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A “pre-traumatic stress syndrome”: trauma and war in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* and *The Heat of the Day*

Qiong He¹✉

As a modernist writer writing through the two World Wars and witnessing the decline of British imperial power through the decay of her own class, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, most of Elizabeth Bowen’s (1899–1973) writing is that of trauma. Many critics have suggested that modernist writing provides a response to the traumas of the era and resonates with the Freudian model of trauma, which regards the syndrome of traumatic events as *post-traumatic*. This essay challenges the previous studies regarding modernist writing of trauma as *post-traumatic*, by introducing Saint-Amour’s concept of a “pre-traumatic stress syndrome” to study Bowen’s two novels about wars, *The Last September* and *The Heat of the Day*. The essay holds that in Bowen’s writing, anticipation and anxiety arising before the war can also inflict psychic damage, just like the actual war. The essay demonstrates how Bowen’s writing about wars adds a new approach to literary trauma studies, which have concentrated almost solely on the aftermath of catastrophes or violence. Interpreting Bowen’s writing as pre-trauma not only provides a better understanding of the psychological condition of people during the wars but brings a new perspective to trauma studies as well.

¹Ocean University of China, Qingdao, China. ✉email: qiong.he@foxmail.com

Introduction

It has been suggested that the modernist period is characterized by unprecedented catastrophes and modernist writing responds to the traumas of the era. Trauma theory, especially the Freudian model of trauma¹, has been developed in response to these unprecedented atrocities. Consequently, Peters and Richards (2021) indicates that trauma is often considered “inherently linked to modernity” (3). As Baer (2007) suggests in “Modernism and Trauma”, modernist writing is “particularly apt for representing traumatic experience” and is often seen as “*post-traumatic* discourse” (307, emphasis added). Much of the literature from this period concerned itself with trauma and the scholarship on trauma writing of this period largely concentrates on war trauma.² As demonstrated by Rae (2007), modernist literature centers on the “work of mourning”, or more precisely, the ‘resistance’ to this work, shaping both its themes and its formal experiments” (13). Regarded as “*post-traumatic* discourse”, modernist literature is often investigated through the lens of trauma theory based on Sigmund Freud’s concept.

This essay challenges the previous studies considering modernist writing of trauma as *post-traumatic*, by introducing Paul K. Saint-Amour’s concept of a “pre-traumatic stress syndrome”. It applies this concept to the analysis of Elizabeth Bowen’s two novels about war, *The Last September* (1998a [1929]) and *The Heat of the Day*³ (1998b [1949]). Unlike the Freudian model of trauma that concentrates almost solely on the aftermath of catastrophes or violence, Saint-Amour suggests that the symptoms of traumatic events arise in response to “a potentially oncoming rather than an already realized catastrophe” (8). *The Last September* presents the traumatic psychology of the Anglo-Irish before their Big Houses are burned down during the Irish War of Independence, while *The Heat of the Day* concerns the traumatic conditions experienced by Londoners during the Blitz, when they are constantly traumatized by the threat of imminent bombings.

As a modernist writer, Bowen faced a uniquely complex situation, since she not only dealt with a set of challenges during the tumultuous period of the two World Wars but also witnessed the decline of British imperial power alongside the decay of her own class, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Consequently, scholars have identified two distinct facets of her work: the postcolonial Bowen, focused on her Irish-set works, like *The Last September* and *A World of Love*; and the modernist Bowen, exploring themes of dislocation, alienation, and betrayal in her novels and short stories from the interwar period onwards. Nevertheless, this dichotomy fails to capture the full complexity of Bowen’s artistry, as argued by Fredric Jameson, who posits that “the colonial experience is at the root of Western modernism”, and James F. Wurtz (2010), who asserts that “Bowen’s representations of Anglo-Irish Big House culture [in *The Last September* in particular] are in fact focal points for understanding Bowen as a modernist” (120). Building upon these ideas, this essay proposes that Bowen’s depiction of the trauma of the Irish War of Independence is intricately linked to her portrayal of the Second World War, ultimately enhancing our understanding of her as a modernist.

This essay suggests that Bowen’s depiction of the characters’ psyche during the Irish War of Independence in *The Last September* and during the Blitz in *The Heat of the Day* introduces a distinct form of psychological trauma called “pre-traumatic” as opposed to “post-traumatic”. The characters in these novels find themselves trapped in a historical period wherein they are “traumatized by both a past conflagration and the prospect of a worse future one” (Saint-Amour 10). This essay contends that Bowen’s writing demonstrates how pre-war anticipation and anxiety can inflict comparable psychological harm akin to the real war itself.

Saint Amour’s notion of “pre-traumatic stress syndrome”

In his work *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*, Saint-Amour explores the relationship between warfare and futurity. He proposes the concept of “pre-traumatic stress syndrome” to study novels written in the 1920s, a period between WWI and WWII. According to this notion, traumatic symptoms appear *before*, not *after*, the event happens: “[T]he sequentially inverted or preposterous phenomenon of traumatic symptoms—denial, dissociation, fragmentation, repression, the compulsive repetition of violence—[that] exists not in the wake of a past event, but in the shadow of a future one” (Saint-Amour 25). Saint-Amour highlights the significance of the anticipation of war and anxiety, asserting that they can also lead to traumatic psychosis, as he writes, “simulated and actual disasters will inflict equal psychic damage, and anticipation will be a condition in which one can ‘die a thousand deaths’” (7). His understanding of trauma mediates between the repression of past traumatic memories and the anticipation of future trauma, with a greater emphasis on the latter.

To present his idea of pre-trauma, Saint-Amour juxtaposes two contradictory perspectives on traumatic psychology during the interwar period: one is Sigmund Freud’s writings on trauma, which focuses on the effects of the subject’s repressed past; the other is the psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski’s study, *Le temps vécu* [*Lived Time*], which fixes its gaze in the future. Saint-Amour visually depicts Freud and Minkowski as figuratively standing in an interwar present, with Freud facing the past and Minkowski looking toward the future.

In his work *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud examines the phenomenon of “traumatic neurosis” experienced by individuals who have survived a traumatic incident, such as a train collision. Freud observes that these individuals may initially appear physically unharmed, but later exhibit severe psychological and physical symptoms. This leads him to the conclusion that traumatic neurosis is characterized by a latent period, during which the effects of the trauma do not immediately manifest (84). Building on Freud’s concept, Caruth (1995) further explores the nature of trauma by focusing on the structure of the traumatic experience itself. Caruth suggests that “the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4, italics in original). Trauma is characterized by its “immediacy”, for it splits the barrier of conscious protection, enabling the entrance of the outside into the inside without any mediation. Not having been fully “assimilated” as it occurred, the traumatic experience fails to be integrated into an individual’s personal history and impacts the subject belatedly, often after a period of latency, through such symptoms as flashbacks, dreams, and the compulsive repetition of behavior. This Freudian perspective on trauma emphasizes its belatedness and lingering influence, viewing the syndrome and associated symptoms as *post-traumatic*.

Despite its primary focus on the aftermath of traumatic experiences, Saint-Amour explains that the Freudian model of trauma sometimes also associates psychic wounding with anticipation. In the interwar writing, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1962), Freud examines the cases of shell shock or “war neurosis” and links psychic wounding to anticipation. To do this, Freud exhibits three distinct responses to danger: “anxiety” refers to a state of expecting or preparing for an unknown danger, “fear” is the expectation of a known one, and “fright” describes a state of being in immediate danger without any preparation, which leads to traumatic neurosis (12). According to Freud, traumatic neurosis occurs when there is only fright and no anxiety. Anxiety cannot cause traumatic neurosis; instead, it can “protect its

subject against fright and so against fright-neuroses” (Saint-Amour 13). Anxiety is seen as strengthening the psyche’s defensive mechanisms, enabling individuals to process and ultimately get rid of stimuli that could reactivate repressed memories and cause trauma. As Saint-Amour further concludes, in Freud’s view, “traumatic neuroses, including war neuroses, result not from a fear of death but from a near-death event’s reactivation of some ‘historical factor’ in the subject’s psychosexual past” (17–18). Although Freud occasionally links trauma to anticipation, as seen in his exploration of anxiety, his focus remains on the individual’s past, which is recollected and repressed, while the future is merely a vessel for the repetition of past traumas.

Minkowski’s interwar theory of the psyche in *Lived Time*, as demonstrated by Saint-Amour, fixes its gaze in the opposite direction—the future. Traditional psychology, including Freud’s work, prioritizes memory and views the future as a projection of the past. However, Minkowski diminishes the importance of memory, stating that it “remains necessarily limited, riveted to that which has actually been” (40). Instead, he emphasizes the concept of expectation in his depiction of the future. Minkowski believes that “[e]xpectation penetrates the individual to his core, fills him with terror before this unknown and unexpected mass, which will engulf him in an instant” (88). He further suggests, “[p]rimary expectation is... always connected to an intense anguish” and “[i]t is always anxious expectation” (88). According to Minkowski, expectation is consistently associated with discomfort. In the face of imminent danger, he describes how anguish and terror immobilize us, freezing us in place as if we are paralyzed by fear (88).

Saint-Amour continues to contrast Freud’s and Minkowski’s understandings of expectation. For Freud, anxious expectation in the face of danger is not an agent of traumatization but a defense mechanism to protect the individual from traumatic neuroses. On the other hand, Minkowski views such expectation as the source of trauma, where “the image of death outside us finds its counterpart in the death within us—where, as Caruth says of traumatic neurosis, ‘the outside has gone inside without mediation’” (Saint-Amour 20). In Minkowski’s perspective, the future takes precedence over the present, dominating the overall situation. Conversely, Freud believes that the past overshadows the present and should be reintegrated into the individual’s psyche through memory work.

In contrast to Freudian trauma studies that primarily focus on the enduring influence of past traumatic memories, Saint-Amour’s work in *Tense Future* directs attention toward the traumatizing power of anticipation. Despite being labeled as “pre-traumatic stress syndrome”, Saint-Amour’s theory does not reject the Freudian model altogether, nor does it apply Minkowski’s work wholesale. Rather, it accommodates both Freudian and Minkowskian approaches by addressing both “a symptom of past repression” and “a wounding anticipation” of an experience (20). Significantly, Saint-Amour uncovers another aspect of traumatic experience, namely, traumatic anticipation, in addition to the reactivation of past memories. As noted by Saint-Amour himself, his approach to trauma in the book regards concepts such as prophecy, prolepsis, foresight, foreclosure, anticipation, and expectation, not in a magical or purely diagnostic sense, but as ways of existing in a specific present and living toward a future that seems pre-determined for identifiable reasons (21). Specifically, Saint-Amour’s model of pre-trauma centers on the moment that is haunted by both a previous catastrophic event and the potential for an even more catastrophic future occurrence. This model serves as a mediator between repressed past shocks and anticipated future disasters.

The policy of “not-noticing” in *The Last September*

The Last September touches upon the political and social turmoil during the Irish War of Independence and the consequent

burning of the Big Houses from September 1920 to February 1921. The majority of the events in the novel occur in Danielstown, a Big House owned by Sir Richard and Lady Myra Naylor, who are of Anglo-Irish descent. The house serves as a refuge for various displaced guests and family members: young Lois Farquar who is an orphan and Sir Richard’s niece; indifferent Laurence who is an undergraduate in Oxford and Lady Naylor’s nephew; deracinated Hugo and Francie Montmorency who visit the house after selling their own Big House, Rockriver; and Marda Norton, a modern woman representing an emerging trend of modern femininity. Despite their ambiguous status, the Anglo-Irish inhabitants of Danielstown remain oblivious to the resentment felt by the Catholic Irish in Ireland and employ the strategy of “not noticing” the political upheavals outside the house, in order to maintain a sense of security within their home.

The Last September is closely related to Bowen’s personal life. As Bowen (1986) herself notes, out of all her works, *The Last September* is “nearest to my heart, [and it] had a deep, unclouded, spontaneous source” (123). Born in Dublin in 1899 to Anglo-Irish parents, Bowen was the last descendant of a Protestant Unionist family that had settled in Ireland in 1653 during Oliver Cromwell’s rule. Her family belonged to the ascendancy class whose wealth and power in Ireland were evident through their grand residences and extensive estates, commonly referred to as Big Houses. By the late nineteenth century, however, the power and authority of the ascendancy were in decline. The Irish War of Independence, which took place from 1920 to 1921 and resulted in the destruction of over two hundred Big Houses in Ireland, marked the end of the Anglo-Irish hegemony. The Bowens resided in a prominent Big House called Bowen’s Court, constructed in 1775, which Elizabeth Bowen inherited as the sole heir. Bowen openly acknowledges that the fictional Danielstown in *The Last September* is based on her own family house (126). Despite surviving the Irish War of Independence and enduring two world wars, Bowen’s Court was sold by Bowen herself in the 1950s due to financial difficulties and eventually demolished by the new owner. This theme of “dispossessors dispossessed” (164), as expressed by Esty (2014), serves as the central focus of Bowen’s novel *The Last September*.

Bowen displays a pre-traumatic autobiographical revision in her novel. In the preface, Bowen (1950) confesses that “I was the child of the house from which Danielstown derives. Bowen’s Court survived—nevertheless, so often in my mind’s eye did I see it burning that the terrible last event in *The Last September* is more real than anything I have lived through” (204). The novel portrays the psychological state of the Anglo-Irish before their Big Houses are destroyed during the Irish War of Independence, that is, before their trauma. Furthermore, at the time of the novel’s publication in 1929, Bowen’s family house has not been destroyed. Bowen revises the fate of her own family house through the fictional Big House, Danielstown, which eventually succumbs to fire, unlike Bowen’s Court.

The Last September, in this sense, can be regarded as Bowen’s own *bukimi* of the ultimate downfall of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, symbolized by the Big House (Blickle 2019, 138). To elucidate the concept of *pre-trauma*, Saint-Amour introduces the concept of *bukimi*, a Japanese word representing the “weird”, “ghastly”, “unearthly”, “ominous” or “uncanny” feelings experienced by the inhabitants of Hiroshima before the explosion of the atomic bomb. According to Saint-Amour, these “premonitions” were partly “attempts at psychic preparation, partly a form of ‘imagining the worst’ as a magical way of warding off disaster” (Saint-Amour 1–2). Bowen herself admitted to harboring a similar dread in her childhood, that is, because Bowen’s Court represents the British colonial power in Ireland, it would be burnt down eventually like other Big Houses in Ireland. Although her

fears did not materialize, the trauma persisted in her imagination to such an extent that she asserts, as mentioned earlier, that the “terrible last event in [the novel] is more real than anything I have lived through” (Bowen 1950, 204). Bowen’s *bukimi* of the eventual destruction of her family house serves as a premonition that, although does not come true in reality, continues to occupy her thoughts throughout her lifetime.

In *The Last September*, Bowen imagines this trauma as Danielstown, along with two other houses, Castle Trent and Mount Isabel, are ultimately destroyed. The transformation of the home front into the frontline is highlighted in the novel, as the country itself is described as “burning”, the neck of mountains is “frightfully outlined”, and the roads are “terrified” (Bowen *The Last September* 1998a 206). After the executioners’ unlit car slides out, “the first wave of a silence that was to be ultimately flowed back, confidently, to the steps” and “the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace” (206). The once familiar and comfortable house suddenly becomes terrifying, evoking a sense of the uncanny. The novel concludes with a single sentence, “Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, not saying anything, did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly” (206). This sentence reveals the characters’ traumatic psychology since this event is beyond their comprehension and they are frozen speechless at that moment. The destruction of these houses represents the downfall of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, the system they symbolize, signifying the loss of their privileged position in Ireland. The abrupt ending of the novel offers no resolution for the characters, leaving them overwhelmed by the loss of their family home and uncertain about their future.

The last scene of the novel is incomprehensible for the Anglo-Irish because they are “oblivious” to the resentment and hostility harbored by the local Irish. In her autobiographical work centered around her family house, *Bowen’s Court*, Bowen asserts that the Anglo-Irish “had come to share with the [Irish] people around them sentiments, memories, interests, affinities” and a wish to “see Ireland autonomous” (Bowen 2017, 160). By doing so, Bowen highlights the Anglo-Irish longing to assimilate into the Irish culture and identify as Irish themselves, as she further emphasizes in the same paragraph that “[t]hemselves, they felt Irish, and acted as Irishmen” (160). Throughout the events at *Bowen’s Court*, there are instances of collaboration between the Anglo-Irish and Catholic Irish against English rule, although it is worth noting that the Anglo-Irish generally relied on England for support as colonizers. While the Anglo-Irish supported the notion of Home Rule and an independent Ireland in which they held authority, they failed to comprehend that this vision would never be accepted by the Catholic Irish. The Catholic Irish sought not only liberation from English rule but also the restoration of the lands seized by Cromwell that later became the inheritance of the Anglo-Irish.

Speaking on the Anglo-Irish’s lack of awareness toward the animosity from the local Irish population, Bowen asserts that “if Ireland did not accept them, they did not know it—and it is in that unawareness of final rejection, unawareness of being looked out at from some secretive, opposed life, that the Anglo-Irish naïve dignity and, even, tragedy seems to me to stand” (Bowen 2017, 160). In the introduction to *Bowen’s Court and Seven Winters*, Hermione Lee (2017) also suggests, “*Bowen’s Court* brings to consciousness a long tradition of unawareness. The Bownes were largely oblivious of their ambivalent position in Ireland” (x).

Similarly, in *The Last September*, the Anglo-Irish characters identify themselves as Irish, adopting a policy of “not-noticing” and lacking a proper understanding of their position in Ireland. Despite the intense political situation during the Irish War of Independence, they continue to indulge in parties and daily life,

pretending that nothing significant is happening. While occasional discussions about current political issues as well as things related to the Black and Tans and Irish rebels do arise, these conversations are quickly overshadowed by other forms of entertainment like tennis parties. As analyzed by Glendinning (1998) in the introduction to *The Last September*, unlike the English whose life is characterized by mobility and fluidity, the Anglo-Irish lead a rather more stable life, for they live in one place, the Big House, for generations and they know each other well (5). Hence, despite the continuous rebellions and uprisings in Irish history, the Anglo-Irish families, like the Naylor, “made impotent by ambivalence”, still adhere to the belief in continuity and maintain their policy of “not noticing” (Bowen *The Last September* 1998a 6). The Naylor would rather stay in a perfect present—“a moment of happiness, of perfection” as depicted in the novel’s opening, hoping that they can “freeze this moment and keep it always” while failing to see what the future will bring to them (7). That is why when the British soldiers give the Naylor Lawrence’s stolen watch, they fail to perceive it as a threat.

The policy of “not-noticing” is particularly evident in another scene in which Lois encounters the “trench coat” whom she regards mistakenly as a ghost at the outset. After finishing a conversation with her family and guests on the porch, Lois decides to wander along the avenue of the Big House, reminiscing about the night she danced with Gerald there. After walking up a dark path through the shrubbery, she becomes overwhelmed by fears—“Her fear of the shrubberies tugged at its chain, fear behind reason, fear before her birth, fear like the earliest germ of her life that had stirred in Laura” (33). This fear intensifies when she encounters a gunman, initially mistaking him for a ghost and feeling terrified (33). After she realizes that he is a gunman and not a supernatural entity, however, her fear transforms into excitement, as described in the novel, “A man in a trench-coat had passed without seeing her: that was what it amounted to. She ran back to tell, in excitement” (34). Given the background of the novel, the man’s secretive actions identify him as an Irish gunman, highlighting the proximity of the adolescent Anglo-Irish girl wandering alone at dusk to the threat and danger posed by the conflict. Nevertheless, she views the encounter as an exhilarating incident rather than a threat, and what frightens her is not the tangible danger surrounding her but an imagined supernatural ghost. This interaction signifies that although Lois is intimately connected to the historical trauma of the war, she misinterprets it and fails to grasp its true nature. Moreover, it demonstrates that despite the tendency of the Anglo-Irish to overlook the political upheavals around them, the house and its inhabitants have become embroiled in the heart of the conflict.

The Anglo-Irish community is genuinely unaware of the extent to which their presence was resented by the Catholic Irish. Considering themselves as Irish, the Anglo-Irish fail to anticipate the consequence of the Irish War of Independence, specifically, the destruction of the Big Houses. As Saint-Amour writes, “the unassimilable nature of traumatic violence would seem to depend on the impossibility of its anticipation” (1). Since they are unable to perceive the reality of the situation, they are taken by surprise by the turn of events and thus exposed to trauma’s full shock. In this regard, instead of serving as a defense mechanism from trauma, the policy of “not-noticing” before the traumatic event is itself traumatizing, for it exacerbates the effects of trauma.

The focus of *The Last September* lies in the examination of Anglo-Irish psychology, specifically the tendencies of denial and anxiety, before the occurrence of the traumatic event at the end of the novel, wherein the Big Houses, including Danielstown, are set ablaze by the Irish rebels. This exploration mirrors Saint-Amour’s account of “pre-traumatic stress syndrome”, which emphasizes

the manifestation of traumatic symptoms before, rather than after, the event transpires. The Naylor's possess knowledge of the political turmoil unfolding in their surroundings, yet they habitually choose to dismiss it. For instance, when Francie expresses concerns about being shot at by Sinn Feiners while preparing to sit on the steps in front of the Big House at twilight, Sir Richard finds amusement in her worries. This amusement is then shared by the others, resulting in Sir Richard teasingly remarking, "You're getting very English, Francie! Isn't Francie getting very English?" (23). Despite hearing about the dire situation in County Cork from residents of County Carlow, which makes Francie believe that her decision to come here is a serious mistake, the Naylor's do not take it the same way—"Sir Richard would certainly say, that was County Carlow all over" (23). The Naylor's, like survivors of Hiroshima described by Saint-Amour in his book, think they would be exempted from the political upheavals happening around them.

As the novel develops, it can be found that despite their denial, the Naylor's are deeply affected by the looming presence of war. Sir Richard acknowledges that Ireland is altogether "too full of soldiers" which unsettles the people (25). The lorry of the patrols takes pleasure in "crawling with such a menace along the boundary" (31). Lawrence worries that Lois "would get assaulted by Black and Tans if she went alone, or by sinister patriots" (55). People talk about the raid at tea between tennis matches: "a R.I.C. barracks at Ballydrum had been attacked and burnt out after a long defense" and two defenders were burnt inside it while "the others shot coming out" (47). Later, the postman delivers news of another raid in the Brittas direction, and this time "the Black and Tans had been fired on" (78). The English press publicizes the idea that Ireland is unsafe (56–57).

The imminence of the war makes the Naylor's anxious. As Glendinning analyses, "[t]he policy of 'not noticing' can be maintained only so long as the cracks in the surface of life do not open and let loose the horror and betrayal that lurks beneath" (Bowen *The Last September* 1998a 6). It is only when the political disturbances infiltrate their domestic sphere, symbolized by the house, that the characters are compelled to acknowledge and comprehend the conflicts surrounding them. Francie believes that times have been even "worse" at Danielstown and Lady Naylor "had a rather strained look" (18). Marda perceives a sense of "despairing optimism" in Lady Naylor's eyes (81). Later, Sir Richard has a dream where he is riding a motorbike through the countryside, unable to detach himself from it. He is then attacked by his Irish friends and discovers that he has transformed into a Black and Tan (107). Although regarding themselves as Irish, they fear being harmed or killed by the local Irish population who may consider them to be English. In the novel, the imminence of the war, especially the execution of the Anglo-Irish house, is not only psychic but also historical in that the event has not yet, in fact, happened. Similar to the idea of "pre-trauma" which considers that "traumatic symptoms—denial, dissociation, fragmentation, repression, the compulsive repetition of violence—exist not in the wake of a past event, but in the shadow of a future one" (25), the Naylor's symptoms of denial and anxiety appear in the shadow of a future traumatic event.

"War-climate" in *The Heat of the Day*

In her wartime fiction, *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen explores the psychological trauma experienced by Londoners during the Second World War. The traumatic sense of dispossession is reminiscent of the experiences felt in Anglo-Irish society during the Irish War of Independence, as depicted in *The Last September*. Bowen transfers the class anxieties and fears of social and cultural change from the Anglo-Irish context to the British setting. Davis

(2013) examines the relationship between Bowen's portrayal of wartime England and Anglo-Ireland, suggesting that "Bowen's stories anticipate a historical recurrence of Anglo-Ireland's fate in post-war Britain" (31). Davis argues that Bowen's understanding of the Second World War is "rooted in her own experience and understanding of Anglo-Ireland's twilight years" (33). The psychological dislocation experienced by Londoners during the war mirrors the sense of homelessness previously encountered by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Moynahan (1989) contends that "a London of houses on fire from incendiary bombs and streets torn apart by high explosives was also a reliving of [Bowen's] late teens and early twenties when country houses and whole towns in Ireland were raided and burnt out by the Black and Tans, Sinn Fein, and the IRA" (74). Therefore, Bowen's wartime narratives create a dialog between London houses and the Big Houses of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

The Heat of the Day faithfully portrays the realities of everyday life in London during the war. Set between September 1942 and 1944, the novel takes place after the end of the Blitz, with the London of that time only appearing in the characters' recollections and flashbacks. The story revolves around the protagonist, Stella Rodney, and her involvement in a love triangle with her lover, Robert Kelway, and a British intelligence agent named Harrison. In the aftermath of London air raids, Harrison begins to suspect Robert of being a German spy and initiates an investigation, while also attempting to persuade Stella to abandon Robert and become his lover. Stella finds herself torn between two men, one a spy and the other a counter-spy. After Robert's true identity is exposed, he attempts to escape by climbing onto the roof of Stella's apartment but tragically falls to his death. Harrison also disappears without a trace. When London is once again attacked in 1944, Harrison unexpectedly returns to Stella's house. The novel concludes with readers left in suspense, pondering the future of these characters.

In *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen (1986) aims to capture "war-climate" (95)—the psychological state and sensory impressions of people living in the ruins of the city during ongoing conflicts after the Blitz. According to Wasson (2010), "[a]ir raids (both Allied and German) were often traumatic, combining overwhelming violence with profound grief, and Bowen describes the home front experience in the language of trauma" (124). Indeed, the novel centers on the characters' traumatic psychology during and after the Blitz, as well as their compulsive efforts to revisit the past in order to fully understand the event, and reorganize it into a meaningful and coherent whole to cope with an uncertain future. Living through the Blitz, characters like Stella find themselves caught in what Pong (2009) refers to as "a traumatic anticipation", encompassing "both the anticipation of trauma (the bombings), as well as an anticipation which was itself psychologically traumatic" (para. 17). They are haunted by memories of past bombings while living in fear of future air attacks. Consequently, they exist in a state of suspension, oscillating between the traumatic events that have already occurred and the anticipatory threat of future trauma.

This state of suspension experienced by the characters, being caught between past bombings and the anticipation of future air raids, aligns with Saint-Amour's concept of "pre-traumatic stress syndrome". As mentioned earlier in this essay, Saint-Amour's concept combines elements from both Freudian and Min-kowskian approaches and "see in the experience of an apparently inescapable future, or of a wounding anticipation, something in addition to a symptom of past repression" (Saint-Amour 20). This approach pays particular attention to the traumatizing effects of anticipatory forces, without disregarding the impact of past traumas. Similarly, in *The Heat of the Day*, characters during the Blitz are more traumatized by the anticipation of future air raids than by the air raids that have already taken place.

Illustrating the traumatic force of anticipation, Saint-Amour introduces Lewis Mumford's work, which investigates a "collective psychosis" engendered by the war. Throughout the war, fear becomes an ingrained part of everyday life, leading to a collective psychosis akin to the one that active warfare itself may foster (6). According to Mumford, the disasters that have already arrived and the disasters that might arrive have equal powers to inflict psychic damage and anticipation will be a condition in which one can "die a thousand deaths" (7). Mumford contends that the violence most particular to the air raid arrives along the temporal vectors of preparation and expectation and "time—and anticipation in particular—has become a new medium for delivering injury" (7). Potential disasters and expectations of them can also inflict psychological harm.

In *The Heat of the Day*, wartime London is characterized by incessant air raids that infiltrate every facet of daily existence. The alternating cycles of day and night embody the oscillation between hope for survival and fear of death: "[t]he night behind and the night to come met across every noon in an arch of strain" and "[t]o work or think was to ache" (91). For the Londoners, "fatigue was the one reality" and they "dared not envisage sleep" (91). "Apathetic, the injured and dying in the hospitals watched the light change on walls which might fall tonight" (91); "Strangers saying 'Good night, good luck', to each other at street corners, as the sky first blanched then faded with evening, each hoped not to die that night, still more not to die unknown" (92). Londoners find themselves caught in the fear arising from the anticipation of death, an anticipation that possesses the capacity to traumatize them during the air raids, enveloping them in anxiety and dread.

Suffering from anticipatory trauma, the characters in the novel exhibit traumatic symptoms, such as dissociating themselves from the war and appearing oblivious to the bombings occurring around them. In *The Heat of the Day*, Stella and Harrison are forced to acclimatize themselves to unpredictable violence. This violence becomes a recurring occurrence, ultimately transforming into a routine—a phenomenon referred to by Saint-Amour as "[weaponized] anticipation". This anticipation makes the future seem "a predetermined site of catastrophic violence and therefore capable of inflicting damage in the present" (8). Stella and Harrison regard the air raids happening around the flat as a daily routine and are dissociated from the bombing and gunfire. As Carola M. Kaplan (2013) suggests, this dissociation serves as "a response to repeated trauma and a defense against re-traumatization" (470). However, this detachment emerges due to the fear of future air raids. The novel's sole depiction of an air raid takes place in the final chapter when Harrison visits Stella's new flat 2 years later. Harrison stands "in the middle of a street, otherwise empty, illuminated by a chandelier flare" and "[d]uring the pulse of silence between the overhead throbbing and the bark of the guns, the flare made the street like a mirrored drawing-room" (Bowen *The Heat of the Day* 1998b 315). As the bombing ensues, "the sky to the east reflected flamingo-pink nobody could have taken to be the dawn, the west was jagged with flames" (315). In contrast to the gruesome and violent scene portrayed in Bowen's essay, "London, 1940", this novel describes the bombing as an ordinary facet of life. Upon entering Stella's flat, Harrison engages in conversation with her while two volleys of gunfire occur outside. However, neither of them seems to pay much attention to the sounds. Only the neighbor's cat seems restless. As Stella searches for the cat under the furniture, Harrison, silenced by the gunfire, "seemed at the same time to feel exonerated from making any secret of the fact that he was following her with his eyes" (317). After another burst of gunfire, Stella leans back against the cushions, acquiescent. Apart from the shaking of the lamp bulb and window frames, the room remains a secluded sanctuary of

silence beneath the resounding sky illuminated by the flare's pale light (319). Stella's room seems to be isolated from the rest of the world so that the bombing in the distance and the gunfire in the vicinity become the background—"the guns, made fools of, died out again, askance" (319). Both Harrison and Stella appear unmoved by the gunfire outside her flat. Harrison "sat through the minutes with a concentrated appearance of hearing nothing" (319). The only living being influenced by the war is the cat, whose "fur seemed to shrink and dampen as a stick of bombs fell diagonally across the middle distance" (317).

The trauma caused by the war is also evident in the dislocation of time, which is exhibited by two instances of reversed chronology identified by Pong (2009). The novel begins in September 1942, with Harrison encountering Louie Lewis in a park and subsequently meeting Stella in her flat, informing her of Robert's espionage activities. It then shifts back to cousin Francis Morris's funeral in May 1942, where Stella first encounters Harrison, before the narrative returns to London during the peak of the Blitz in 1940, when Stella encounters Robert for the first time. Another reversal in chronology occurs toward the end of the novel, where Bowen initially portrays the characters' actions several months after Robert's death, before retracing back to the inquest into his death and the consequences that follow. This narrative strategy of revisiting the past and then returning to the present mirrors Stella's own process of memory, as she reflects on her past to comprehend her current circumstances. When contemplating the possibility of Robert's treachery, she revisits her initial memories of him, which are intermingled with recollections of London during the Blitz. Again, after Robert's death, Stella reevaluates and analyses her relationship with him. During their final meeting, he tells her, "You'll have to re-read me backwards, figure me out—you will have years to do that in, if you want to" (270). Stella's endeavor to understand the present situation is thus achieved through her retrospective examination of the past.

Robert D. Stolorow (2011) describes the disruption of time in trauma:

Experiences of emotional trauma become freeze-framed into an eternal present in which one remains forever trapped, or to which one is condemned to be perpetually returned through the portkeys supplied by life's slings and arrows. In the region of trauma, all duration or stretching along collapses; past becomes present, and future loses all meaning other than endless repetition (55).

For Stolorow, "Dissociation just is traumatic temporality" (61). This traumatic temporality is experienced by Stella, whose sense of helplessness is exacerbated by the war to the extent that time itself becomes an enemy that she vigorously resists. Throughout the nights of air raids, she tosses and turns, unable to find solace: "Those were a series of nights in which one slept, if at all, with an abandonment in itself exhausting; but no kind of sleep accounted for the distance she felt between herself and yesterday—and, indeed, between herself and today" (Bowen *The Heat of the Day* 1998b 97). For Stella, there is no clear boundary between past and present, as "most of all the dead...made their anonymous presence—not as today's dead but as yesterday's living" (91). Stella loses her grasp on the concept of time and her surroundings, as "nothing she saw or touched gave token of even its own reality: her wrist watch seemed to belie time; she fancied it had lost hours during the night, that this might be midday, the afternoon—her first act, as she hurried into the street, was to look about in vain for a public clock" (97). Time for Stella relinquishes its objectivity and neutrality.

During the inquest, Stella's inability to reorganize and recount her life with Robert in a coherent and chronological manner highlights the manifestation of her traumatic psychology. Her

testimony is characterized by disorder and disjointedness, exemplified by her statements such as “He was determined to leave by the roof...No, I cannot suggest any other reason, but one never knows...For two years.—Two years and two months: we met in September 1940...Yes, we saw one another frequently...I’m afraid I cannot say...No, I don’t think I remember any quarrels... I suppose we did not notice how time was passing; the war is a very interesting subject” (Bowen *The Heat of the Day* 1998b 302). By following Stella’s account, readers are compelled to read in a non-chronological manner. Stella’s act of reproducing the past in non-chronological order, along with her strategy of not-noticing and forgetting, signifies her difficulties in fully understanding the past and integrating it into her personal history. Failing to understand Robert’s death, Stella is compelled to revisit the past event. With each revisitation, she adds her own understanding of the event, as she remarks that they go on “piecing and repiecing [the events] together to try and make out something they had not had time to say—possibly even had not had time to know” (317).

Upon initial analysis, the disruption of time and the linear narration in the text manifest a Freudian model of trauma, whereby “the traumatic past remains transgressively present as revenant, haunting, or possession, dominating the present rather than receding as it should into the past” (Saint-Amour 14–15). As Pong proposes, Stella’s compulsion to reread backward is “itself an interminable, inexhaustible exercise that emphasizes the impossibility of returning to, and fully elucidating, that past” (para. 16). Nevertheless, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that Stella adopts the strategy of forgetting in order to survive: “Most of all there is something one has got to forget—that is, if it is to be possible to live. The more wars there are, I suppose, the more we shall learn how to be survivors” (Bowen *The Heat of the Day* 1998b 317). Hence, her very inability to recount her story with Robert is a *pre-trauma* symptom, because she is anxious about the future catastrophe that might happen and this anxiety prompts her to repress past traumas in order to survive.

Furthermore, Stella also demonstrates the retrospectively amplified phenomenon of “anticipatory *bukimi*” in her flashback. Saint-Amour observes that those who survived the bombing in Hiroshima and recollected their anticipatory *bukimi* years after the bombing “may have retrospectively amplified their memories of weird expectation, perhaps as a way of attempting to master an incommensurable and singular event by installing it within a narrative of causality, continuity, even prophecy” (2). In Chapter Five of the novel, there is a narrative detour to the first air raids in London during September 1940, when Stella initially encounters Robert. Stella recalls a scene that anticipates Robert’s death: “That was the morning when, in the instant before opening her eyes, she saw Robert’s face with a despairing hallucinatory clearness. When she did open her eyes, it had been to stare around her room in the sunshine certain that he was dead. *Something* final had happened, in any case” (Bowen *The Heat of the Day* 1998b 93). Additionally, “The non-existence of her window, the church-yard hush of the square, the grit which had drifted on to her dressing-table all became ominous for the first time” (93). The restaurant where Stella and Robert frequently meet each other is “closed—the street roped off: some nonsense about a time-bomb” (97). The unexploded bomb that could go off at any moment highlights the threat and danger of time, fostering an expectation of unexpected terror. After they sit in a strange restaurant, “[t]he gilt-faced clock in the sunburst on the restaurant’s wall had, like others in London, been shock-stopped” and “their two wrist watches—which, in the time to come, were to come at some kind of relationship of their own by never perfectly synchronizing—found it, respectively, to be a minute before and a minute after half past two” (99). During the war, Stella’s perception of time becomes distorted. Her memory is amplified with weird expectations, akin to those experienced by the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing.

Conclusion

This essay explores the ways in which Bowen’s writing about wars challenges the field of trauma studies, which has concentrated almost solely on the aftermath of catastrophes or violence. Bowen’s portrayal of trauma differs from the Freudian model insofar as, where Freud considers symptoms as *post-traumatic*, that is, symptoms appear after a traumatic event happens, Bowen presents characters’ psychological trauma as *pre-traumatic*, namely, traumatic conditions arise before imminent violence occurs. As discussed in this essay, the characters in Bowen’s novels exhibit traumatic symptoms, such as traumatic repression, *before* the event happens, such as the burning of the Big House in *The Last September*. Additionally, characters like Stella in *The Heat of the Day* are more affected by the potential bomb explosion than by the bomb that has already detonated. In both novels, characters live in a particular present—living toward a future that seems to be predetermined by some retraceable reasons. Their traumatic symptoms like *bukimi* and anxiety exist in the shadow of a future event, not in the wake of a past one. Studying Bowen’s writing on trauma is of significance to understanding trauma in modernist literature. Researching trauma in modernist literature can also be beneficial to the work of mourning in the last decades of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century, marked by such cataclysmic events as the AIDS epidemic, racially motivated genocide, terrorist attacks, and others. Reconsidering the representations of trauma in modernist literature can facilitate understanding traumatic events or catastrophes in our current time.

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Notes

- 1 The Freudian model of trauma flourished in the 1990s and was advocated by a group of critics at Yale University, including Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman (2003), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), who were devoted to applying psychoanalytic ideas about psychological trauma, especially Freud’s, to the analysis of literary texts.
- 2 For scholarship on war trauma in modernist writing, see Smith’s (2000) *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*; Rae’s (2007) *Modernism and Mourning*; Crosthwaite’s (2009) *Trauma, Postmodernism and the Aftermath of World War II*; Goodspeed-Chadwick’s (2011) *Modernist Women Writers and War: Trauma and the Female Body in Djuna Barnes, HD, and Gertrude Stein*; Clewell’s (2013) *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*; Saint-Amour’s (2015) *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*; Bonikowski’s (2016) *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction*; MacKay’s (2017) *Modernism, War, and Violence*. It is worth noting that some critics tend to study war trauma represented by male and female writers respectively. For British male writers’ writing about war trauma, see Krockel’s (2011) *War Trauma and English Modernism: T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence*; also, Freedman (2014) studies the image of a dying man to explore the questions about modernity and masculinity. In “Modernism and Trauma”, Henke (2010) studies the historical trauma of the First World War demonstrated by some British and American female writers, who present not only shell-shock suffered by soldiers, but also trauma of noncombatants enduring “an overwhelming sense of loss, bereavement, anxiety, and emotional rupture” in “domestic isolation” (161). For British women writers writing about the Second World War, see Phyllis Lassner (1998) and Rumbarger (2006).
- 3 The motif of trauma in Bowen’s work is studied by Jessica Gildersleeve, in *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma: The Ethic of Survival* (2014). Gildersleeve explores the linguistic and psychological effects of trauma in Bowen’s work and argues Bowen’s writing echoes Caruth’s understanding of trauma, which presents the symptoms of traumatic events as *post-traumatic*. The present essay presents a different idea from Gildersleeve’s.

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Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Qiong He.

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