies to the boundary between the outer world and the domestic. The domestic is separate from the home front because the home front is the world of people left out of war. The home front consists of the domestic, but not all domestic spaces are part of the home front due to the inter-war period and the fact that some exist in the fighting itself.

The upheaval of war confuses the domestic space by uprooting people. This disruption in the domestic during war takes many forms including the physical entrance of war into the home space, but for others it is the constant pressure of war from newspapers and changing social structures, that are created to address the war effort itself. Hepburn continues his consideration of a spy’s place in the world by saying,

Intrigue plots create and manage crises of belonging. In effect, a spy belongs nowhere. In Edwardian fiction, crises are instigated outside British national borders by French, German, Japanese, Russian, or Eastern European characters, or from within by anarchists, suffragettes, communists, revolutionaries, or terrorists. (11)

Hepburn makes an interesting point about the nature of a spy, by pointing out that spies inhabit a dangerous middle ground in the makeup of war. The issue of loyalty directly connects to the domestic. If the spy cannot trust anything around them then they cannot fully trust the domestic and anything in it. This blurring of war and home complicates relationships between strangers, family, and friends. In a world where everyone could be lying to you how can life return to normal? Hepburn looks at the intrigue novel and considers its place within a nation under fire, and how the spy holds a unique place saying,

Spy novels worry about the disequilibrium of justice for individuals over and against justice for a polity. Should a citizen remain faithful to a political regime that denies liberties to its citizens? Spies are emblems of doubt insofar as they live at a distance from conviction and keep testing allegiances. (5-6)

This statement shows the careful consideration of a spy's ability to question the unquestionable. It is interesting how Hepburn is able to consider the figure of the spy as subversive and outside of the boundaries of conventional war, and yet he doesn't consider the spy's place in the war-rife domestic. How can the role of spies be fully understood when the focus is on the landscape of war, without a glance at how intrigue effects and is effected by the atmosphere of the domestic? In this chapter I will be exploring how Hepburn's statement, "Intrigue plots create and manage crises of belonging." (11), comes into play in Bowen's novel.

In *The Heat of the Day*, Elizabeth Bowen answers the question of intrigue in the domestic by presenting a character named Louie. Louie becomes so entangled in the narrative of war from newspapers that she can't find the boundary between her life and the lives she reads about. Similarly, the character of Stella Rodney finds her domestic infiltrated by a spy named Harrison, who brings the issues of war and espionage into her domestic using information he has about Stella's lover to try and take over her life.

Bowen's main character, Stella Rodney, becomes entrapped in a world where the domestic is not safe. The novel opens with Louie sitting in a park listening to a summer concert. This mundane domestic event is tinged with the war raging around it. Louie enjoys the concert as an escape from war-related problems, and yet the war through Harrison invades the space. The incident is described as follows,

A proportion of the listeners were solitary; and, of the solitary, those who came every Sunday, by habit, could be told from those who had come this Sunday by chance. Surprise at having stumbled upon the music was written on the faces of first-timers. For many, chiefly, the concert was the solution of where to be: One felt eased by this place where something was going on. To be sitting packed among other people was better than walking about alone. At the last moment, this crowned the day with meaning... There were those who had followed the others into the theatre automatically, and who asked nothing now they had sat down. You could observe one or two who remained locked in some unhearing obsession – for instance, an Englishman in civilian clothes who had placed himself towards the outside end of a row, halfway up the slope from the orchestra. On his left a Czech soldier, on his right a bareheaded woman wrapped in a coat, each

spaced out from him by a vacant chair. This man's excessive stillness gave the effect not of abandon but of cryptic behavior. (Bowen, 5-6)

This scene clearly shows how Harrison is an outsider. Harrison's demeanor is described as "cryptic" which hints at his status as a spy, but also shows his inability to blend into a crowd.

This strange encounter at the concert sets Bowen's tone for her novel of domestic intrigue. When considering how Bowen is seen as a writer, Claire Seiler makes an important statement saying that Bowen's writing is, "...suspended in various middles: the middle of the war, mid-life, the artistic middlebrow (in some estimations), and most importantly here, the self-aware middle of the twentieth century" (127). Seiler's focus on the middle opens up the consideration of *The Heat of the Day* as something stuck in the middle not quite fitting into literature that has come before or after it. I wish to argue that Bowen's novel is solidly a novel of domesticity that uses intrigue to explore what happens when that domestic is invaded by outside forces.

In the second chapter of the book, we are introduced to Stella's character through a scene that revolves around Stella waiting in her apartment for a stranger, the same above mentioned Harrison. Stella thinks that,

In so far as she had set the scene at all, everything had been arranged to show that she did not care – either for him, which he should know already, or as to anything more he might have to say. (Bowen, 21)

Stella arranging her flat to communicate to Harrison that she does not want to see him is important because it shows how Stella is using her domestic to send Harrison the message that he is not welcome. As the novel progresses, Stella is drawn into a strange love triangle between Harrison who is a British spy, and Robert, her lover, who is a spy for the enemy. Stella is navigating through a world where no one can be trusted. This reading of Stella's character is

different from how others have perceived her. An example of this misreading comes from Hepburn who says, “Most spy plots treat love as a pesky distraction that befalls male spies. By contrast, in *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen places love at the core of narrative” (139). Bowen’s depiction of Stella is seen here as that of a victim of love. I am arguing that Bowen’s focus was not on the ramifications of loving the wrong person; but instead, on guarding oneself against agents of destruction. Stella lets the wrong men into the safety of her home, and their interference with her domestic space, which mirrors the forms of larger geopolitical intrigue related to spying on the home front. This is seen when Harrison uses his knowledge about Robert to proposition Stella. Harrison who should be the good guy in this novel is just as corrupt and self-serving as Robert is. Both men in this novel live lives disconnected from the domestic, so that when they enter into Stella’s they cause irreparable damage.

Harrison wants to re-enter the domestic so desperately that he attempts to blackmail Stella into letting him into her home and life, creating the tense dialogue below with Stella,

‘Exactly what *do* you want?’

‘You to give me a break. Me to come here, be here, in and out of here, on and off – at the same time, always. To be in your life, as they call it – your life, just as it is.’ (Bowen, 31)

Harrison admits he wants to live with Stella in her world, it could even be argued that he wants to *be* her in a sense. This strange desire for a stranger’s life further accentuates the importance of the domestic to Harrison even if it’s something he will never have. When Hepburn looks at *The Heat of the Day* he completely ignores Harrison’s obsession with Stella’s domestic space.

Hepburn says that,

As Bowen thinks back through models of literary espionage, summed up by Conrad, Buchan, and Greene, she alters the genre to include considerations of gender within

political representation. Women accumulate, sift, purvey, interpret information, especially Stella, whose work requires knowledge of several European languages...Most spy plots treat love as a pesky distraction that befalls male spies. By contrast, in *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen places love at the core of narrative. (139)

Hepburn's view of Stella misses her place in this narrative entirely. Stella isn't a spy that is evaluating and using the information around her; instead, she is an ordinary woman trying to navigate the murky waters around the two spies who are invading her domestic. Hepburn does make the point that Bowen focuses on women and love in *The Heat of the Day*. While this is true, there is also a pronounced focus on the domestic that doesn't fall beneath the categories of women or love. When it comes to Harrison, I argue that there is no love between himself and Stella. Harrison wants Stella's life because he sees it as a source of stability, he blackmails her in an attempt to gain her place in the world of domesticity as Harrison sees it. Bowen shows that Harrison and Robert can never achieve this domestic peace; not because they are men but, because of their status as spies which means they never relax and enter the domestic because of their duplicitous position. Bowen's treatment of Harrison signals the deeper and more complex relationship between a spy and the domestic that Hepburn glosses over.

While Harrison desperately wants to re-enter the domestic and belong Robert, on the other hand, disavows the home to the point where he is working to actively destroy it. Bowen shows this in Robert's speech,

'You are out for the enemy to win because you think they have something.'

'This war's just so much bloody quibbling about something that's predecided itself. Either side's winning would stop the war; only their side's winning would stop the quibbling. I want the cackle cut. – Well, what have I still not said?' (Bowen, 318)

Robert is casual about why he is spying for the enemy. Robert's feelings on the matter are resigned at best which further shows how he is disconnected from the world around him. Robert can't even muster up passion for the cause he will soon die for. His complete lack of feeling in this conversation shows how Robert can never be part of safe domestic life, just like Harrison, he must remain in the fringes of society eventually dying there.

Stella moves effortlessly through the domestic without being entirely enmeshed in it. She sees the merits of being involved in life outside the domestic, but also why it's important to maintain a home-space that provides safety. Stella internally considers the state of London after it has been bombed by the Germans saying that,

More loss had not seemed possible after the fall of France. On through the rest of that summer in which she had not rallied from that psychological blow, and forward into this autumn of the attack on London, she had been the onlooker with nothing more to lose – out of feeling as one can be out of breath. She had had the sensation of being on furlough from her own life. Throughout these September raids she had been awed, exhilarated, cast at the very most into a sort of abstract of compassion – only what had been very small indeed, a torn scrap of finery, for instance, could draw tears. (Bowen, 102)

Stella describes how the war coming to London shattered the safety of the domestic for her and everyone else who decided to stay in the city after the bombing. Stella describes empty buildings and how her window has no glass in it. In a world where everything could be destroyed, no one can be trusted and there can be no safe home-space.

In *The Heat of the Day*, the primary intrigue plot is interrupted by a strange narrative of inheritance and the decay of the domestic. Stella's son, Roderick, has inherited his deceased father's ancestral home in Southern Ireland, Mount Morris. In the novel it is imperative that

someone look over the big house that Roderick has inherited and see what needs to be done to put it in working order. The big house must be taken care of. To take over the upkeep of Mount Morris more time and money is required than either Stella or Roderick possess. The big house is like a parasite that is trying to hold on to anyone it can suck dry. What is interesting is that Stella agrees to go to Ireland and visit her son's inheritance. Stella remains outside of the world of Mount Morris due to her separation from Roderick's deceased father, who is also named Robert. This rending sets Stella outside of this big house domestic. Stella does not belong in the big house she visits which is abundantly clear in the text,

She then pushed back her chair and began to examine the many drawers of the table, with unusual stealthiness trying each in turn: all were as locked as they looked. Walking foolishly round the room she searched for the keys, opening boxes and cabinets, shifting objects at random, even attempting once to look in the drawers themselves. She came to the point of denouncing Cousin Francis as a conspiratorial, mischievous, too-old man; when anger ran out she was left alone with uneasiness – liking the library less and less.

(Bowen, 189)

This passage shows how Stella cannot access this domestic. Stella is locked out of the role of authority. This is jarring because, Stella is safe in her urban domestic. Her flat is invaded by spies, but it is still the place she is safest and most in control. Stella cannot feel safe in the big house domestic. Bowen makes it clear that these two domestic spaces are very different. The flat in London is open to Stella's independence. Her apartment does not turn on her for bringing people in or for living there alone. Mount Morris, on the other hand, punishes anything that isn't a full traditional family with enough help and money to maintain it by decaying. Stella comes into this domestic as an unwelcome outsider and leaves in the same state. Bowen even highlights

how the temporary caretakers are in a strange position in this domestic. They do not have the authority or funds to maintain the estate and yet are tasked with keeping it in order. Stella is welcomed into Mount Morris but isn't expected to do anything more than observe and report back to her son, the true heir. Stella's position in the big house domestic is due to her breaking with the rural domestic for the urban.

Roderick, unlike his mother, is fully enamored with the idea of the big house domestic he thinks about Mount Morris often,

Possessorship of Mount Morris affected Roderick strongly. It established for him, and was adding to day by day, what might be called an historic future. The house came out to meet his growing capacity for attachment; all the more, perhaps, in that by geographically standing outside the present. The house, nonhuman, became the hub of his imaginary life, of fancies, fantasies only so to be called because circumstance outlawed them from reality. (Bowen, 52)

Roderick's obsession with Mount Morris is just as troubling as Harrison's obsession with Stella's life since they are both unobtainable. Roderick will never inherit Mount Morris because he won't make it out of the war alive, and Harrison cannot share Stella's life because she does not fall for his attempts at blackmail. The issue of the lost domestic to the men in this novel further shows the strange divide that war creates. Stella is able to thrive in the domestic making a stable life for herself in her flat. She is able to do this despite the threat of bombings and the threats that both Harrison and Robert pose to her home-space. Where Stella thrives, Roderick is constantly grasping as is shown when he is visiting his mother,

In a minute she passed him the tray of cups and said: 'Will you take this into the other room?'

‘Where shall I put it?’

‘Anywhere you like.’

‘Yes, Mother, yes,’ said Roderick patiently, ‘but there must be some place where it always goes?’

‘Anywhere,’ she repeated, not understanding.

He sighed. In this flat, rooms had no names; there being only two, whichever you were not in was ‘the other room.’ Proceeding into what *he* saw as the drawing-room, Roderick, grasping the tray, stood looking round again...His mother came in with the coffee, looked about for the tray, exclaimed, ‘Really, darling!’ and moved it on to a stool.

(Bowen, 53-54)

Roderick fails to discern where the tray goes in his mother’s flat. Roderick tries to find a clue that would tell him where to put the tray. This interaction shows how uncomfortable Roderick is in the domestic space. Roderick thinks that he is unable to navigate this space because of how cramped it is. Which could be why Roderick desperately chases the dream of Mount Morris hoping that the addition of space would allow Roderick to feel comfortable in the domestic.

Where Harrison and Robert move through the domestic for a purpose, Roderick wants nothing more than to settle down into a domestic that he will never have and will never understand. Roderick romanticizes Mount Morris to the point where he takes on all of its responsibilities without ever seeing it. Once Roderick fully inherits Mount Morris he takes it upon himself to visit Aunt Nettie, who is confined to a home for the mentally ill called Wisteria Lodge. Aunt Nettie was Cousin Francis’s wife, she could not live comfortably at Mount Morris because of her mental state. The disconnect Nettie has with the big house domestic should serve

as a warning to Roderick. It should show him that this life he envisions doesn't hold the answer to his problem. Cousin Nettie warns Roderick of the dangers of the big house domestic saying,

'I thought.' She said, still in agitation, 'it had all begun again. *You* now, now that you are the master. No, I cannot come back; I told him, again and again, and I told them – now I am telling you. Everywhere is better without me, so of all places I will not go back there. You must make the best of Mount Morris as it is.'

'I don't especially want anybody to do anything,' said Roderick.

'Oh, but you brood about what they should be doing. Whenever you remember you are unforgiving.'

'But,' said Roderick, having taken thought, 'I don't really think I'm like that.'

'I know, because I never have been forgiven. You should be like that: what is to become of us wrong ones if there's nobody who is right?'

'Well,' he could only say, 'I'm not like that.'

'No, not like him,' she decided, lightly shaking her head. 'oh I wish you could have seen him when he was a young man, when he was my cousin. Head and shoulders above all the rest of them, full of schemes and life! Who knows what might not have come of a different story, if there could have been one. As it was, he had to go out looking for a son.' (Bowen, 232-33)

Cousin Nettie gives Roderick a look into what the big house domestic means in the realm of modernity. She describes how Mount Morris caused a change in Cousin Francis, and made him worry about those working on the property, and on finding an heir for the property itself. Cousin Nettie presents Mount Morris as some sort of cursed place that changes whoever owns it into

someone different. This weird interaction doesn't put Roderick off his big-house dreams, instead it solidifies his resolve to take over the property, and do a better job than Cousin Francis did.

The exchange that occurs between Roderick and Cousin Nettie is important to this intrigue narrative because, it presents the reader with a look at how Bowen is presenting the rift that war creates for those fighting in it from their homes and domestic spaces over all. Roderick is disconnected due to his place physically fighting in the army and having a radically different way of living that comes with being in the military. Harrison and Robert are both severed from the domestic in a way that is also caused by the war, but is different from fighting in the front lines. Harrison and Robert both remain in the domestic, but their role as spies cuts them off from ever being able to live peacefully in the home due to it being their battle ground.

What makes *The Heat of the Day* an interesting view of the domestic is in how the novel ends. Once Robert has been unmasked as the enemy spy Harrison accused him of being throughout the narrative slows, and the focus moves to Stella trying to understand Robert and why he has betrayed his country.

'Why?'

'You wonder – yes, I suppose you must. We should have to understand each other all over again, and it's too late now.'

'Late in the night?'

He did not answer.

Raising herself in order to be more clearly heard, she said: 'Only, why are you against this country?'

'Country?'

'This, where we are.'

‘I don’t see what you mean – what *do* you mean? Country? – there are no more countries left; nothing but names. What country have you and I outside this room? Exhausted shadows, dragging themselves out again to fight – and how long are they going to drag the fight out? We have come out at the far side of that.’ (Bowen, 300-301)

This passage shows how elusive Robert is as Stella is questioning him. He gives vague reasons for betraying his country and every answer he gives Stella implies that what he is doing will make the world a better place. That tearing apart the world he currently inhabits is a noble cause. Robert’s view of the domestic and his desire to destroy it are similar to how most modernist writers approach the domestic. They wish to do away with it, just as Robert wants to do away with his native country. The fact that Bowen has Stella question Robert about his motivations, and that Robert’s answers reflect the destructive standpoint that her contemporaries promoted makes this ending exchange particularly important.

During Robert’s final meeting with Stella, the threat of violence is constant. Robert knows that Harrison is outside waiting for him and that his time is up. The narrative never divulges the violence that causes Robert’s death once he leaves Stella’s apartment. This shows what is important to Bowen in this novel which isn’t the narrative of intrigue itself; but instead, how the domestic can be maintained in times of war. Robert’s character shows how those who desire to destroy their own sources of home threaten the entire domestic. The action that causes Robert’s death is concealed from both Stella and the reader. The violence happens outside of the narrative itself which further shows how this novel isn’t about the spies themselves. Instead, this narrative is about Stella dealing with these two agents manipulating her. The novel closes with Stella Rodney being questioned about her knowledge of Robert’s duplicity. The danger Stella faces when she is questioned about Robert shows how deeply Robert and Harrison have

damaged Stella's domestic space. The two spies forcing her to participate in their cat and mouse game have dropped her into international danger.

The most prominent facet of Bowen's domestic style is how her description of domestic spaces directly points to aspects of character that are important to the novel. Part of Stella's flat is described as,

He sat planted well forward in his armchair – which, like so many third armchairs in a room in which normally only two intimate people sit, was a stranded outpost some way away down the carpet, and was turned towards hers (which faced towards Robert's, empty) at a tentative angle which he had not changed. (Bowen, 142)

Stella's armchairs are given the weight of countries, the two armchairs that sit together and the one that is on the outside. Turning armchairs in a flat into a reflection of Stella's life, and Harrison's inability to access it, furthers the importance of the domestic in this novel. Another instance where Bowen uses the domestic to illustrate the nature of a character, is in Louie's flat. Louie is a character on the fringes of the central plot, she swings in and out of Stella and Harrison's intrigue narrative. Louie is important to the inheritance aspect of *The Heat of the Day*. This is clearly shown through her son's illegitimacy and inheritance of the post-war world. Louie's flat is shown in detail by Bowen again looking at the nature of living-room chairs,

It had been Louie who – chair tilted back, tongue exploring her palate, mind blank of anything in particular – had hour-long passively gazed at Tom. Why now, therefore, should it be his chair that gazed at her? It directed something at her whichever way she pushed, pulled or turned it, in whatever direction she turned it. The discountenancing of the chair by filling it had been her object in bringing strangers she met in the park back here. (Bowen, 162)

This passage shows how Louie has been cut loose into the world since her husband left for the war. She has been trying to find stability through strangers, attempting to fill the empty spaces in her domestic without success. The empty chair is blamed for throwing Louie into the dangers of bringing strangers home to her flat. Both Stella and Louie treat their furniture as living entities inhabiting their domestic spaces. Where Alan Hepburn misses this domestic entirely in his discourse on Bowen, Haiyan Lee in her article actively looks at how Eileen Chang employs a similar use of the domestic in her writing saying, “Some point to her unrelenting focus on the urban everyday in an age when “serious” literature overwhelmingly rallied to the cause of nationalism” (641). The focus on nationalism that this quote references harkens back to Hepburn’s description of a spy. Both Bowen and Chang weave the domestic into the plots of their intrigue narratives. Bowen and Chang create a tension between the traditional spy narrative and novels about the home.

Unlike Stella Rodney, who resists her involvement in espionage, Wang Chia-chih throws herself into an intrigue plot that threatens everything around her including her life. In Eileen Chang’s short story *Lust, Caution*, the issue of melding the dangers of war and the domestic create an atmosphere nearly identical to the one in *The Heat of the Day*. Similar to Bowen’s novel, Chang takes a female protagonist named Wang Chia-chih and has her in a tale of intrigue. Unlike Stella Rodney who is surrounded by spies, Wang Chia-chih is in the position of spy. Wang Chia-chih becomes enmeshed in intrigue when she joins a political theater group set up by college students. The students decide that they need to act against the Japanese puppet government in China presenting the reader with the following plan,

After he had reported his findings to his conspirators, they resolved after much discussion to set a honey trap for one Mr. Yee: to seduce him, with the help of one of their female

classmates, toward an assassin's bullet. First she would befriend the wife, then move in on the husband. But if she presented herself as a student – always the most militant members of the population – Yee Tai-tai would be instantly on her guard. Instead, the group decided to make her the young wife of a local businessman; that sounded unthreatening enough, particularly in Hong Kong, where men of commerce were almost always apolitical. Enter the female star of the college drama troupe. (Chang, 18)

Wang Chia-chih thrusts herself into this seemingly simple assassination plot that requires her to take on a false identity. This false identity, that of Mai Tai-tai, the wife of a made-up Hong Kong businessman puts Wang Chia-chih into is a dangerous domestic.

Wang Chia-chih and Stella Rodney are both women who are in a dangerous space between the domestic and war. This dangerous space is created by the espionage and intrigue that crawls through both of these works. While Stella is attempting to find out if her lover is a spy, Wang Chia-chih is trying to avoid being discovered as a spy herself. Both of these stories take the genre of intrigue fiction and complicate it with their focus on the domestic. These narratives refuse to ignore the disorienting danger of not being able to distinguish between war and the home. Eileen Chang begins this short fiction with a scene that involves Wang Chia-chih playing mahjong with the wives of Mr. Yee and his colleagues. The game is important because it shows Wang Chia-chih as fully integrated into the domestic space of Mr. Yee through a relationship with his wife, Yee Tai-tai. The details given about the room, in which the mahjong is being played, and the details about the clothing of the other wives firmly establishes the opulent and tenuous domestic.

Mr. Yee, who is a traitor to his own country, is benefiting off of the war with Japan which is illustrated by Chang's description below,

The two ladies – *tai-tais* – immediately to her left and right were both wearing black wool capes, each held fast at the neck by a heavy double gold chain and snaked out from beneath the cloak's turned-down collar. Isolated from the rest of the world by Japanese occupation, Shanghai had elaborated a few native fashions. Thanks to the extravagantly inflated price of gold in the occupied territories, gold chains as thick as these were now fabulously expensive. But somehow, functionally worn in place of a collar button, they managed to avoid the taint of vulgar ostentation, thereby offering their owners the perfect pretext for parading their wealth on excursions about the city. (Chang, 1)

Chang's description of clothing is as telling as Bowen's descriptions of scene. The black capes that the *tai-tais* wear imply a false attempt at being somber. The need to keep their status while pretending the large gold chains are there to serve a practical purpose reveals the type of people these women are without having them speak. The outfits are also interesting when considered beside Bowen's description of Stella's apartment, and the sense of an endangered war domestic that she creates. Chang's description of clothing creates an invading domestic. The wives of the members of Wang Ching-wei's puppet government maintain a precarious home-space that depends upon the success of an invading force. This precarious home-space is the opposite of Stella's home-space in *The Heat of the Day*. Instead of trying to protect itself against the enemy, the domestic that Chang creates is that of the enemy constantly threatened by its own country while also not entirely secure with the enemy country.

Wang Chia-chih infiltrates this domestic through Mr. Yee's wife, Yee Tai-tai. The need for Wang Chia-chih to fit in with Yee Tai-tai's social circle, but also to betray that domestic

through her position as spy makes this invading domestic even more tenuous. This tension is shown as follows,

As the gamblers busily set to calculating their wins and losses, Mr. Yee motioned slightly at Chia-chih with his chin toward the door. She immediately glanced at the two black capes on either side of her. Fortunately, neither seemed to have noticed. She paid out the chips she had lost, took a sip from her teacup, then suddenly exclaimed: 'That memory of mine! I have a business appointment at three o'clock, I'd forgotten all about it Mr. Yee, will you take my place until I get back?' (Chang, 8)

Wang Chia-chih has to juggle between the domestic danger of sleeping with a married man, and the war-related danger of being part of an assassination plot. This strange intersection between domestic danger and the danger inherent in espionage further solidifies the importance of the domestic to intrigue.

Another interesting facet of this story is the way that it has been adapted. Ang Lee adapted Eileen Chang's short story *Lust, Cation* in 2007 bringing Chang's work international attention. This adaptation presents Chang's narrative in a way that deviates from Chang's original tone and her use of the domestic. In Ang Lee's film the presence of the invading Japanese is front and center. There is an entire scene that takes place in a Japanese-style place of business. This scene where Wang Chia-chih is surrounded by Japanese aesthetics and furniture is important because it is the best example of how Lee's film diverts from Chang's story. The need to fill in gaps left in Chang's story enabled Lee to construct scenes in the film that are not described in the story.

Eileen Chang makes a conscious choice in her narrative to omit the influence of Japan. In this narrative of intrigue where a Chinese student is taking action against the Japanese invasion

of China none of the characters are Japanese they are all Chinese. Even the man who is the focus of the assassination plot is a Chinese man working under the Japanese government. This intentional focus on China further shows Chang's fascination with the domestic. As in Bowen's narrative, the enemy in the intrigue plot is from the same country they have turned against. This deviation is important because the addition of a Japanese style scene breaks with Chang's domestic and turns the movie into a different type of intrigue fiction. Chang excludes the Japanese in her writing; instead choosing to illustrate Chinese domestic scenes and relationships. Lee invites the Japanese aesthetic into his version of the story which fits since it is about fighting against the Japanese. I assert that this shows that Chang's neglect of the Japanese in *Lust, Caution* is intentional.

Another intentional move Chang uses in *Lust, Caution* is how she emphasizes Wang Chia-chih's position as an actress turned spy. In Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* players in the intrigue narrative are out for personal gain; Robert wants to see the enemy win, Harrison wants Stella's life, and Stella just wants the truth. Chang's intrigue narrative focuses on the spy as an actress who doesn't seem to have any great patriotic feeling. Chang presents Wang Chia-chih as follows,

She had, in a past life, been an actress; and here she was, still playing a part, but in a drama too secret to make her famous.

While at college in Canton she'd starred in a string of rousing patriotic history plays. Before the city fell to the Japanese, her university had relocated to Hong Kong, where the drama troupe had given one last performance. Overexcited, unable to wind down after the curtain had fallen, she had gone out for a bite to eat with the rest of the cast. But even after almost everyone else had dispersed, she still hadn't wanted to go home. Instead, she

and two female classmates had ridden through the city on the deserted upper deck of a tram as it swayed and trundled down the middle of the Hong Kong streets, the neon advertisements glowing in the darkness outside the windows. (Chang, 17)

This passage makes Wang Chia-chih's spying strange. Up until this point in the narrative Wang Chia-chih's reasons for joining the assassination plot were unknown. Wang Chia-chih didn't seem overly patriotic but anything could have pushed her into this situation. The fact that Wang Chia-chih joined this student rebel group so she could feel like she belonged is unexpected. Wang Chia-chih is putting her life in danger because she enjoys acting and never wants to stop. This seems like a trivial reason that shouldn't lead her into a deadly assassination plot and yet Chang puts her there. The facts that Wang Chia-chih's reason for joining is trivial makes it important to my argument. This trivial reasoning further grounds this narrative as a domestic tale of intrigue. Bowen and Chang both place mundane people into strange situations. Stella is pulled into the intrigue plot because of her lover's secret activities. Wang Chia-chih chases her desire to act to a deadly end.

In both of these narratives the spies crave the domestic. Both Harrison and Wang Chia-chih believe their own lies and enter a safe space that doesn't actually exist for them. This desire for the domestic propels these narratives out of the traditional genre of intrigue and into a category of their own. This category looks at the domestic during war-time and how it changes, but also bolsters itself against agents of war that seek to dismantle it.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONFUSING TIME

Allan Hepburn's definition of culture is, "'Culture,' for my purposes, means the nexus of narratives, institutions, practices, values, spaces, habits, and customs that shape human activities in material and symbolic forms." (15). This definition is important to my analysis because it points out the importance of material objects and how their relation to intrigue narratives refers to physical evidence or documents. These physical documents are entirely absent in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* which is focused on intrigue in the domestic. In this chapter I will be looking at narratives that focus on physical documents. What is important about these documents is how they are able to seize control of the characters who find them and distort the line between the past and the present.

In Elizabeth Bowen's novel *A World of Love* time not only plays a strange role, but also relates closely to the documents that tie this narrative into Hepburn's description of intrigue. The documents in this novel resemble documents in intrigue novels. These documents of intrigue chronicle an event that needs to be puzzled out. The difference between Bowen and Chang's documents and the ones described by Hepburn comes in when the ramifications are discovered. Instead of being international secrets these documents hold domestic secrets. The other element of this narrative that is connected to these physical documents is how these letters are able to manipulate and even break down time. In the beginning of the novel time is introduced as follows,

On the dresser, from one of the hooks for cups, hung a still handsome calendar for the year before; and shreds of another, previous to that, remained tacked to the shutter over the sink. These, with the disregarded dawdling and often stopping of the cheap scarlet

clock wedged in somewhere between the bowls and dishes, spoke of the almost total irrelevance of Time, in the abstract, to this ceaseless kitchen. (Bowen, 25)

Bowen treats time in this passage as a person all its own by having the word time capitalized. This focus on the idea of time itself and how it is functioning in her narrative is a fundamental part of Bowen's style. This use of time is shown most clearly in her novel *A World of Love*; which follows a young woman's desire to connect to the past and to explore alternate realities in her mind. The novel shows the main character, named Jane, as disconnected from the standard flow of time, and like the passage above unable to keep track of time.

Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang both; use time to isolate incidents in their novels, to provide importance, and to explore the strange way that time can be halted even destroyed when characters throw themselves into the past. For Elizabeth Bowen time plays an important role in her construction of the domestic especially where she is focused on the big house domestic. Bowen constantly remains focused, in her literature, on how these big old house domestics are bubbles outside of time. These big houses create their own time in a way that allows the past to remain constantly in play. This constant atmosphere of the past haunting the present is most obvious in Bowen's *A World of Love*. In *A World of Love* the character of Jane propels the narrative forward creating a strange sense of anachronism in her choice of Edwardian dress-up, and her obsession with things her elders would rather stay buried. Jane sets off a series of uncomfortable encounters between the residents of Montefort, the big house at the center of the narrative.

Jane's actions center around a packet of letters she finds in the attic of Montefort described as follows,

She planted the candle on the floor, knelt down, and set about shifting albums, stacks of them, from the top. She unbuckled traps, put the lid back, and began to draw out the inexhaustible muslin of the dress; out of it, having been wedged in somewhere, tumbled the packet of letters. They fell at her feet, having found her rather than she them. (Bowen, 36)

These letters document the relationship of the original owner of Montefort, a man named Guy, who died in the First World War and two different women. The first woman is Jane's mother Lilia. The second is his cousin Antonia who is the current owner of Montefort. The strange inheritance that is depicted in the novel is similar to that of Stella Rodney in *The Heat of the Day*, where she is cut out of the inheritance of the big house by her own child. In this situation though, the strange inheritance creates an even stranger domestic space. This strange domestic creates the out of time sense in the novel. Lilia was engaged to Guy when he came home on leave from the war. Guy didn't include Lilia in his will so that when he died the property of Montefort went to his nearest living relation, Antonia. The strangeness occurs when Antonia feels that she owes something to Lilia. This obligation compels Antonia to take Lilia on at Montefort where she is neither owner nor employee. Lilia is also given in marriage to Antonia's other cousin, Fred. Fred has been cut out of the line of inheritance due to his illegitimacy. All of these strange connections and unresolved slights remain closed into the domestic at Montefort.

The way that time is stopped or shifted in this novel directly connects to the dysfunctional nature of this domestic. The issues that Antonia, Lilia, and Fred have with one another have never been discussed or resolved. This unresolved tension has made Montefort a

place where aggressions and problems from the the First World War are suspended in gelatin. Jane finding and reading Guy's letters disturbs this gelatin and brings to light things that have been left to fester. This unearthing also creates a problem with time for everyone involved. For Antonia and Lilia the unresolved love triangle between them and Guy is disrupted for the first time since Guy's death. For Jane, it creates an alternate life where she is the rightful inheritor of Montefort due to a change in paternity. These problems all have to do with missed opportunities in the past. Bowen makes use of this invasion of the past by having Jane see herself in the past interacting with Guy through his old letters. The ghostly presence of Guy in the narrative not only represents Antonia and Lilia's inability to move on from his romance; but also, the entire culture's inability to move on from the sudden death of an entire generation in the First World War.

This traumatic loss blinds the older characters in this narrative to the world around them. Instead they become trapped in a haunted domestic. Bowen uses the youngest character in the novel to address the discord Guy's letters have created in Montefort. All of the adults are lost in a mix of imagined and real past experiences. The youngest daughter, Maud, is obsessed with keeping time accurately. Maud desperately keeps a hold on the present. She isn't romantically entangled in the past and doesn't share her sister's desire for an alternate life. Instead Maud is constantly present. Bowen makes Maud almost malevolent in her ability to be present. She skips in and out of the other's problems almost like an evil spirit bringing them into present reality. One such example comes after Maud is caught with the letters from Guy by her father. Who then takes them after beating her up as Bowen describes,

Maud as a character had to be re-assessed – she was a bandit not out of contempt for law but out of contempt for its missingness from Montefort: she in fact was the purest

authoritarian. She had put into power, one might say forced into being, a father-figure: this had collapsed on top of her in the Horse Field. (Bowen, 181)

Bowen reinforces Maud's desire for temporal stability. Maud wants a father who won't beat his child for old love-letters. When this façade is torn down Maud can't come to terms with it. She then turns to the Old Testament to try and call revenge down on Fred who has betrayed her. Where Jane is romantic to the point of dangerous nostalgia, Maud is painfully present and vengeful to anyone who doesn't live up to how she sees them. These two sisters present a fascinating divide. One stuck in a past that isn't her own. The other is desperately trying to get the out of sync domestic in order.

It is important that Jane is the one to uncover the long suffering problem between the older generations of Montefort. She is able to release Guy's ghost and open conversation where Maud wouldn't give it a second thought. Jane is removed from the event itself, but she is also a product of that event. If Guy had lived and married Lilia or Antonia, Jane would never have existed. This instability in the past makes Jane question her very existence. It also makes her obsess over Guy's ghostly presence. Her obsession is most apparent at a dinner party Jane attends. The dinner party includes a strange mix of out of town guests at Montefort's closest neighboring estate. Once there Jane drinks alcohol and hallucinates about Guy thinking,

Only, all went to heighten her striking power – and had she not struck when she spoke the name! It had left her lips and was in the room.

Guy was among them. The recoil of the others – marked his triumphant displacement of their air. She saw the reflection of crisis in each face, heard it in loudening, dropping, then stopping voices. (Bowen, 101)

Guy's hold on the present through Jane is so strong that it conjures him into ghostly existence. This presence seems to have an effect on the other people present. Bowen continues to push Guy's ghost into the consciousness of those at Montefort by having Antonia experience his presence. After Jane has been brought back to Montefort and Antonia is closing up the house for the night she thinks,

This was not the long-ago, it was now or nothing – the stink of the expiring lamp came fanning out from the hall behind her; unmistakably was her stout shadow cast forward over the little garden. Ghosts could have no place in this active darkness – more, tonight was a night which had changed hands, going back again to its lordly owners: time again was into the clutch of herself an Guy. (Bowen, 122)

This strange passage occurs right after Jane's dinner party. It is almost as though now that Guy has been summoned the line between the present and the past is thinning. Montefort is almost like a time-machine after this point, conjuring up memories that Jane has unlocked with the letters.

In Eileen Chang's short story titled "Jasmine Tea" the power of objects from the past creates a situation similar to *A World of Love*. Where in Bowen's novel the stalling of time due to letters from the past creates awkward tension, Chuanqing's discovery in Chang's narrative creates a dangerous tension. These differences are interesting because Bowen is writing a novel that is looking back on the inter war period in Ireland. That place and time are haunted by ghosts of the past and the looming future war. In "Jasmine Tea" the main character Chuanqing lives a life of abuse from his opium addicted family. His only solace is in an object that sets Chuanqing on a destructive path. Chuanqing finds a gift that his Chinese literature teacher, named Yan Ziyi, gave to his deceased mother, Feng Biluo, which is describes as,

Azaleas outside the window; inside, Yan Danzhu ... and Danzhu's father was Yan Ziyue. He'd seen that name when he was little, before he'd really learned to read. On the blank inside cover of a ragged old *Early Tide* magazine he'd deciphered, one by one, these words:

To Miss Biluo,

A trifle for your amusement.

Best regards, Yan Ziyue

His mother's name was Feng Biluo. (Chang, 88)

This discovery sends Chuanqing's already deteriorating mental state into complete disarray. This is the point at which time stops for Chuanqing and the boundary between the past and the present disintegrates. Chang's short story coincides with Bowen's in interesting ways. One of those ways is how they handle a character's loss of self and place in time. For Bowen, the character of Jane romanticizes Guy and almost feels connected to him through the letters. For Chang, Chuanqing's character uncovers his mother's past; but instead of, feeling more connected to her he responds with anger. His anger is at her for not marrying a different man. He also feels ashamed that he is no better than her in accepting his undesirable lot in life.

Chuanqing sits listlessly in a room full of opium smoke and conjures up his mother's spirit, much in the way that Jane drinks alcohol and sees guy's ghost. Chuanqing's experience is presented as,

He had a strange feeling, though, that the sky would soon be dark [...] that already it was dark. As he waited all alone by the window, his heart darkened along with the sky. An unspeakable, dusky anguish [...] Just as in a dream, that person waiting by the window

was at first himself, and then in an instant he could see, very clearly, that it was his mother [...] He couldn't tell whether it really was his mother, or himself.

But the nameless anguish pressing down on him? He knew now that that was love, a hopeless love some twenty years in the past. A knife will rust after twenty years, but it's still a knife. (Chang, 89)

Chuanqing sees his mother in his own reflection and then instantly loses track of who is who, his identity becomes melded with his feelings about her. This strange melding, stops time and creates a space outside of both the past and present. In this timeless space Chuanqing can fantasize about what his life would be like if his mother had chosen Yan Ziyi instead of his father. In both of these narratives the danger found in documents is clear. Both Bowen and Chang illustrate the importance of stable reality. Considering how many lives can be disrupted when time is lost, Bowen and Chang's stories present important scenarios. In times of war and peace the need for stability and certainty is paramount, especially in the domestic.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE USE OF THINGS

Bowen and Chang continue their exploration of the domestic by presenting the lives of women. For Bowen a year in the life of an adolescent girl is sufficient. For Chang, the entire life of a woman is needed to present her view. Both of these stories use objects in a more intimate way than presented in the previous chapter.

The wartime espionage narratives of *The Heat of the Day* and *Lust, Caution* highlight the paranoia of a domestic under threat. They also look at the inability for agents of espionage to exist peacefully in a domestic space. I then discuss the significance of documents and the dangers of losing one's grip on their present reality. In Chapter Three, my focus shifts fully to narratives of the interwar period. In this chapter, I will explore how prewar narratives magnify and complicate the interactions between objects, domestic, familial, and national domestics.

These complicated interactions are best seen Bowen and Chang's use of inheritance narratives. For Bowen, inheritance has potential for good but also great harm. She shows this in the big houses that appear in all three of the novels I have looked at. Eileen Chang also presents readers with both sides of the inheritance narrative. She presents characters such as Ch'i-ch'iao who strive for inheritance and then use it to harm others or Liu Ch'üan in *Naked Earth* who lives in early communist China, a world that is violently against the idea of inheritance altogether. For both of these authors the way that they manipulate time in their narratives of inheritance reveals different benefits and pitfalls for their characters. Bowen's narrative moves in the microcosm of one household, and one girl's summer romance. While Chang's story encompasses years of one woman's life from youth to old age. These two different spans of time reveal different things. Both explore the ever-present tension of the past and the future that lurks in the idea of

inheritance. The issue of inheritance also draws attention to physical objects and their role in the domestic. Bowen and Chang both use objects to represent the struggle of inheritance.

In Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Death of the Heart* the importance of physical objects in the domestic is startlingly clear. In the novel, the Quaynes who are married but without children take in the child of Thomas Quaynes deceased father. The child, Portia, was the product of Thomas's father's relationship with another woman who he took abroad and remained with until his death. The total absence of a stable domestic space for Portia is important because when she comes into the Quayne's home she is out of place and unable to act in a way that Anna Quayne deems appropriate. Bowen uses this strange and hostile domestic to hone in on the place of inheritable objects in the domestic.

The Quaynes are the keepers of the inheritance. They are the legal owners who can decide how it is used. The maid who is only known by the name Matchett is a strange part of this dynamic which is explained as, "Matchett, on the other hand, had been not a matter of choice: she had years in service in Dorset with Thomas Quayne's mother, and after Mrs. Quayne's death had come to 2 Windsor Terrace with the furniture that had always been her charge" (Bowen, 25). This quote paints Matchett as part of the inheritance itself as a part of the furniture like a speaker for these objects. Matchett is also the only one who closely watches Portia. Matchett forces Portia and the readers to question Eddie's intentions with Portia. Matchett shoots down the idea that this novel is about a young romance. Instead, Matchett places herself in opposition to Eddie protecting Portia in the same way she protects the furniture from decay. This makes it as though Matchett sees Portia as part of the inheritance instead of an independent being. Bowen also presents Matchett as constantly in tension with the Quaynes. This is strange because it also presents a tension between the past which is represented in objects and the present which is

represented by the Quayne's free metropolitan life-style. Anna Quayne is constantly surrounded by company who either come to her or she goes to them. Her husband, Thomas, wants nothing more than solitude in his study. The disapproval that Matchett has for the Quayne's domestic choices provides a strange view of the home. I wish to argue that Bowen presents readers with this domestic tension, not to proselytize about the need for an antiquated domestic. Instead she presents it to show the danger of a domestic that is out of sync. The character of Matchett and the objects she obsesses over pulls the domestic into the big house past that Bowen has criticized in many of her other works. Anna and Thomas represent a more modern domestic where objects are taken advantage of and forgotten. They fight against the weight of the past, or as Matchett says, "No there's no past in this house [...] They'd rather no past – not have the past, that is to say. No wonder they don't rightly know what they're doing. Those without memories don't know what is what." (Bowen, 99) I believe that Bowen's focus on Portia who is thrown between these two domestic opposites shows that Bowen believes in a healthy balance between these two. That a balanced domestic space isn't as harmful or toxic. Also The necessity of remembering the past without getting so caught up in it that life can be lived.

Bowen uses *The Death of the Heart* to explore the issue of the modern era. Where other writers of modernism are destroying the idea of domestic. Trying to distance themselves from their literary past. Their way of writing is similar to how Anna and Thomas try to distance themselves from Matchett and her furniture. Bowen fights back against this destruction showing a young woman trapped between destruction of the domestic and an inability to move on from the objects of the past. Bowen doesn't provide a safe, stable answer to the problem. She never presents a stable Portia in a safe domestic. Instead she leaves the story before Portia is able to find her place in this ever changing environment. The importance of this lack of a distinct

solution to the problem of modernism or the past reflects the fact that there is no easy answer, and Bowen is aware of a need for balance between the two.

Portia's place in the narrative is to bring up these domestic issues. She does this while she is staying with Anna's old governess at a house named Waikiki on the seashore, wondering, she says,

Having lived in hotels where one's bills wait weekly at the foot of the stairs, and no "extra" is ever overlooked, she had had it borne in on her that wherever anyone is they are costing somebody something, and that the cost must be met. She understood that by living at Windsor Terrace, eating what she ate, sleeping between sheets that had to be washed, by even so much as breathing the warmed air, she became a charge on Thomas and Anna. (Bowen, 245)

Portia's life before the events of *The Death of the Heart* were without a stable domestic. Just as in Bowen's life, Portia lived out of hotels especially with her mother towards the end of her life. This lack of domestic makes Portia the perfect character to throw into the war between the Quaynes and Matchett. Portia wants to please Thomas and Anna because they are her only living guardians and she is at their discretion. Due to this Portia flirts with an older man who is Anna's friend trying to be part of Anna's world rejecting the traditional domestic. This doesn't work out for Portia instead sending her spinning in the opposite direction. She returns from her time at the seaside and seeks out Matchett saying,

'Gracious, Matchett, you have got everywhere clean!'

'Oh – so that's where you've been?'

'Yes, I've looked at everywhere. It really *is* clean- not that it isn't always.'

‘More likely you’d notice it, coming back. I know those seaside houses – all claptrap and must.’

‘I must say,’ said Portia, sitting on Matchett’s table, ‘today makes me wish only you and I lived here.’ (Bowen, 302)

This conversation between Portia and Matchett while they’re alone in Windsor Terrace shows Portia swinging from the modern domestic of the seaside to the traditional domestic that Matchett aggressively protects. This extreme is appealing to Portia because she knows her place. The traditional domestic isn’t looking out for her best interest. Matchett watches over Portia, but she also spies on her and creates an unsettling surveillance state within Windsor Terrace. The freedom of the seaside was dangerous for Portia because she was allowed time with Eddie who is only interested in her to aggravate Anna. The structure of Windsor Terrace is also damaging. Where the seaside was too open and unstructured, Windsor Terrace is tightly observed by Matchett. This is clearly seen when Portia is trying to hide a letter from Eddie,

Portia at once stiffened. ‘No, don’t. I like it this way – No, don’t.’

‘Why ever not?’

‘Because I like it this way.’

But Matchett’s hand pushed underneath the pillow, to turn it. Under there, going wooden, her hand stopped. ‘What’s this you’ve got under here? *Now*, what have you got?’

‘That’s only just a letter.’

‘What have you got it here for?’

‘I must have put it there.’

‘Or maybe it walked,’ said Matchett. ‘And who’s been writing *you* letters, may I ask?’

As gently as possible, Portia tried saying nothing. She let Matchett turn the pillow, then settled with her cheek on the new, cool side. For nearly a minute, propitiatingly, she acted someone grateful going to sleep. Then, with infinite stealth, she felt round under the pillow – to find the letter gone. (Bowen, 104)

Matchett is using a system of surveillance in this passage. The pretense of turning her pillow is to do what she believes is a good thing. It can be argued as a good thing because Eddie should be chased off. This does not excuse Matchett's means of obtaining her information. The problem with Matchett is also in the way that she is comforting and loving to Portia until Portia steps out of line when Matchett emotionally punishes her.

The way that Matchett employs her place as the keeper of things and furniture allows her to control this domestic. This furthers the rift between the Quaynes modern domestic and Matchett who wants to preserve a way of domestic which is no longer practical. The connection between the inheritance of things and the construction of domestic spaces is not only depicted in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*. This connection also shows up in Eileen Chang's fiction particularly her short story titled "The Golden Cangue".

In "The Golden Cangue" a woman named Ch'i-ch'iao marries into a rich family, the Chiangs. They live in Shanghai and consist of the matriarch, three brothers, one sister and their wives. The close living quarters of the Chiangs creates domestic tension between everyone and Ch'i-ch'iao, who sees herself as constantly slighted. Ch'i-ch'iao is constantly weighed down by the fact that she has joined this family for wealth, wealth that she may never see. This focus on wealth unhinges her mind and creates strange conversations such as the one she has with the youngest of the three brothers,

On her way out she again leaned her back against the door, whispering, 'What I don't get is in what way I'm not as good as the others. What is it about me that is no good?'

'My good sister-in-law, you're all good.'

She said with a laugh, 'Could it be that staying with a cripple, I smell crippled too, and it will rub off on you?' She stared straight ahead, the small, solid gold pendants of her earrings like two brass nails nailing her to the door, a butterfly specimen in a glass box, bright-colored and desolate. (Chang, 186)

This paragraph gives insight into how Ch'i-ch'iao views her place in this situation. It also shows something Chang is pointing out in her situation. For Ch'i-ch'iao her lowered status in this family is unfounded and her coming from a sesame oil shop owner's family shouldn't put her so low. Instead she believes that it is her husband's health that holds her down and makes her angry. Chang herself shows how this isn't the only thing that is troubling Ch'i-ch'iao. Even if the character herself doesn't realize it Chang makes a point of saying that the physical objects in this domestic, her gold earrings, the inheritance she is struggling for, are what bind her into this toxic environment.

Ch'i-ch'iao is blinded by her obsession with objects can't see anybody. The fog of money and inherited objects is strong. This is clearly shown when Ch'i-ch'iao is visited by Chi-tse, the youngest brother, who tries to get her buy land off of him. Ch'i-ch'iao perceives Chi-tse as trying to emotionally manipulate her which causes her to lose her temper and attack him. After he leaves Ch'i-ch'iao is described as seeing,

A curtain of ice-cold pearls seemed to hang in front of Ch'i-ch'iao's eyes. A hot wind would press the curtain tight on her face, and after being sucked back by the wind for a moment, it would muffle all her head and face before she could draw her breath. In such

alternately hot and cold waves her tears flowed. The tiny shrunken image of a policeman reflected faintly in the top corner of the window glass ambled by swinging his arms. A rickshaw quietly ran over the policeman. A little boy with his long gown tucked into his trouser waist kicking a ball out of the edge of the glass. The postman in green riding a bicycle superimposed his image on the policeman as he streaked by. All ghosts, ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence [...] What is real and what is false? (Chang, 205)

The objects of the domestic in this quote are filtering the outer world for Ch'i-ch'iao. This filter distorts her view of the outer world.

Ch'i-ch'iao views herself as fighting the traditional domestic of the Chiangs. Chang shows her downfall. Ch'i-ch'iao's downfall comes about due to her demented attachment to wealth and to the physical things of the Chiang family. This attachment comes at the expense of the people in that domestic. This short story illustrates what happens when someone fights against a traditional domestic so that they then turn it on others. Ch'i-ch'iao is resentful of the old-fashioned way that the Chiangs live and yet she takes their repressive tactics and turns them into weapons. She uses tradition against her own children in a sick form of self-destruction.

After the death of both Ch'i-ch'iao's husband and the matriarch of the family, Ch'i-ch'iao gains her inheritance and leaves the Chiangs with her two children. This departure seems like a triumph, but Chang shows that Ch'i-ch'iao is still in the grips of the destructive domestic that she tried to escape. Ch'i-ch'iao uses the physical trappings of the traditional domestic she so desperately hated to hurt her children. This destruction starts with her daughter, Ch'ang-an, who she forces into having her feet bound even though, "By then even women in conservative families like the Chiangs were letting out their bound feet, to say nothing of girls whose feet had

never been bound.” (Chang, 208). Despite the fact that fashion no longer favors bound feet, Ch’i-ch’iao insists on putting Ch’ang-an through it. This experience scars her forever. Ch’i-ch’iao also ruins things for her son Ch’ang-pai. She encourages him to smoke opium while also driving a wedge between him and his wife. Ch’i-ch’iao uses her acquired power to torture and ruin her children. Eileen Chang shows how Ch’i-ch’iao tried to break out from the toxic domestic of the Chiangs that she hated. Instead she ended up becoming worse than they were. Overcome with the need to guard her things from everyone, even her own family, and isolating herself as much as possible.

Elizabeth Bowen shows the tension between the modern domestic and the traditional. Eileen Chang shows how when someone is focused on obtaining a power over a harmful domestic, that the Chiang’s represent, they can fall into the same traps and scar the next generation. Both of these authors focus on this inner domestic decay. Bowen and Chang expose how negligence and hunger for power over objects can ruin not only one life, but an entire family.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The way that Elizabeth Bowen approaches the domestic is in line with Eileen Chang's writing, until the rise of communist China. This is when Chang's fiction takes a turn into territory that Bowen only vaguely touches on. The atmosphere of surveillance that Bowen creates in the Quaynes house enforced by Matchett cannot compare to the surveillance of Chang's communist China.

This surveillance state does away with a safe domestic completely. Instead it creates a tense environment, that is detrimental to all involved. In Eileen Chang's novel titled *Naked Earth* this extreme state of surveillance is shown. The reader sees things through the eyes of a young man named Liu Ch'üan. Liu Ch'üan starts the novel as an idealistic youth trying to become a member of the communist party and ends the novel joining the Chinese forces in the Korean war to escape the repressive communist regime. Liu Ch'üan's journey presents the reader with a radical view of a society without the safety of the domestic. Chang takes the things that Bowen, in her earlier works, presented and completely does away with it. Liu Ch'üan describes the atmosphere that pervades this novel saying, "To begin with he had never consciously felt that he had passed beyond the boundary line. He wondered if anybody who had lived under Communist rule could ever feel unwatched again." (Chang, 293). Liu Ch'üan has lived under surveillance for so long that even once he escapes it's reach he cannot shake the feeling of being watched. He cannot ever get back to his safe domestic because it had been so thoroughly demolished by the communist ideals that he once prescribed to.

The lack of domestic that Chang presents in *Naked Earth* is meant to be progressive and equal for both men and women. Chang quickly extinguishes this lie giving the reader two

different examples of women being subjugated in this communist world order. Chang shows how the demolition of the domestic has not freed women in the way that those demolishing it said it would. Instead they are thrown into the same uncertainty as Liu Ch'üan about being surveilled. They must also worry about the threat of being sexually used and abused by men of higher standing. The two prominent women in this novel are Ko Shan and Su Nan. Ko Shan is Liu Ch'üan's superior. She is able to bend the rules of this strict society by seducing men with power. The other side of that coin is Su Nan who is as low in status as Liu Ch'üan. She ends up being impregnated by a powerful man and dying during an illegal abortion procedure. Both of these women, despite their different status, must navigate this world in the same way. This shows that the loss of domestic safety did not change the same ways of gaining power. The only thing that the loss of the domestic did for them is make hiding these illicit affairs harder and more dangerous.

The threat of espionage invading and destroying the domestic that is thwarted in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, is the reality for Liu Ch'üan, Ko Shan, and Su Nan. Everyone in *Naked Earth* is a spy. Every single person has the ability to turn in those that do not follow the rules. Chang shows how this atmosphere of constant intrigue is dangerous and unhealthy. No one can truly trust anyone else. Instead they are surviving as Harrison does in Bowen's novel disconnected from everyone and everything out of necessity. This novel works as a perfect companion piece to Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* by showing the worst case scenario. Where men like Harrison create a society of spies. Chang's novel also compliments Harrison's desire for the domestic by presenting her characters as struggling for normalcy.

Looking at how Chang's *Naked Earth* interacts with her own domestic-based literature the striking difference is revealed. In "The Golden Cangue" the domestic traps those that come

into the family. It doesn't expose those members to the dangers of the outside world. The problems that the Chiangs experience in their domestic and the dangers of Liu Ch'üan's communist life both have the capacity to destroy people and to cripple further generations. The important difference between these narratives is that the toxic domestic of "The Golden Cangue" can be learned from and eventually fixed. The dangers of the *Naked Earth's* complete lack of domestic does not allow for any possible redemption because there is no domestic to work on.

"The Golden Cangue" shows how toxic domestics can harm those living in them which is similar to the domestic of "Jasmine Tea". Where the home is so horrible that Chuanqing has to create a dangerous fantasy to escape it, at least there is a home. The danger in "Jasmine Tea" is similar to the danger in *Naked Earth* because both stories contain male characters who feel as though they are without a stable home. The major difference is that Chuanqing does have a domestic to fall back on and the potential of a safe home some day. Liu Ch'üan does not have that option, he can either remain in his life of constant surveillance and danger or choose to join the Chinese forces in the Korean war.

Liu Ch'üan chooses to go to war because he cannot remain in the Chinese communist state. He has been living in constant fear of failing the party and paying with his life. This use of war to escape his oppressive home life further illuminates how important the domestic is to Chang's characters. Liu Ch'üan spends most of the novel trying to find stability in his day-to-day life. When that is destroyed by his arrest and Su Nan's death the prospect of the horrors of war outweighs the horrors of remaining in this society where nothing is private or safe from scrutiny. Liu Ch'üan muses over his choice to join the war saying,

He could breathe more easily out here at the edge of his Chinese world. Of course there was a good chance of getting killed. Not that he really cared, though he had not come

here for that purpose. If he had wanted to kill himself he could have done so without dying for them. (Chang, 267)

Liu Ch'üan clearly articulates how his choice to go to war is the only way he has to escape the surveillance of communist China. The price of escape is his potential death. Chang makes sure to mention and point out to readers that this is not something that Liu Ch'üan wants further illustrating the devastating effect of losing the domestic.

The importance of *Naked Earth* to the study of both Bowen and Chang's narratives is obvious. *Naked Earth* illustrates the loss of the domestic and how this loss devastates people's lives. Its importance comes from the picture of life without domestic. A picture of a society of intrigue that takes hold and destroys any sort of social safety. This novel and the other narratives discussed in my thesis point to a new way of reading Elizabeth Bowen and Eileen Chang's literature. Using modernism, intrigue and the domestic to look at both times of peace and times of war. Each of the three elements of Bowen and Chang's writing combine to create the strange environments in their writing. It is important to study the literature of not only Bowen and Chang; but, other writers from this time who might have been overlooked because their literature crossed the boundaries set for modernist, intrigue or domestic literatures.

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