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Ruins; or the Being of Time as History in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of Day*

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‘Disaster ruins everything while leaving everything as is (*en l'état*). (Blanchot 7, my translation)
‘Whence the love of ruins.’ (Derrida 1990, 72, my translation)

‘The broken gable, the shattered columns, should attest the wonder that sacred construction work withstood even the most elementary forces of destruction, lightning (*Blitz*) and earthquake. The artificial (*künstlich*) ruinous thereby appears as the last inheritance of eminent antiquity merely factually transposed onto modern ground as a painted expanse of ruins or bombsite (*Trümmerfeld*).’¹

Published in 1949, *The Heat of the Day* describes life in London from the beginning of the first *Blitz* from September 1940 until the last months of the war against Germany. Ruined London gives Bowen the grounds for staging a general *destruction* that is profoundly enabling. In his unpublished analysis of Martin Heidegger's 1927 book, *Being and Time*, Jacques Derrida demonstrates that Heidegger's great breakthrough in it consisted in its recognition of its own failure to achieve what it had set out to.² The ruin of *Being and Time* was nothing less than the result of the weight of history (or, historicity) upon Being and time, Being *in* time.³ Far from constituting a

¹ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990, p. 156. My translation.

² Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: la question de l'Être et l'histoire*, lecture course from 1964-65, delivered at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure – Ulm*. This lecture course is unpublished. It is held in the Critical Theory Archive at the University of California, Irvine, and at the Institut de Mémoire d'Écrivains Contemporains (IMEC) à l'Abbaye d'Ardennes, Caen. Its publication, directed and introduced by Thomas Dutoit, is programmed for May, 2013 by Éditions Galilée.

³ In the 1920s, and by analogy, Walter Benjamin expresses this idea:

collapse, from instituting a ruined oeuvre, the ruinous consequences for the project envisioned by *Being and Time* opened the ruin of work as the opening and work of ruin as highly enabling. Freed from inscribing Being in authentic temporality (i.e., in non ruin), history is the ruination of Martin Heidegger's project, in *Being and Time*, to ground an interpretation of Being in an authentic time. This ruination opened Heidegger's thinking from thenceforth, in particular with regard to literary writing.

Our switch from Heidegger to Bowen, philosophy to literature, is precisely the operation of a cross-stitch. For important implications consist in the fact that Heidegger seems to *let slip* that he casts *Dasein* as a *text*: indeed, what would be the repercussions for *Dasein*, and for an analysis of it, if it is cast *like a net*? *Dasein* as textual network is relevant to Bowen, especially to the character of Cousin Nettie in *The Heat of the Day*, whose particularity is that she lives outside all history, external to stories, but is herself an embroiderer, more especially of patterns unchosen by herself. 'Est-ce que l'on peut dire que le *Da-sein* est un texte alors qu'on serait tenté de penser que puisqu'il est seul en fait à écrire des textes, il n'est pas lui-même texte?' Derrida spots (in Lecture four) the fact that Heidegger defines *Dasein* as that which is read, and even that which is the 'bon texte', the 'good text.' To be sure, Derrida, taking down the privilege of *Dasein* by unmasking the

If history emigrated and settled into the theatre with tragedy (*Trauerspiel*), then it did so as writing. Upon the face of nature is marked (*steht*) 'history' in the sign-writing of the past. The allegorical physiognomy of natural history, which is put on stage by means of the *Trauerspiel*, is really present as ruins. With ruin, with this allegorical physiognomy, history has sensibly displaced itself onto the scene of theatre. And indeed, staged thus, history is stamped not as the process (*Prozess*) of an eternal life, but rather as the previous record (*Vorgang*, the having always already, *Vor*, gone, *gang*) of uninterrupted ruination (*Verfalls*). In this way, allegory is recognized beyond beauty. Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things. [Walter Benjamin, 1990, 156]

Whereas Jacques Derrida derives the love of ruins from it:

De même que la mémoire ne restaure pas ici un présent passé, de même la ruine du visage -- et du visage dévisagé dans le dessin -- ne signifie pas le vieillissement, l'usure, la décomposition anticipée ou cette morsure du temps dont un portrait souvent trahit l'appréhension. La ruine ne survient pas comme un accident à un monument hier intact. Au commencement il y a la ruine. Ruine est ce qui arrive ici à l'image dès le premier regard. Ruine est l'autoportrait, ce visage dévisagé comme mémoire de soi, ce qui *reste* ou *revient* comme un spectre dès qu'au premier regard sur soi une figuration s'éclipse. [...] On peut aussi bien lire les tableaux de ruines comme les figures d'un portrait, voire d'un autoportrait.

D'où l'amour des ruines. [...] Comment aimer autre chose que la possibilité de la ruine ? [Derrida 1990, 72].

From Benjamin and for Bowen the idea to be taken is not that Bowen writes allegory, or even tragedy, but that she insists on history as the irreducible dimension of her writing, and of the action in which her characters are players. History is stamped as record of uninterrupted ruination. The ruins to which history and stories in *The Heat of the Day* have always already been given over, represent an end there before the beginning. In Derrida's terms, this ruin is at the heart of love, and what constitutes Bowen's peculiar love story *The Heat of the Day*.

unwarranted privilege of presence that Heidegger takes to subtend it, considers that a *Fort-sein* (Being elsewhere, absent, non or not Being), to wit a ‘bad’ text, an apocryphal text, is as legitimate (or as illegitimate, and therefore as legitimate) as *Dasein*, the good text.

In Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*, Cousin Nettie’s ‘embroidery’ is her ‘guard or feint’ (Bowen 1949, 180). As maker of texts, she does not herself enter the text as character: her refusal to enter life takes the form of her self-cloistering in a home from which she never exits, and into which her knitting abyssally retreats. Her knitting ‘represents’ the fact she herself enters no story, thereby protecting herself from history, which is ruin. Her Being is outside history. The entrance into history is the ruination of Being. Living outside story and history, she risks nothing ever happening. Contrary to Cousin Nettie, the present text on ruins in *The Heat of the Day* intends to enter the fray, and the fraying which any text risks being reduced. For an analysis of the theme of ‘ruins’ to be adequate to its object, it must be vulnerable, affected by its object; such analysis must not only be a work about ruins, but a work in ruins, experiencing ruins as process.⁴ Unlike Cousin Nettie’s ‘embroidery,’ it must not be a ‘guard or feint.’

A study of ruins worthy of its subject needs, therefore, to be a ruin of study. To discourse on ruins, for a discourse to be in ruin, is, as is the case of the character Louie Lewis in *The Heat of the Day*, to be the situation of, ‘when I have no words,’ for words on ruin are words in ruin: they fail to say their object, and thereby say it. Louie’s language is a ruins because it fails to express what she wishes to say: ‘Often you say the advantage I should be at if I could speak grammar; but it’s not only that. Look the trouble there is when I have to only say what I *can* say, and so cannot ever say what it is really’ (Bowen 1949, 212).⁵

Bowen’s debt to ruins is re-financed by many critics, most recently perhaps by Leo Mellor, in his book *Reading the Ruins. Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture*. This paper pursues a

⁴ ‘La ruine n’est pas devant nous, ce n’est ni un spectacle ni un objet d’amour. Elle est l’expérience même : ni le fragment abandonné mais encore monumental d’une totalité, ni seulement, comme le pensait Benjamin, un thème de la culture baroque. Ce n’est pas un thème, justement, cela ruine le thème, la position, la présentation ou la représentation de quoi que ce soit.’ [Derrida, 1990, 72].

⁵ Cousin Nettie (and Mrs Kelway, also a knitter outside any story) represent a text that is only grammar, pattern, without any personal story.

different ruinous path: ruin is not something that befalls, belatedly, upon what is constructed or living; rather, ruin is originally abyssal, making all prone to *Destruktion* in the Heideggerian sense or deconstruction in the Derridian, all a mode of surviving or presence lived as the past of the future.

Two times of ruins

Ruins have different moments, in *The Heat of the Day*, such as during the Blitz of autumn 1940, and then two years later, autumn 1942. In 1940, ruins are the life of yesterday, life as yesterday's being shorn off from tomorrow:

Most of all the dead, from mortuaries, from under cataracts of rubble, made their anonymous presence—not as today's dead but as yesterday's living—felt through London. Uncounted, they continued to move in shoals through the city day, pervading everything to be seen or heard or felt with their torn-off senses, drawing on this tomorrow they had expected—for death cannot be so sudden as all that. Absent from the routine which had been life, they stamped upon that routine their absence. [Bowen, 1949, 79]

All presence occurs as perception. The medium of perception are the dead, but not as 'today's dead.' Rather, vision, hearing, feeling occur in the milieu that is filled with 'yesterday's living.' Ruins are where perception is pervaded by the living of yesterday, the living from yesterday. Life today is seen, heard and felt through the life of yesterday that is, by definition, present in its absence. What all sensation shares is the present as a shearing off. The day is what severs yesterday from tomorrow. I, living today, only sense insofar as I sense through 'yesterday's living.' I only sense insofar as my senses belong to yesterday, to those living yesterday, and to how yesterday lives. Ruins are my mode of perception. Life is the stamp of the dead. The die stamped on routine is the life of yesterday out of which only is possible today's living, living today.

In the ruins of autumn 1942, the dead no longer linger, and the living no longer live:

The first generation of ruins, cleaned up, shored up, began to weather—in daylight they took their places as a norm of the scene; the dangerless nights of September two years later blotted them out. It was from this insidious echoless propriety of ruins that you breathed in all that was most malarial. (Bowen 1949, 80)

Ruins have become ambushes (i.e., the etymology of ‘insidious’). ‘Echoless,’ their deceit is the absence of ghosts, of ‘yesterday’s living.’ Ruins become propriety, what is proper, and even property. Ruined property becomes proper property. The ambush is possible because one no longer sees the ruins as ruins. That is, one no longer senses through yesterday’s living.

If Stella’s love with Robert was possible in autumn 1940, it is perhaps because of the first stage of ruins, and if, in autumn 1942, Stella’s love with Robert is damaged by Harrison’s telling her that Robert is a spy, it is perhaps because of the becoming-proper of ruins.

Here, three paragraphs, the most stunning in *The Heat of the Day*. They depict the very moment in which Stella and Robert fall in love, simultaneous both with an adieu and with the detonation of bombs dropped on London.

It was a characteristic of that life in the moment and for the moment’s sake that one knew people well without knowing much about them: vacuum as to future was offset by vacuum as to past [...] At the first glance they saw in each other’s faces a flash of promise, a background of mystery. [...] [Stella] found herself [...] in the middle of studying this person [...] from whom she only turned away to wave goodbye to the friend who had brought her across the room.

The gesture of goodbye, so perfunctory, was of a finalness not to appear till later. It comprehended the room and everybody, everything in it which had up to now *counted* as her life: it was an unconscious announcement of the departure she was about to take—a first and last wave, across the widening water, from a liner. Remembered, her fleeting sketch of a gesture came to look prophetic; for ever she was to see, photographed as though it had been someone else’s, her hand up. [...] They fixed their eyes expectantly on each other’s lips. Both waited, both spoke at once, *unheard*.

Overhead, an enemy plane had been dragging, drumming slowly round in the pool of night, drawing up bursts of gunfire—nosing, pausing, turning, fascinated by the point for its intent. The barrage banged, coughed, retched; in here the lights in the mirrors rocked. Now down a shaft of anticipating silence the bomb swung whistling. with the shock of detonation, still be heard, four walls of in here yawped in then bellied out; bottles danced on glass; a distortion ran through the view. The detonation dulled off into the cataracting roar of a split building: direct hit, somewhere else.

It was the demolition of an entire moment. (Bowen 1949, 83, italics mine)

The original moment, all and nothing at once, is a zigzagging movement between future and past, ‘promise’ and ‘background,’ tele-photographic light, ‘flash,’ and enigmatic darkness, ‘mystery.’ Robert and Stella’s origin is Stella’s adieu to her life, everything and everybody that *counted*, become the ‘uncounted.’ They don’t count; her *conte*, her story, is final adieu, ‘departure’, from a liner like *The Titanic* whose capsizing will be compared to marriage by Stella and Robert, much

later in the novel. The zigzagging moment that is the dislocating movement of presence is written by 'Remembered' at the head of the sentence that recalls the drawing of a gesture the appearance of which only comes to her afterwards, from the future, which it announces as already in the present: 'prophetic.' The moment of being-together with the lover is a separation not only from her world, from the world, but is also an adieu to herself. That cleaver of Bowen's language, her figurative 'as though,' records this division. On the verge of joining lips, tongues, the encounter of Robert and Stella is an inaugural cut, marking the 'hiatus of a wound the lips of which will never come to close, never gather together.' (Derrida 2003, 54. Translation Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski) What brings these lips together, and keeps them forever separate, even in the most intense copulation, is the appeal to the other, unconditionally. Yet Bowen is more radical than Derrida, in insisting upon separation, on interruption as the condition of possibility of being-together.

'Unheard' is overwritten by 'Overhead,' unless it is that the bomber 'overhears,' eavesdrops, if one will, and even captures what it is they say, despite their own not being to hear what they themselves say. As each reaches her or his mouth to the other, the enemy plane 'noses' London, like Stella and Robert nose each other. From the ground, artillery spits up gunfire, from its mouth, its throat, 'coughed, retched,' vomit, froth or saliva that is lapped up by the bomber, 'drawing up bursts.' The text depicts warfare as lovemaking, if not vice versa. (Let alone the referent of 'banged.') The narrator, and the readers, are in the bar whose own mouth gapes, 'yawped.' The present, 'Now,' 'here,' is blown, blown out, made as much into a vacuum as the future or the past. The present of the joining of two people, the communication of two mouths, two speeches, two times two lips, is blown, in the sense of prompted by another 'dialogue,' between artillery and bombers. This singular moment of falling in love is rent, ruined, blown away.

Postal addresses, and the Being of time

Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* is something like Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* meets Jacques Derrida's *The Postcard*:

Roderick, at the beginning, had been the reason why the lovers did not move into the same house—the indifference of the embattled city to private lives, the exiguousness and vagueness of everybody’s existence among the *ruins* could, but for Roderick, have made that easy. But by the time Stella’s son, at the end of a phantom year at Oxford, was called up, she and Robert found themselves conscious of a submerged decision to go on as they were, for that ‘time being’ which war had made the very being of time. War time, with its makeshifts, shelvings, deferrings, could not have been kinder to romantic love. The two discussed any merging of their postal addresses not more seriously than they discussed marriage—happy to stay as they were, afloat on this tideless, hypnotic, futureless day-to-day.

It was more than a dream. (Bowen 1949, 87)

Ruins give the conditions for living together, for being together. Being-together, being inseparable, is made possible by the destruction of partitions, of separations. Their destruction is what ruination is. Ruination is therefore the seeming possibility of immediacy. There is just Stella’s son in the way. His entrance in military service takes away the only thing separating them, be it only a phantom separation, unless the phantom is not what always separates. Yet they continue to live apart, separately. “‘For that time being’,” indicates something temporary, a time that is, well, temporal, only for a time, like all time is. For the “‘time being’” means for the time that is, as long as it lasts. “‘For the time being’” is ‘for the moment.’ “‘For the time being’” suggests a present as long it continues. This temporariness of time becomes the ‘being of time’. Not Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, but the very essence of time. This particular time seems to be a continuous present, but it is not the time of *Being*. The time of Being is what Heidegger set out to destroy in his *Being and Time*. He destroyed, submitted to destruction, which means to analysis, *Being*, by reinterpreting time so that time came to be thought as a dislocated time, comprised of a complex movement of past and future, of memory and anticipation. In his 1964 lecture course, Derrida named this deconstructed time ‘trace’ or ‘text,’ making Being be a difference of *Dasein* and *Fortsein*, presence and absence, each the metaphor of the other, without a clear privilege given to either, and with a privilege given to their between, their *textual network*, the relays between their postal addresses. For Bowen, war makes the ‘time being’ the ‘very being of time,’ which is as much as to say as Bowen is the Derrida-ization of Heidegger: to use common nouns, her fiction makes the supplement, postponement, act as, represent, the Being itself of time. This delegation means that the essence of

time is not presence, not presence equal to itself, not simple presence—and so we can see why they (Robert and Stella) don't live together, why their excellent lovemaking relationship doesn't collapse, doesn't fall, doesn't ruin itself, into their moving in together with each other. The essence of time is that it is only 'for the time being.' It is makeshift. It is merely a substitute. A 'makeshift' is when you make a shift, as in when you make a substitution that is inferior to what it is substituted for but since what is substituted for is essentially lacking this explains why one necessarily and only has recourse to the substitute. For the time being is 'War time,' a time proper to war. This time is why you put off, the time of 'shelvings', setting aside, not finishing, but deferring to later. It is a finite time, because it is only 'for that time being,' only for the moment that is by definition temporary, but it is an unfinished time, because nothing gets finished once and for, since it is postponed, in 'deferrings.' 'Ruins' might make it easy to be together, but marriage would be the ruin of ruin itself, for marriage is the being-together and therefore the eradication of postal addresses, of a postal principle, of the 'postal resonance,' a 'communication from a distance'.(Derrida 1962, 36) Where there are postal addresses, there are echoes. Where there are echoes, yesterday's living still linger(s). Mediation, a general telecommunication, is that without which no love could move, be put into movement, let itself be quested or questioned. This is why 'the two discussed any merging of their postal addresses not more seriously than they discussed marriage.' The reference to 'postal addresses' is not accidental. It is essential. A postal principle obtains throughout *The Heat of the Day*. Letters and postmen rhythm the novel. Cousin Nettie's residence is adorned with 'postcards of electrically blue foreign lakes' (Bowen 1949, 181). The postal principle involves the fact that the spy Harrison is constantly 'posted' outside Stella's flat, and includes a dog supposedly named 'Spot,' in other letters, anagrammatically alike to 'post',⁶ hinting at a ruinous potential equivalence. Here, separate 'postal addresses' are more serious than

⁶ Bowen stages the transmogrification of these letters in an underground restaurant where Stella with Harrison, encounter, by accident Louie Louis and a dog, dubbed 'Spot', duplicating the fact that Louie's chance being-posted-there blows Harrison's cover of anonymous invisibility, in a passage starting with 'She came to a *stop*', passing through 'About a *spot* of something?', 'You—you've put us all on the *spot*, nicely', '*Spot*, you bad boy!', 'Why do you call your dog *Spot*? He hasn't got any' (Bowen 1949, 194-204, my emphases).

‘marriage.’ To ‘merge’ mailboxes is the supreme metaphor, more powerful than its near homophone, ‘marriage.’ Marriage is to be thought as from the mailbox. Yet war time, the time that is only for the time being, the temporary temporality that is the very being of time, ushers in ‘postal addresses’ as that which preserve a distance, as that which refuses the collapse into the ideology of union.

The time of the wood

Stella goes to Mount Morris to inspect the house, bequeathed to her son by her son’s uncle. While there, she wanders out on the grounds, on a gloriously sunny October late morning. In a moment of the sheer presence of nature—‘This was the peace of the moment in which one sees the world for a moment innocent of oneself’ (Bowen 1949, 153)—Stella enters what she beholds as its beholder: ‘One cannot remain away: while she looked up at sun-pierced triumphant golden fans of leaves it began to be she who saw them.’ Bowen’s narrator presents a classic topos: the entrance of time into nature as the existence of subjectivity. Stella’s eye and I appear to make appear memory as loss of innocence. Bowen seems to distend the ‘peace of the moment’ as ‘moment innocent of one self,’ in properly breathtakingly beautiful, Arcadian, pre-lapsarian description, culminating in a sentence-ending nominative, of ‘a breathless glory’: ‘and there travelled through the layered, lit, shaded, thinning and crossing foliage, and was deflected downward on to the laurels, a breathless glory’ (Bowen, 1949, 153). We might be seduced into thinking that ruins befall upon this setting, only with its invasion by the subject of perception. Yet then we read the following, which indeed bequeathes the very setting:

In the hush the dead could be imagined returning from all the wars; and, turning the eyes from arch to arch of boughs, from ray to ray of light, one knew some expectant sense to be tuned in to an unfinished symphony of love.

The seeming of this to be for ever was astonishing—until a leaf fell slowly, veering towards her eyes as though she had brought *time* with her into the *wood*.

There cannot be a moment in which nothing happens. (Bowen 1949, 153)

The ‘dead could be imagined,’ but who is imagining their return? ‘The eyes’ are turned from arch to arch, but whose eyes are they? There is ‘some expectant sense’ but it does not seem to belong to the unknown ‘one.’ The infinite symphony of love seems to belong resurrection itself. Love does not leave, love; not leaf, love rises, not fails. So seems love. Just before falling in love with Robert, Stella described herself after the ‘fall of France’ as on a leave of absence from life. ‘She had had the sensation of being on furlough from her own life’ (Bowen 1949, 81). Her fall into love is a fall into life, into a mode of presence inherently ruinous. When Stella is in the wood, as if in the ‘infinite symphony of love,’ love seems unending. Yet Bowen not so much as ruins this paradise regained as insists on a ruin always occurring. Contradicting, but from a delayed origin, the earlier ‘peace of the moment in which one sees the world for a moment innocent of oneself,’ now, but then already, ‘There cannot be a moment in which nothing happens.’ There is always something happening, contrary to any metaphysics of presence. A moment when nothing happens would be the metaphysics of presence: an eternal present. Its ‘breathless glory’ would not be alive. Such eternal present is only illusion, ruined always already by ruin itself, by the time of the fall and the fall of time. ‘The seeming of this to be for ever was astonishing—until a leaf fell slowly, veering towards *her* eyes as though she had brought time with her into the wood.’ *Her* eyes, not just *the* eyes, are approached by the falling leaf. The leaf and the fall, nearly palindromic, inscribed as from the novel’s very incipit, do not just *approach* her eyes. They ‘veer,’ they turn to her, she, Stella, who turns in orbit until the dis(-)aster that makes her, too, veer off course, discon(-)stellated. (Her son considers that it is Stella who fell off the roof, when Robert fell from it to his death). ‘Veering,’ they turn. ‘Veer’ is not the seeming ‘ever’ that seems to precede, ‘this to be for ever.’ ‘Veer’ is not ‘ever,’ but it comes out of Stella’s dream, her ‘*rêve*’: this outdoor scene came out of her deep sleep that morning just prior to this scene. Bowen’s figurative language, that trait that runs through, divvies as its inaugural cut, all her writing, the ‘as though’ that intervenes here, is literally *important*, importing time itself: ‘as though she had brought time with her into the wood.’ Stella imports time into this prelapsarian wood, but it is only as if time had to be brought in, as if time,

and more precisely historicity, were not already there. Stella is in wood, that place that in all Gothic romances of Ann Radcliffe is the place *par excellence* of imagination. Stella's apparent step out of time in the wood followed her previous evening, inside the house, trying to see it through the eyes of her future daughter-in-law who Stella forms like 'ectoplasm' out of her 'flank.' In the house, Stella sees a picture of the ocean liner *The Titanic* vertically plunging, after having 'become for *the moment* immortal as a portrait' (Bowen 1949, 150; 152). Strangely not unlike Elizabeth Bennett in Darcy's portrait gallery in Pemberley, Stella confirms the most useful description we have of Bowen's writing: 'Bowen's novels are like Jane Austen on drugs' (Bennett—that's Andrew, not Elizabeth—and Royle, xv)⁷. Those drugs are powerful enough to make a 'wood' veer into a 'would.' Those drugs are her literature. If, as topos for imagination, the wood is the place for the 'would,' then what Bowen does is 'as though' she 'brought time with her into the wood.' Bowen brings 'time' into the timeless, ever-present, forest, the wood, *le bois*, but she also brings temporality, which by definition is inauthentic temporality, historicity, into presence. She brings time into what would be eternal presence. She brings time into Being, that Being which the philosophical tradition posits as presence. Yet it is only 'as though' she brought time into the conditional, unactualized, place of the *would*. For, time is already there. 'There cannot be a moment in which nothing happens.'

Bowen's narrator withdraws what she had given us, in her final sentence. The ruination of the metaphysics of presence, in other words, the unviability of any being not always already given to time and to history, engenders and structures this symphony of love.

Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* is obsessed with falling. From the leaves falling in the first page, to the leaves and bombs fallen on London when Stella falls in love, and to Robert's falling off the roof, 'fall or leap' (Bowen 1949, 250), as the text puts it, making 'leap' be a version of 'leaf.' Whether leaping or falling from the roof, as counter-signature to *The Heat of Day*, falling from the roof is what befalls me in writing to this enigmatic text.

⁷ Subsequent to writing this paper, I received *Veering. A Theory of Literature* by Nicholas Royle. However, Nicholas Royle presented a paper on veering to our research group at the University of Lille in March, 2007.

Ruin makes perfect

When Stella returns from Ireland and is picked up at the train station by Robert, they ride in a taxi together. Estrangement characterizes their finding each other, Robert remarking to her that he is more intimate with her coat than with herself. Stella's reply stresses the perfection of ruination:

Who would like to feel less welcome back again than her own coat! Surely either we know each other absolutely or not at all—and how can we possibly wonder which? ... We are friends of circumstance—war, this isolation, this atmosphere in which everything goes on and nothing's said. Or we began as that: that was what we were at the start—but now, look how all this ruin's made for our perfectness! You and I are an accident, if you like—outside us neither of us when we are together ever seems to look. How much of the 'you' or the 'me' *is*, even, outside of the 'us'? (Bowen 1949, 163).

I know my lover absolutely, *and* I don't know him at all. Stella misses that both, in difference, obtain, unless her wondering which is which attests as much. Ruinous London makes their relationship perfect: Stella adds, '*our* perfectness!' Ruins constitute their 'we,' them as 'us.' In ruins, there *is* no 'I' and no 'you.' The ontological entity is the 'us' that is perfect, fills up all time and space. This ontology of 'us' is precisely perfect, however, because of ruins. Ruins are what make the 'you' and the 'I' not be, but only be ghosts, survivors of the 'us.' The 'I' or the 'you' will survive, alone, when the 'us' is decimated, by separation, by falsehood, by fall, by ruin, by death. The 'I' or the 'you' can only be ghosts, either the one who is lost as a phantom or the one who remains as survivor. The apostrophic contraction in 'ruin's' in Stella's statement could be read to read, 'all this ruin *is* made for our perfectness': that reading means that their full closure together is sealed by the absence of any world around them. But 'ruin's' also means that 'all this ruin *has* made for our perfectness': perfect unity is made by a division that is at the origin and the end of the relation, because they were and will be again separated. Ruin *makes for* perfection.

Immunity in ruins

Writing in the great age of immunization, of inoculation, whereby what is lethal is used in order to attain a relative immunity precisely from the lethal, Bowen's writing of ruin, her

destruction of the metaphysics of presence, subtly incorporates a re-thinking of immunity. There is no pure immunity in Bowen because the outside is always the inside of the inside. Conventionally understood, immunity would be the privileged: it is the fact of being exempt from a charge. If there is no immunity in Bowen, it is because of ruination, lost immunity. Presence to self is not immune from absence, from the loss of what presence thinks it has. This lack of immunity is originary. Yet this originary separation and loss are what redefine presence (life) as survival of, through, original separation and loss. Moreover, they are what make a deconstructed love or intimacy possible, whence the love of ruins (double genitive): love from, love for, ruins.

The narrated time in *The Heat of the Day* begins on the day when Stella realizes that loss might have already intervened in her life, despite her sensation, during the *Blitz* on London and into 1942, that she had not yet lost anyone: ‘So far, nothing had happened to anybody she knew, or even to anyone she knew knew—today, however, tingled all over from some shock which could be the breaking down of immunity’ (Bowen 1949, 81). Indeed, this day was ‘the morning’ when ‘she was certain that [Robert] was dead’ (Bowen 1949, 81). The day before, Harrison had intimated to her that Robert was working for the Germans (possibly since even before her relationship with Robert began). Later in the novel, when Robert explains to her how he thinks of his being a spy, he explains that he immunizes himself: “‘Words, words, like that [i.e., ‘betrayal’], yes—what a terrific dust they can still raise in a mind, yours even: I see that. Myself, even, I have needed to immunize myself against them; I tell you I have only at last done that by saying them to myself over and over again till it became absolutely certain they mean nothing. What they once meant is gone”’ (Bowen 1949, 231). Stella’s being ‘certain’ and Robert’s being ‘absolutely certain’ denote different things. Robert believes himself immune from deception because, in a Nietzschean embrace of ruin, he has made all language nothing but deception, whereas Stella’s loss of immunity is the loss of love as if it were not, had not been, constituted by separation (here embodied by Harrison’s intrusion). Generalized ruin, for Robert, is translated, by Bowen, into sheer equivocity: whether Robert leapt from the roof to suicide or was executed by being pushed off it, whether it was even a ‘fall or leap’

(Bowen 1949, 250), is left undecided by the novel. Holding out a more encouraging prospect is Bowen's previous novel, *The Death of the Heart* (1938).

Sixteen-year-old Portia has been excoriated by her love relationship with twenty-three-year-old Eddie, by his and Anna (Portia's half-brother's wife) betrayal of her:

[T]he idea of betrayal had been in her, upon her, sleeping and waking, as might be one's own guilt, making her not confront any face with candour, making her dread Eddie. Being able to shut her eyes while he was in this room with her, to feel impassive marble against her cheek, made her feel in the arms of immunity—the immunity of sleep, of anaesthesia, of endless solitude, the immunity of the journey across Switzerland two days after her mother died. (Bowen 1998, 256)

Such immunity is, as form of catatonia, probably inherently ruined, but it is a stage of the auto-immunity that Bowen's fiction moves towards as the survival of the heart.

During Portia's phase of new love with Eddie, her immunity was at an earlier stage:

Everything became threatened.

There are moments when it becomes frightening to realize that you are not, in fact, alone in the world—or at least, alone in the world with one other person. The telephone ringing when you are in a day-dream becomes a cruel attacking voice. That general tender kindness towards the world [...] comes from a pitying sense of the world's unreality. ... A pact with life, a pact of immunity, appears to exist—But this pact is not respected for ever—a street accident, an overheard quarrel, a certain note in a voice, a face coming too close, a tree being blown down, someone's unjust fate—the peace tears right across. Life militates against the seclusion we seek. In the chaos that suddenly thrusts in, nothing remains unreal, except possibly love. (Bowen 1998, 170)

Everything is real, *i.e.*, separated, shorn, save, perhaps, for the illusion of a moment, love, which is the only thing that seems unreal, *i.e.*, intimate in an unseparated way. Yet 'pity the selfishness of lovers ... it is impossible' (Bowen 1998, 170). What Bowen takes her reader to is an awareness, a wariness, about irreducible separation—pending ruin always already inscribed in any encounter—that itself is the condition of possibility of a *partage*, a sharing that is the experience of shearing. This ruin of immunity, this ruin of a false privilege, of an exemption from separation—from death—is in fact the emboldening *form* of ruin, a recognition of the unique chance and occasion being in the world is.

If ruin in *The Death of the Heart* appears more encouraging than *The Heat of the Day*, it is because the former leaves us with Portia’s relative and rebuilt but always precarious immunity:

‘No, don’t kiss me now.’

‘Why not now?’

‘Because I don’t want you to.’

‘You mean’, he said, ‘that I didn’t once when you did?’

She began to put on her hat with an immune little smile, as though all that had been too long ago. The tears shed in that series of small convulsions—felt by him but quite silent—had done no more than mat her lashes together. (Bowen 1998, 276)

Portia survives here the ruin of her love for and with Eddie, blocking him away, and moving forth with her ‘immune little smile.’ Her lashes are matted together, in an image of her capacity to sustain, to hold up, in the *pas au-delà*, the stepping-forth over the lack of foundation. Bowen leaves us with the immunity that consists in our knowing ourselves not to be immune, with the protection against ruin that comes from a recognition of an indomitable ruin out of which is born life, desire, love.

Love in ruins

<p>But then she paused in the act,ⁱ raising her eyes: he and she returned to looking at one another at leisure, with a sort of enchanted familiarity, across the gold-rimmed cups.</p> <p>But they were not alone, nor had they been from the start, from the start of loveⁱⁱ. Theirⁱⁱⁱ time sat in the third place^{iv} at their table. They were creatures of history, whose coming together was of a nature^v possible in no other day^{vi} —the day was inherent^{vii} in the nature. Which must have been always^{viii} true of lovers, if it had taken till</p>	<p>ⁱ[of pouring out coffee]</p> <p>ⁱⁱ[The start of love is the advent of separation, severance.]</p> <p>ⁱⁱⁱ[and ‘their’ time is not theirs, that is the point, the possession of ‘their’ time belongs to neither one of them]</p> <p>^{iv}[this <i>third</i> place is <i>in the first</i> place]</p> <p>^v[“Die allegorische Physiognomie der Natur-Geschichte {...} ist wirklich gegenwärtig als Ruine.”(Benjamin 1955, 155)]</p> <p>^{vi}[‘day’: it is singular, this is not myth; the <i>Dasein</i> is unique]</p> <p>^{vii}[Time inheres in physis, and time is grounded in history, in historicity, in something thoroughly inauthentic; inheritance inheres.]</p> <p>^{viii}[it may be true for all lovers, and therefore <i>mythic</i>, but each time differently, uniquely]</p>
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<p>now to be seen. The relation of people to one another is subject to the relation of each to time^{ix}, to what is happening^x. If this has not been always felt—and as to that who is to know?^{xi}— it has begun to be felt, irrevocably^{xii}. On from now, every moment, with more and more of what had been ‘now’ behind it, would be going on adding itself to the larger <i>story</i>^{xiii}. Could these two have loved each other better at a better time? At no other would they have been themselves^{xiv}; what had <i>carried</i> their world to its hour was in their bloodstreams. The more imperative the love, the deeper its draft on beings, till it has taken up all that ever went to their making, and according to what it draws on its nature is. In dwelling upon the constant for our reassurance, we forget that the loves <i>in history</i> have been agonizingly modern loves in their <i>day</i>. War at present worked as a thinning of the membrane between the this and the that, it was a becoming apparent^{xv}—but then what else is love?^{xvi}</p> <p>No, there is no such thing as being alone together.^{xvii} Daylight moves round the walls; night rings the changes of its intensity; everything is <i>on its way to somewhere else</i>—there is <i>the presence of</i></p>	<p>^{ix}[Time, and history, being in time, and the time being in history {and here we have Bowen’s reference for the ‘time being’ and ‘being in (war) time’}]</p> <p>^x[<i>Geschehen</i>, the base of history or <i>Geschichte</i>]</p> <p>^{xi}[The narrator embarks on a solo here. Bowen even appears to intervene in the text as the narrator begins to refer to <i>her</i> time, to a time of 1949, to a time of the 1940s, as is seen with the switch to the present perfect, and the verb ‘begin’ that singles out a doubled <i>now</i>]</p> <p>^{xii}[There is no going back, but why is this no return singular in the 1940s?]</p> <p>^{xiii} [Here, the overlap of ‘story’ and ‘history’, and this is very enigmatic: what does this mean? from now on, stuff that was ‘now’ behind <i>now</i>, behind the fact that the third is at the table, belongs to history more and more. History is going now to be that the ‘now’ is made the <i>now</i> by the third. History is going to be made <i>present</i> by the fact that that which ruins presence is <i>invited to the table</i>]</p> <p>^{xiv}[<i>Dasein</i> happens once]</p> <p>^{xv} [this is referred to in the scene in the underground restaurant: the ruin is there the absence of medium that characterizes perception, the -ception <i>through, per-</i>; and this is a clear reference to the transparency of Chapter 5, {Bowen, 1949, 80}]</p> <p>^{xvi} [Bowen here seems to be saying that war is the condition of possibility of love, or at least that war is propitious for love, and therefore that there is a predilection for love in the <i>Dasein</i>, in the context given by war, by war-time. That seems to be what Bowen endorses, but the book undoes that. What <i>else</i> is love? Love is this. Love is, it seems, this thinning of the membrane between the this and the that, love is the <i>appearance</i> of non-appearance, it is the <i>appearance</i> of immediacy. Love is the medium of immediacy. Love is the</p>
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<p><i>movement</i>, that third presence, however still, however unheeding in their trance two may try to stay. Unceasingly <i>something</i> is at work. Even, each beat of the other beloved heart is one beat nearer the <i>destination</i>, unknowable, towards which that heart is beating its way; under what compulsion, what?—to love is to be inescapably conscious of the question—to love is to be inescapably conscious of the question. To have turned away from everything to one face is to find oneself face to face with everything. [Bowen, 1949, 169, italics mine.]</p>	<p>representation of non-representation, is the representation of presence, of simple presence, of presence to itself, love is the semblance of the disappearance of difference. <i>Love is the metaphysics of presence</i>. Yet, with war, the threat of ruination, one still has to think that this immediacy is itself a modality of ruination, because it would get rid of separation, of the membrane, the mediation, that hiatus that makes love what it is, which is an else, an other irreducible to the two, that third at the table]</p> <p>xvii[What makes love is the third at the table. There is no such thing as love, if love is understood as being alone together; the only thing is a being separate and a being separated. This being-separated is the only thing, and that is what Bowen calls love. What undoes love is what love undoes. In <i>The Heat of the Day</i>, this hiatus—and this hiatus is the irreducible isolation of each individual—is what ruins the privilege of the present, or ruins the illusion of being together. This ruin, however, is that without which no love, understood at the third at the table, is possible. So, that which seems to be the principle of ruin of love, is the love of ruin, and the love of love, and the ruin of ruin.]</p>
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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines *Dasein* as a mode of care between birth and death whose unity is based in temporality. This *Dasein* is characterized by a ‘movement [*Bewegtheit*, a ‘movedness’, a ‘being waylaid’] of existence that is not the motion [*Bewegung*] of something present-at-hand. [...] The specific *Bewegtheit* of extended self-extending, we call it the happening [*Geschehen*] of *Dasein*, the historicity of *Dasein*. The question of how *Dasein* holds together is the ontological problem of its happening’ (Heidegger 1986, 374-75, my translation). The German word, *Bewegung*, is formed on the root of *Weg*, ‘way’ but also ‘away.’ A faithful translation of *Bewegtheit* in English could be *waylaid*. Derrida opines, ‘I believe the problem of *Bewegtheit* as non-motion was the most important problem in Heidegger’s own view’, adding that ‘the moving [*Bewegtheit*] or the historical sequence (the movedness of historicizing, of historical production: *die Bewegtheit des*

Geschehens), in which something happens, enters history [*s' historialise*], *geschieht*, does not let itself be thought, grasped, according to a movement as the changing of place. The enigma of *happening* towards which Heidegger recalls us is this *Bewegtheit* unthinkable according to *Bewegung*' (Derrida 1964-65, Lecture 7). The 'third presence' in Bowen is not the movement of Stella or Robert, of anyone or anything present at hand. This 'presence of movement' is that 'everything is on its way to somewhere else'; 'each beat' of the other heart is 'beating its way' but to an 'unknowable' destination, a radical elsewhere, the else of where, the other of place and time. If Stella and Robert are 'creatures of history', if their 'relation' is 'subject' 'to what is happening', it is because of this 'third place', this 'third presence', that is time being waylaid by history. Just as Heidegger insists upon the fundamental enigma [*Rätse!*] of this historical happening or happening of history [Heidegger, 1986, 392], Bowen's narrator also extends herself in aporetic enigmatic extension, as figured by the gaping irresolution of the paroxystic question: 'under what compulsion? what?—to love is to be inescapably conscious of the question' [Bowen, 1949, 169]. What pro- or com-, im- or ex-, pulsion, what unnameable 'movement' or 'being waylaid', is underway, being traced if not that of their being traced by 'their time [sitting] in the third place at the table'?

A cogito of farewell

The rift, between Robert and Stella, widens in the back of a taxi. It is night, and pitch black in the back of the taxi. Each is invisible to the other, with the presence of a driver. Stella has asked Robert if he is a spy for the Germans. The lovers, who had been, they thought, bound to each other in sheer intimacy, are shorn by this question so radically that, despite being in the same car and apparently same time, it becomes as if they are neither in the same car nor even together alone at all. All dialogue comes from Robert:

Robert could be felt turning round slowly [...], to stare at the place where she invisibly was.

[...]

‘Between you and me this is inconceivable.’

[...]

‘Someone comes to you with a story: with you, the story takes—seeds itself in *some crack* that you felt between us. Some crack—should I have known it was there?’

[...]

‘How do you expect me to know what’s true, now? All I can say now is, how well you hide things—you may have been having another lover all this time for all I know; and I’m not sure I wouldn’t rather it had only been that. This other thing seems colder, more up against me. This thing locked up inside you, yes; yes, but always secretly being taken out and looked at—and how without going mad am I to let myself imagine at what moments In the night, how did I not hear it ticking under the pillow like your watch? [...] While I’ve talked, you’ve been adding up what I say? We have not, then, been really alone together for the last two months.’
(Bowen 1949, 164-65)

The ontic ruin Robert identifies here is one that happens after the origin: Stella learns that Robert is, or might be, a spy after almost two years of love, and then keeps this information away from Robert for two months before telling him; but this knowledge that happens to their relationship as something after it is built into the novel as something more basic and radical in at least three ways. First, indications from the text suggest that Harrison only exists as the allegory of Stella’s own self-censorship, hence Harrison in some ways might only be her super-ego as it were, denying her her pleasure (Harrison is the idea that a woman or a man should serve the body politic, and not pleasure the personal, private and sexual body); second, Stella and Robert’s relation begins thanks to ruins, is borne out of ruins, is a product of ruination (Bowen 1949, 80-81); third, narratively, the narrative time of the loss of the relationship precedes the narrative time of its origin, even if the narrated time of the origin precedes in chronological time its loss. Finally, adieu and separation are the origin of any relationship, ruin the abyssal foundation of any love/ friendship:

One day death will necessarily separate us. Fatal and inflexible law: one of two friends will always see the other die. The dialogue, as virtual as it may be, will forever be wounded by an ultimate interruption. Comparable to no other, a separation between life and death will defy thought right from a first enigmatic seal, that which we will endlessly seek to decipher. No doubt the dialogue continues, pursuing its wake with the survivor. The latter believes she guards the other in herself—she did so already while the other was alive—henceforth, the survivor lets the other speak inside herself. She does so perhaps better than ever, and that is a tarrying hypothesis. But survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich* than ever. ... This melancholic certainty ... begins as of the friends’ lifetime itself. Not only by an interruption but by a speech of interruption. A *cogito* of farewell, this good-bye without return, signs the very breathing of the dialogue, of dialogue in the world or of the most interior dialogue. Mourning waits no longer at that moment.

From this first encounter, interruption anticipates death, interruption precedes death. Interruption casts over everyone the gloom of an implacable future anterior. One of us two *will have* had to remain alone. Both of us knew this in advance. And right from the start. One of the two *will have* been doomed, from the beginning, to carry alone, in herself, both the dialogue which she must pursue beyond the interruption and the memory of the first interruption. (Derrida, 2003, 20, trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski)

This originary interruption, separation as the ruin from which and over which any relationship is constructed and deconstructed, is how Bowen in fact depicts ruins in *The Heat of the Day*. Bowen gives it her own twist, when she has Stella tell Harrison about how, after his disappearance subsequent to Robert's death, and during the interval of several years prior to his return, she continued a mental conversation with him:

‘After I gave up thinking I should see you again, I still went on talking and talking to you in my own mind—so I cannot really have felt you were dead, I think, because one doesn't go talking and talking to any one of the *them*: more one goes on hearing what they said, piecing and repiecing it together to try and make out something they had not time to say—possibly even had not time to know’ (Bowen 1949, 273).

I am most intimate with the other when the other is absent

When that other is dead, then I hear best what the other says

I hear what the other did not hear or himself hear her or himself even to be saying

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