IPRPD
International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
ISSN 2693-2547 (Print), 2693-2555 (Online)
Volume 06; Issue no 09: September 2025
DOI: 10.56734/ijahss.v6n9a2

THE DISSOLUTION OF SELF: NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF ELIZABETH BOWEN, CHRISTA WOLF AND ELENA FERRANTE

Patricia Laurence[1]

[1]*Professor Emerita, City University of New York*

Abstract

The personal pronoun "I" has slipped into our ways of thinking and literature like an iron bolt. However, the authors Elizabeth Bowen, Christa Wolf and Elena Ferrante--though a generation apart and living in different nations--work to unloosen it in their writing. Their characters are not single, unitary beings with a stable "I"-- but kaleidoscopic in their variety of states of mind and being. They present a multiplicity of "selves" merging with past aspects of self, narrators, characters and themselves as authors.This essay foregrounds their narrative experiments with the "dissolution of self" and examines the lexical and narrative techniques through which they "dissolve" and express their multiplicity as women, authors, narrators, citizens, friends, and, sometimes, spies in selected works.

Keywords

Elizabeth Bowen, Christa Wolf, Elena Ferrante, the modern "self"

"What is a person? Is it true that there is more than one of each?" asks Eva, a character in Elizabeth Bowen's novel, *Eva Trout*[1]; another character, Lois, seemingly responds that one must at least be "double" and "twice as complex as someone from an earlier generation as many people have gone into...[our]making."[2] Lila in Elena Ferrante's novel, *My Brilliant Friend*, also feels "double" as the "margins" between herself and her friend, Lenu, suddenly "dissolve."[3]

And Christa Wolf 's narrator merges in her novel, *The Quest for Christa T*, with a dead friend--now present, now absent in her life--who becomes, at times, the voice of the novel.

These writers remind us that though the personal pronoun 'I" has slipped into our ways of thinking like an iron bolt, they write to unloosen it along with other modernist writers like Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust and James Joyce. They express their unease with the narrow scope of the pronoun "I" and struggle to invent a self that is multiple in their fiction. As women writers in a patriarchal world, they remember roles, stored selves from different times and places, as well as a selfhood often defined by interdependence with friends, family and community. They relate and act outside in the material world, and put into circularity not just feeling, but doing. The primacy of their relationships to other women, family and community—their capacious selves--are embodied in pronouns and other kinds of narrative perspectives and techniques and become a formal mark of their hidden or past selves, sometimes arising from the unconscious. They do not experience selfhood as the "autonomy" of a "free subject"—as an uncomplicated, unitary "I"--as Kant would posit, given that they have grown up with a multiplicity to be demonstrated in this essay. Who am I?" queries a character in a Virginia Woolf novel, "it depends so much upon the room." Many rooms, people, places and times created Ferrante, Wolf and Bowen as they grew into writers. Unable to contain these multiple selves, they face the "difficulty"—as authors—as Christa Wolf notes—of saying 'I'."[4]

Their splits rifle their memories and imaginations and lead to a new way of voicing female experience through multiplicity. These writers layer the reflexive pronoun-- "I" to express the multidirectional tides within themselves. They eschew the grammatical reference to one person, and advance a more capacious "I" composed of multiple shards of the self. The fluidity inherent in their innovative pronouns bears comparison to today's interrogation of the gender pronouns--"he" and "she"— as the cultural and sexual borders between these binary categories are questioned. In an age preoccupied with entering into the fiction of character, mind and place of the cultural "other," these authors demonstrate that turning "inward" to find and describe multiple "others"-- the evolving and dissolving past selves and relationships within the self--is as daunting a pursuit. Wolf states that "I" is

a layered pronoun and construct, and part of a "long and never-ending journey toward oneself." [5] Readers need to be alerted to these dissolutions and multi-layered pronouns as they embody the complexity of women and shatter the conception of the single self in new narrative forms.

The writers now or once were among the most important and popular writers of their day though generations apart and living in different countries. They create new narrative perspectives in their writing and a politics, at times, of feminist community and collectivity. They summon various selves and evanescent states of being. First, each has lived as a woman and a woman author in a patriarchal society, often surprised as Virginia Woolf observed, "by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall [a street of British government offices] when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical."[6] Women begin as outsiders, and as writers they live their lives with an observing self that enters into their writing. Second, these writers have experienced the national partition or class divisions of their countries in young womanhood: Bowen in a nation divided into a southern Irish free state and northern counties loyal to England; Wolf living in a country split into East and West Germany; and Ferrante, living in a period of second wave feminism, class divisions and communism in Italy. Grace Paley has foregrounded Wolf's ethical and political self, her commitment to Communism, Socialism and East German values, and Bowen and Ferrante are equally engaged with the history of their nations. Fourth, they are citizens of a nation but also become spies or are spied upon leading to further divisions of self during turbulent times. Various aspects of these authors are then at play then as they engage in the personal and historical events swirling around them. They spark a constellation of modernist questions—literary, psychological, cultural, national and philosophical about the unity of the "I," including their fictional and the authorial selves. They journey then as women and writers to both find and lose themselves not only in "others" but in transient forms of the self in fiction.

Their innovations emerge from these experiences as women, and contribute new narrative shapes to the movement of modernism on a global canvas. Notions of "convergence" or "divergence" shape them: described by the critic, David Porter, who reexamines comparative theory and thinking about writers across decades and centuries, challenging traditional historical and literary borders as does Susan Stanford Friedman .[7] Though of different nations and generations, Bowen, Wolf and Ferrante "converge" at points in their lives and narration. Their personal and national histories are both recounted in this essay--and then removed to be observed in a global context. Placing them on a larger feminist, global canvas—a critical move--- relieves them of the tired critical and national debates and binaries that surround them in their own countries. This is a debate that surfaces, at times, in Ireland about whether Bowen's loyalties are more Irish or English, particularly during World War II and later; and whether the loyalties of Christa Wolf reside in Socialism in the East German State, the Stasi, social realism or her own authority as an author; or whether Elena Ferrante is a man or a woman or both or a Neapolitan or Roman.

In the last three decades, critics have acknowledged the contributions of women writers to the map of modernism. Beginning with critics like Bonnie Kime Scott who demonstrated a web of relationships among women writers in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* in the early nineties; continuing with Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernism Across Time* that posited a circulating modernity across centuries, including female and male authors (2018); and, now, Lauren Elkin situating authors like Elizabeth Bowen within cross-cultural currents. In "Across the Other Channel," Elkin dissolves borders between England, Ireland and France as authors travel across into other selves, nations and languages, elements that mix and drift into their writing styles. All reflect a narrative shift in women's writing that is a contribution to the creation of transnational modernism.

Readers and critics socialized into reading characters as "single," will now encounter them here as composite and layered: friends merge into one another as do, sometimes, a character and the author, the living and the dead, the named and the unnamed, the male and female, the animate and the inanimate, sometimes embodied in puzzling pronouns. Women now write "against the bad language that doesn't provide a welcome for ...[their] truth." Ferrante urges women to fuse their talents: "not a line should be lost in the wind."[8]

Cultural and National Divisions

Bowen, Wolf and Ferrante grew up with an early awareness of cultural and national divisions in countries or cities that were "partitioned." History fractured not only Bowen and Wolf's countries –Ireland and Germany—with clear borders, but also their personal, cultural and political identities: lines of conflict that they, nevertheless, learned to cross early. They write of characters experiencing and absorbing a geometry of "sides" and the instability of places in which they lived or observed in other women writers. As they grow into writers, other selves would be grafted onto this early split.

These writers suspected "truths" and deceptions on both "sides" of the borders in their countries of birth, Ireland and Germany. Wolf in East Germany spoke of how "decades of living with a border that splits up one's country and causes intense opposition between the two halves is limiting to thought on both sides."[9] They shared a national stress that took its toll on them as women, writers, and, sometimes, their reputations. Both were forced, at various times, to take a position: Bowen, living in London under the blitz in World War II, and working as a spy

for the British Ministry of Information in Ireland, suspended between the British/Allied war against Hitler and Fascism, and loyalty to her heritage and Ireland's position of neutrality and non-engagement; Christa Wolf, also, was caught for decades between the politics, economics and values of East and West Germany before the collapse of the wall in 1989. Each author broke through the geographical, political, and metaphorical walls in her respective country in creating characters--aspects of themselves--who were on different "sides."

Bowen would announce the different "sides" within herself as she sometimes felt like a "stranger" in her own country, being Anglo-Irish and Protestant in a Catholic country. She was a member of the Protestant minority--only 5% of the Irish population—and as a child, recalls in her memoir, *Seven Winters*, the tolling of Catholic Church bells that divided her Anglo-Irish, Protestant sky. On Sundays, she said, she heard the sounds of the bells of all kinds of churches, mainly the Church of Ireland, Protestants, rolling in a sort of unison. But on weekdays, she would hear "other" bells of the Catholic church "with their (to my ear) alien, searching insistence had the sky and the Dublin echoes all to themselves."[10] As many in the Anglo-Irish culture in Dublin, her family lived apart from Catholics, socializing with Protestants and a small circle from Trinity College, the Bar, the Church of Ireland, and those who lived in the big houses. In addition, she witnessed some of the violence leading up to the partition of Ireland into the 26 counties of the Republic in the south and 6 counties loyal to England in the north, beginning in 1919; subsequently, the Irish War of Independence followed that led to the end of British rule in Ireland in 1922, and the creation of a border between the counties. This border is captured in the character of Lois, a young woman in Bowen's novel, *The Last September*, who is part of the Anglo-Ascendancy and who crosses over the "partition" in Ireland, to fall in love with a British soldier to the dismay of her Anglo-Irish family.

Similarly, Wolf, of a later generation, witnessed the social revolution in post-war Germany and its division into the communist East under the USSR, and the democratic West in 1949 when she was twenty. She went on to write of the cultural and political doubleness in her first novel, *The Divided Sky* (1963*)* that highlights the divisions between the two Germanys, and she limns a personal and political rupture that informs all of her writing. Published in 1961 when the Cold War was at its height, the novel reveals the conflict and irresolution in a younger German generation, and more particularly, a young woman, Rita, who must decide whether to stay in her socialist state, East Germany, or flee to a "freer" capitalist and more materialist West Germany with her lover, Manfred. Rita makes a critical personal and political decision--after a culturally alienating trip to the unfamiliar and capitalist West--to stay in the familiar East and work in a factory, her homeland. She remains loyal to East Germany and socialist daily life and values, and rejects her lover who reflects on their separation and the border between East and West. He comments, "At least they can't divide the sky." She replies "Yes, they can. The sky is what divides first of all," reminding us of her early awareness of national division.[11] Rita in the novel takes "sides"—an earlier Christa Wolf—and it augurs what Wolf viewed as the loss of cherished socialist values when East Germany merged with the West in 1989. It is also interesting to note that the characters' choices about what "side" of the border to be on is intertwined with their love interests: Bowen's Lois chooses the British lover over her family identity; Wolf's Rita chooses her homeland in East Germany.

It is important to note at the beginning that Christa Wolf is an important source of inspiration for Ferrante whose books, according to the critic, Alessia Ricciardi "provide the Italian novelist with models of character relationship and narrative structure as well as a sense what feminism's historical depth of field might be."[12] Ricciardi in her book, *Finding Ferrante*, posits that Ferrante--the pseudonymous, absent author-- is apparently the Germanist and translator, Anita Raj, based on the investigations of the obsessive journalist, Claudio Gatti. He pursued past records to validate that Anita Raj has spent a good part of her life translating German literature and Christa Wolf into Italian--and IS Ferrante. The conjecture is that Ferrante-Raj knows the work of Christa Wolf very well.

Christa Wolf moved through changing times and divisions in Germany as Ferrante did in Rome and the Naples of her imagination. She grew up in the Nazi era in what is now Poland and moved to Mecklenburg when her family was expelled by the Germans after World War II, an area that would become East Germany. She engaged in party politics, the Writer's Union and embraced its socialist values as a path to a more progressive society until 1976 when she became disillusioned by the German Democratic Republic's censure and expatriation of Wolf Biermann, her friend, a popular East German poet and singer who voiced criticism of GCR policies. His songs were condemned as anarchistic, and, he, subsequently blacklisted and stripped of East German citizenship in '76. This stance, among others, caused Wolf to lose faith in the GDR, and these historical and political changes of heart surface in her writing. She relates these changes va in an interview with *Efim* Ethirds when she remembers the "different moral systems" she subscribed to and then abandoned at different times in her life during periods of Naziism, the Stasi, and the fall of the Berlin wall."[13] She juggles her various "I's," private and public, part of her struggle and self-invention as a woman, a citizen of Germany, and a writer. There is a politics of memory in her writing.

Ferrante in *My Brilliant Friend* also writes of geographic and cultural divisions in the city of Naples that is clearly split between the rich and the poor, and marked by a long street, Spaccanapoli meaning, "Naples splitter." It was a cultural and economic division that awakened the ambition of the impoverished girls, Lila and Lenu, to escape to another place. One day, the friends, Lila and Lenu growing up in gritty Naples, are "excited by the

invisible" (by what they had only learned of in schoolbooks) [and] cross the border, the street encountering another "perimeter," and run through a tunnel to a road that leads to the sea, an exciting opening and release from their dark streets.

The divisions and violence of class are more clearly focused in Ferrante's novel, but she also expresses the "dissolutions" between friends as well as the splits between men and women, the educated and the uneducated[14], the criminal and the law-abiding, and children and adults. *"*We lived in a world," writes Lenu, the striving student and writer, "in which children and adults were wounded, blood flowed*"* These divisions forced Lila and Lenu to "take sides" in their culture from their early years, introducing the self-division that would continue to mark their life choices and writing. They thought about money and education and writing as solidifying their "dissolving" existences in the chaotic crime-ridden city of Naples. Education leads impoverished girls to upward mobility. Ferrante, as author--like Bowen and Wolf—represents these shifting personal and cultural identities in her characters. Borders, lines and walls posed an early personal challenge and questions: on which side and with which self does one live? Does Bowen live with the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class, the English, the Catholic Irish or Europeans? Does Wolf side with the socialist East or capitalist West Germany? Will Ferrante's characters be drawn to the poor working-class side of the city, or Comorra, the rich and corrupt or the educated or the uneducated?

The Personal, Public and Fictional "I"

Christa Wolf is one of the few East German women writers widely translated in Europe and America, and she, Ferrante and Bowen managed multiple personal, national and authorial shifts in their lives. They struggle in life and fiction to bring these together into a whole. As public authors, each expressed discomfort with the autobiographical "I" and avoided private exposure for various reasons.

Elena Ferrante, an artist of absence, strikes an extreme stance in hiding her personal "I" by adopting a pseudonym and refusing to reveal a private name, self or appear as an author in public. This has led to speculations that her *nom de plume* may a represent a woman, a man, both she and Dominick Starnone, or even a collective. Like Bowen she refuses the politics of celebrity--pointing to her writing, protecting herself from time-consuming and diverting public events: literary tours, tv interviews, and responds to questions only in writing. "Who" she is has led to an intensive investigations by the journalist, Claudio Gatti, and speculations by the writer, Rachel Donadio. Gatti, however, after an exhaustive investigation in 2016 seemingly confirms the identification of Ferrante with Anita Raj, a German translator. He affirms this connection--according to Alessia Ricciardi in *Finding Ferrante*--through methods generally reserved for organized crime in Italy: Ferrante's real estate purchases in Rome as well as hacked payments by her publisher, Edizio e/o: it is an identification that earned credibility in the New York Review of Books blog. Regardless of the identification, female relationships and similar narrative experimentation are evident in their work.

Elizabeth Bowen also denied the cult of personality as an author, famously rejecting a *Paris Review* interview with the remark, "Even to my friends, I do not find that I talk much, often or easily about my writing. As for the outside world, I never can see why I should. Why can't they just read my books if they care to—and leave it at that." Though of an earlier generation not immersed in social media, she like Ferrante protected her privacy concealing the unique aspects of her life as a *femme du monde* who had affairs when married, erotic relationships with women as well as men, and activities as a spy in Ireland for the British Ministry of Information during World War II. Christa Wolf also hid her various selves and her ambiguous role in spying on fellow writers for the Stasi and relates in an interview with Efim Ethirds "I myself. Who was that? Which one of the multiple beings from which myself was composed? The one that wanted to know itself? The one that wanted to protect itself."[15] She confirms her shifting political selves in her essay, "Interview with Myself," where she describes her writing as "a journey into the unknown individual soul, bumping into history, society and myself at every turn."[16] Writing under censorship in East Germany, external and internalized, Wolf found narrative structures to hide as an author to avoid exposure as she strove for individuality in a social realist literary world. All three writers have preferred to disappear into their writing to both reveal "who" they are in a nuanced way: they sought to escape from personality, or protect themselves from the social and political glare and misinterpretations of the public eye. Yet they do not fully escape but surface to infuse their complex selves--actual and fictional---into their multiple narrators and characters in their stories. They all live fully in the tensions, discords, suspicions and deceptions of their cultural and political moments.

The Female, Inanimate or Ghostly Double

Bowen, Wolf and Ferrante innovate a way of writing that allows a space and narratological function—for another woman, a living or dead friend, a fictional author--sometimes, an object—and, perhaps, the female reader. Elena Ferrante explains how she worked out the relationship between Lila and Lenu in *My Brilliant Friend* inspired by the feminist thinker, Adriana Cavareo's theories of narration. Ferrante's Lila grows up living, reading and writing

in close relationship with her friend, Lenu, in gritty, raw, working-class Naples. These friends form and reform each other and each other's lives and stories throughout the novel—sometimes in competition, at other times, in affectionate and supportive relation. To discover who you are, according to Carvereo, you need "a necessary other" another person, a friend, a lover, somebody that presents another way to be.[17] Your sense of self depends on someone else's telling of your story. Lila and Lenu's friendship includes strange episodes of "dissolving margins" that threaten Lila, and later, Lenu, as they struggle to find and contain themselves within the pronoun "I," a single, unitary self—selves that intermittently merge.[18]

Ferrante weaves the stories of two friends so that we don't know who is Lenu and who is Lila or who is the "brilliant" friend of the title. When Lila and Lenu as children buy a copy of *Little Women* with the little money they have, they read it over and over again together, dreaming that they might grow up to write their own *Little Women* if they read and study hard enough. Perhaps they might *"*become rich*"* and escape from their world full of people and words that killed, they think. They are two smart girls growing up in a violent neighborhood comforting and challenging each other without saying a word; "No castle, no treasure chest...would concern Lila and me alone," says Lenu, "intent on writing our *Little Women*."[19] Lila begins writing "The Blue Fairy," as a teenager, and Lenu, the more academic friend with writing aspirations, is impressed and jealous of how her friend's voice "was able to speak through writing."[20] They comfort and compete, with one other throughout their early years-- both are readers and vividly intellectual in their different cultural spheres--and dissolve most visibly in one another's writing both blending and writing for themselves and the "you" of other women. As the novel proceeds, Lenu continues to reflect upon her brilliant friend, though she has vanished, and stunningly reads the diary of her life when Lila disappears. Lila--though not present except through memory and her diary voice--then becomes Lenu's muse. Their two voices blend, and the outlines between the two friends "broke like a cotton thread." And so, the narrator of the novel, Lenu takes up the themes she finds in Lila's diary and publishes her own novel. Who is who? From the beginning, their identities are porous and Ferrante splits the narrative "I" in two.

In another scene, Lenu, the more driven and successful student, writes a short essay about her conflict with a priest, giving it to Lila to review: Lila rewrites and revises parts of Lenu's essay in her own handwriting; Lenu then gives this version to a friend for publication--in Lila's handwriting (though both have composed it) --"in order to keep the visible trace of her presence in my words." Lenu writes, "her [Lila's]handwriting itself gave me the impression that I had escaped from myself."[21] They relate, they blend. Lila, does not become a writer but instead marries Stefano, a wealthy, ambitious man, from the neighborhood, who would betray her and exploit her various creative designs for shoes; Lenu, on the other hand, goes on to become a professor and novelist and writes her friend's unrecorded story when she mysteriously disappears as a character in the very opening of the book. "She [Lila] wanted to vanish...she wanted not only to disappear herself now at the age of sixty-six, but also to eliminate the entire life she had left behind. [22] Lenu often suspects that Lila is the "real" writer given her flashes of spunk and talent and, she, merely an ambitious woman battling to escape her social class through education and a career. She is angry at Lenu's abandonment of her, her disappearance, and is determined to recover not only Lila's early life but her own and the story of their interlocking friendship and Lila's life in the diary in the voices of her own writing. She reincarnates Lila in her published, successful novel—sometimes not knowing whose story it is--illustrating Adriana Cavarero's view of female friendship and merging--"I tell you my story in order to make you tell it to me."

In another novel, *The Days of Abandonment*, Ferrante tells the story of the threat in female mergings such as Lila and Lenu's. She intimately describes the disintegration—the dissolution of self--of a married woman, Olga, who is abandoned by her husband who has gone off with a younger friend of the family. In her early desperate days, Olga is haunted by a childhood image of a woman in her neighborhood, a *poverella,* a woman who lost everything when her perfidious husband left her. This image of a despondent and grief-stricken woman who was no longer loved and drowns herself haunts her like a "double." One day when her daughter, Ilaria, dresses up her clothes and make-up, she is reminded of another childhood story about identical twins, strange dwarves a hundred years old who play musical instruments in concert. When her costumed child looks at her in dismay and says "we're identical," she is disturbed to be merging with her child and the dwarves: "The sentence disturbed me, I shuddered, in a flash I lost that bit of ground I seemed to have gained. What did it mean, we are identical, at that moment I needed to be identical only to myself. I mustn't imagine myself as one of the old women."[23] She also thinks Ilaria, her daughter, isn't Ilaria but maybe was one of those dwarves who had appeared by surprise like the image of the *poverella.* Later, looking into the mirrors she sees the two halves of her face separately—both unfamiliar. "The mirror was summing up my situation," one side was reassuring her, "I was Olga"; the other changing features of her secret side, the image of the *poverella*.[24]

Elizabeth Bowen also describes mergings, and begins to express her discomfort with the personal pronoun "I" more overtly during World War II. She posits--in the preface to her wartime stories, *Ivy Gripped the Steps*--"a dissolving self" (reminding us of Lila's "dissolving borders") that is now subconsciously merging with other citizens during the war, suffering in the blitz. "I felt one with and just like, everyone else. Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began." During those times she said that she lived "both as a civilian and as a writer, with every pore open; I lived so many lives, and, still more, lived among the packed repercussions of so

many thousands of lives." In the wartime climate of a collective "we," the boundaries between people go down and the individual experiences and stories of people resonate within oneself."[25] The "I" and "we" disintegrated like the walls of bombed buildings during the war. Bowen, as a writer, would try to save and reconstruct the lost "I's" and "we's"—selves-- in her wartime stories. "Saving hallucinations" would be part of her rescue effort and she would present characters who were wounded, brutalized and anesthetized by daily bombings and deprivations in her stories. Only bits and pieces of identity were left for them, and only a return to a past memory of someone dead might restore them, leading to the shadowy presence of past identities blurring with the present. In the story, "The Demon Lover," Mrs. Drover returns to her shuttered wartime house at the end of a day to pick up some items. She discovers a letter on a table addressed to her long ago by her former soldier lover—now dead-- from World War I. Time past and present merge, and the world of actual and fictional time collapse: the dead soldier's "I" comes alive in the letter and the two aspects of Mrs. Drover—young and old—are admitted into the notion of her "character." The letter is infused with the past and Mrs. Drover moves into a former self that animates her dead lover: borders dissolve, and the line between the living and the dead is crossed.

"Other" people are also catalysts for Bowen for her impulse to tell stories. She experiences herself as "disembodied" during the war allowing others to inhabit her: "the walls went down [between people]: and we felt, if not knew each other. We all lived in a state of lucid abnormality." In these stories, the subconscious of characters merge—the stored selves-- with the "I" of the author. Bowen said of these stories that they were not hers; they are "flying particles of something enormous and inchoate that had been going on. They were sparks from experience--an experience not necessarily my own." People and pronouns merge, time is fragmented and "the past discharges its load of feeling into the bewildered present." For all these characters, Bowen asserts in her preface, "it is the pre-war 'I' that is lost, sought—and retrieved, at the cost of no little pain." [26] In the story, "Summer Night," about a woman fleeing to a nighttime lover's assignation in the middle of the war, the narrator observes of one of the characters in a dream state that she behaves "almost without an 'I.'"[27]

In addition to these subconscious mergings with others, the "we" of her wartime writing, Bowen is distinguished from Ferrante and Wolf in blurring boundaries between the animate and inanimate in her use of the pronoun, "it." Sometimes her characters merge and dissolve into inanimate dead beings or "things" and "objects." This kind of border crossing—the animate crossing over to the inanimate, the dead –is related to a person moving into a former self or a thing. For example, her character, Matchett, the servant in *The Heat of the Day,* cares for the furniture of the house, and becomes an extension of the objects in the room as they both, according to Bowen, contain memories of the past, Matchett, "a vaseful of memory." Objects are not solid and "other": they do not remain "it" in Bowen's writing as Maude Ellman presciently describes in Bowen's treatment of furniture in her novels in *The Shadow Across the Page.*[28] In swift little turns, Bowen shifts at times from a human gaze to an impersonal eye revealing through objects the feeling of a place. Objects embody what is "outside" in the room—a feeling or atmosphere created by people--as in *Friends and Relations*, in which we find a description of "staring lamps" in a room in which people have just quarreled. The objects she represents in various stories and novels may be extensions of her or a character's consciousness—not a separation of subject and object (Dora Russel, the wife of Bertrand, thought this "separation" was a "masculine" philosophy).

The question of a stable identity is again posed by Eva Trout in Bowen's last novel: "anyhow, what a slippery fish is identity; and what is it, besides a slippery fish?....What is a person? Is it true, there is not more than one of each?"[29] Eva decides to see by examining many selves: we observe her changes throughout the novel, subtitled "Changing Places." She moves from the castle school as a girl to Iseult and Eric's home in Worcestershire to Broadstairs, Kent, to America—always in motion assuming different identities: the neglected daughter of a homosexual father; a lover of a schoolfriend, Elsinore; an unhinged wanderer in America; a mother; a seeming madwoman who is shot by an adopted son.

Bowen's crossings, fluidity of personality and suspension of place augurs a modern life of "no place." Though some Bowen critics have negatively assessed this movement as emotional, psychological and physical "dislocation," there is a difference. Borders can be fearful, and we witness Bowen's anxious crossing to Kent, England, at the age of seven after her father's breakdown, yet they open new strange, imaginative, cultural and narrative spaces. Dublin and Kent were opposing places in her mind and she had a migrant's sense of unfamiliarity when arriving in England. Nevertheless, in trying to find words to match her impressions, she wrote to her friend, Isaiah Berlin that England made her into a novelist.[30] Newly defined "characters" or "presences" are uncannily felt in her writing as visual (spectral), aural, inanimate or dead. This stance catapults Bowen into the "dissolution" of the grounds of character that Bowen critics, Bennett & Royle, presciently discuss, and that Keri Walshe and, recently, Ana Ashraf have projected into surrealist and spectral identities. She acquires a philosophy and appreciation of the value of "movement" and we observe the cultural enrichment of her style in contact.

Wolf's early writing—more radically than Bowen's—also overtly splinters into multiple identities, particularly in her novel, *The Quest for Christa T*. Here, Wolf like Bowen (and Ferrante) crosses over from life to death, in this case in quest of a childhood friend who had died and with whom Christa had a close relationship from World War II into the 1960s. And like Elena Ferrante, she names her narrator "Christa"—as Ferrante morphs her own name , "Elena" to "Lenu" for her fictional narrator. Both dissolve the "I" of the author, narrator and character

from the very start. We read the kaleidoscope of names for different aspects of the narrator of the Ferrante novel: Elena Greco, given name; Lenuccia in the neighborhood; Greco to her teachers.,"Lenu" to her friend. One "name" cannot capture an identity, an "I." Both Wolf and Ferrante search for a lost friend in thought and in reading their friend's diaries and these voices become a part of their own.

Wolf illuminates the origins of her character, Christa T. in her essay, "Interview with Myself." Here she recounts her difficulty accepting the very early death of a friend, and she, like Ferrante and Bowen, crosses over in her novel. She writes, "I enter into the past world of this dead woman whom I believed I knew and whom I can hold on to only if I set out to really know her" Adding invention to memory, she writes in the novel of the passionate life and early death of Christa T, a beautiful and brilliant non-conformist in East Germany who cannot adapt to the changing politics of socialist GDR. Wolf enters the past world of this dead woman, Christa T (just as she will enter the childhood of Nelly in Patterns of Childhood), and sets out to know and reveal her through her unnamed narrator who is fascinated by the young, daring Communist woman with an inspired social vision who is eventually destroyed by her society. Though the narrator meets Christa T and seeks to recreate her, she is elusive and the "net that has been woven and set for [her] ...finally turns out to be incapable of catching her."[31] Once Christa "existed in real light of cities, landscapes and living rooms, amidst suspicions, wars, soldiers, widows," but now the narrator is just on a "quest for her in the thought of her."[32] However, when the narrator discovers Christa's diary and other writings after her death, she presents her friend in fiction through her friend's own voice and writing, and she, the narrator, then lapses into silence. Christa T, the friend's voice takes over and becomes the alter ego of the narrator. Several voices are then suspended in narration: the composite character blends with the actual author as well as the writing friend and that leads to the innovation of multiple pronoun use*:* first, the voice of an author-narrator, an "I" that tells the story of a deceased friend (and author-narrator is already a split self); then there is the character, Christa, a distancing pronoun, "she" that the fictional author and actual author, Wolf create; and then the voice of Christa though dead represented by the writing in her diary, a different "I"(as in Ferrante's novel). It leads Wolf to the prescient narrative observation: "I understand the secret of the third person, who is there without being tangible, and who, when circumstances favor her, can bring down more reality upon herself than the first person"- "I." We return then to the difficulty of the narrative "I"." One can place a third person, Wolf says, next to oneself—call her a "she"—and observe her in a way one cannot observe oneself, an "I." The narrator is drawn to a third person, her absent friend, Christa T—indeed inseparable from her, in a way—and fascinated with her restless life as she experiments with various forms of living, marries, has three children, a lover, manages two jobs, and is always in the process of becoming. Wolf later admitted that the focus of the novel was not Christa T, the character, but herself: "Suddenly it was myself I was confronting. I had not foreseen that. The relationship between 'us'—between Christa T and the narrator 'I'—moved of its own accord into the center." [33] Bothe the author and the character are named Christa, and a name or a pronoun "I" --Wolf and Ferrante tell us-- cannot be pinned down to a single self.

Christa Wolf's more overt experimentation and marking of different narrative selves and border crossings in her writing brings Ferrante and Bowen's narrative experiments to the foreground. They all—in different countries and generations-- transform notions of "character" in the form of the twentieth-century novel. Wolf's use of "I," her stance, philosophy and pronouns are illuminated by Anita Raja (the unmasked Elena Ferrante) in a 2016 article on the language of Christa Wolf.

The irresolution of Bowen, Wolf and Ferrante's divided and restless personal "I's" in life, is dispelled as they move toward their writing desks and fuse them. Here they are relieved of identities and actions predicated on society: unwavering national and political loyalties, public roles as authors, fixed selves, conventional relationships and attachments, and clear gender roles. Each writer locks herself as "a non-entity in some ideal no place—perfect and clear as a bubble." This bubble is the world of writing where their actual and fictional selves could be at play in the riddle of life. Here, they can break through the walls and borders of the narrow political, cultural and religious understanding, observing limitations on both sides in their own countries, on an undisturbed canvas. The recognition of complexity--their doubleness if not multiplicity-- leads Bowen, Wolf and Ferrante to disappear as "authors" splintering into their various "I's": narrators, characters, and first, second and third points of view in their fiction. They abandon the notion of the fixed self (as many modernists) and express in their writing the multitudes of "I" in fiction that alternately merges, separates and illustrate layers of knowingness, unknowingness, about the past or the present in the palimpsest of self. They enhance multiplicity, and Wolf and Ferrante in particular disappear, shrinking from stamping any name on themselves as authors that would brand a stable, knowable or public self.

Split Selves: Spies and being Spied Upon

The split "I" in the narratives of these women authors is reflected in their national and cultural divisions as well as their psychological mergings, at times, with friends; and, finally, they took on the role of doubleness of being spies or being spied upon in their own countries. Bowen and Wolf became spies in time of war and political turmoil: Wolf not only a spied upon on other German authors for a brief time in 90's but is also was spied upon by the Stasi;

Bowen was a spy for the British in World War II taking the temperature of Irish opinion of the Germans and the English if there were to be a British incursion into Ireland. Ferrante is often spied upon by private investigators though resolutely out of public view and hidden behind a pseudonym. We know little about her personal, social or political history directly—except through traces in her novels and the journalist, Claudio Gatti's spying as described in Alessia Ricciardi's *Finding Ferrante*.[34] In changing times of national crisis, these writers embrace other selves as part of an expansive and fluid modern identity that they sometimes hide, protect or reveal in their fiction or non-fiction.

Elizabeth Bowen was an active agent for the British Ministry of Information in and because of this was subject to secrecy, personal complicity, disillusionments and charges of treason in Ireland.[35] This intrigue enters into Bowen's wartime novel of love, espionage and betrayal, *The Heat of the Day*. The protagonist, Stella Rodney, a divorced woman over forty, learns of the porousness between the personal and the national when she discovers that her lover, Robert Kelway, is a Nazi spy. He has not only betrayed his nation but her, personally, as she also is a spy for XYZ and it's unclear what kinds of information may have passed between them given their intimacy. Various selves take shifts within her during this period: she is a divorced woman but also a mother and a lover and a spy for the nation as well as a spy on her lover. All this happens within her as she learns of the personal and political doubleness of both her lover and the British counter intelligence agent, Harrison –indeed herself—all are spies and lovers. Though each man in this novel spies for a different nation, Germany and England, they merge or "dissolve" into one to betray Stella, the woman. This male dissolution is similar to Ferrante and Wolf's female mergings. Both Stella's lover and the British agent are named "Robert" and each forsakes her: her lover hides a secret, that he is a Nazi spy and the British agent tries to seduce her into a sexual relationship to save her lover from the law. Such wartime opacities animate Bowen's writing as both she and Wolf lived in a time of telling-- "a little but not much"-- about certain national activities. Having hidden and split national selves as citizens and spies, Bowen and Wolf knew the power of secrets and holding or withholding information in their lives, but allowing their hidden selves to appear in their shadowy characters.

A plurality of I's-- emerged within Stella in Bowen's *Heat of the Day* and she questions the collective pronoun, "we," asserting a separate and objective "they" when she comes in contact with the black-mailing British counter spy, Harrison. She discovers that he has been surveying her private life with her lover, Robert, and she decries his sexual manipulation and coarse language. Her "we" is distinguished from other wartime men and women writers as she resents counterspy Harrison's use of the "perpetual we" of war. Your "we," she asserts, expressing the wartime feeling of a mother, is my "they." Stella has reservations about the war and what it has done to her son. She distinguishes herself as a mother and a woman on the home front from the feeling that "war made us one big family." She reacts to the war and what "they"--the Army and war machine of which Harrison is a part--had "done" to her son, Roderick, that rendered him another person: in her view, emotionally impoverished and dislocated. When her son returns on furlough, visiting her in an unfamiliar flat, he is not the Roderick she remembered. "The Army," she thought, "was out to obliterate [him] in the course of a process, she could do nothing to stop it." Roderick projects a wariness, she thinks, a fear of the "expenditure of feeling" that the war has bred, and she perceives the "dissolution" of his words and self.[36]

As women writers in male-dominated fields of literature and war, Bowen and Wolf perhaps begin with a doubleness of identity as they live their lives as observing women and that enters into their writing as the first split of self. Stella in *The Heat of the Day*, for example, was not prepared to be just "a woman" during wartime--she was a mother, a lover, a spy--and also vacillated about her Anglo-Irish identity while living in England. Christa Wolf reveals this multiplicity as well as her anti-war stance in her feminist reinterpretations of Greek tales, Medea, for example, who speaks in six different voices. Her characters cross gender borders, times, as well as life and death. Similarly, Bowen allows multiple presences—the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate-- into her wartime short stories.

Because of these multiple personas and perspectives, Bowen like Wolf refused to surrender her individual voice as a women writer to follow the calls for nationalist literature after Independence was declared in Ireland in 1922, and became a cosmopolitan, transnational writer. Wolf also was surrounded by the demand for social realist writing in Germany yet stood up to the establishment and wrote about the individual lives and dilemmas of young East Germans (perhaps leading to the STASI's thirty years of surveillance of her) and preserved her many selves as an author.. She challenged cliches about socialist realism and struggled to journey to her own voices, rejecting the socialist creed to create certain types of characters in prescribed sociological paths to represent the "realist" interests of the state. Each continued to follow her own personal, literary and political forking paths

Bowen confronted Irish society in her novel *The Last September,* focusing on the tensions in Irish society among the Anglo-Irish in the "big house," their Catholic neighbors, and the marauding IRA as Ireland approached independence. Given the multiple views, it was criticized by some critics as not being nationalist or "Irish enough." Sean O'Faolain, a fellow writer, greatly admired the texture and atmosphere of this novel and its "drama in small things" and took these critics to task asserting that the novel is "entirely Irish—if that matters a damn." He then added, in an aside, the broader literary vision that he and Bowen shared: "(We're so sick of hearing our Nationalists ask for Irish literature—so thirsty for just literature)"[37] Nevertheless, the Good Friday agreement eased such

tensions and violence between Loyalists in Northern Ireland and Republicans in the south in1998--though Bowen was not alive to see it--and the borders between East and West Germany were erased in principle during Wolf's lifetime after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—though not resolved in her writing. The residue of these early and continued tensions fired their personal identities and their writing.

For Bowen, as for Wolf, official and public language was inadequate to describe her choices and activities. They find nuanced language in fiction to illuminate or hide their political and informant activities. And though they are spies, they rejected the words in which they were publicly represented and vilified for their political stances. They recoiled from descriptions of their activities in the "debased language" of official government or police reports or newspapers. as such accounts diminished or distorted their finely-tuned literary, cultural and political stances. The official language is blunt and binary. Wolf and Bowen rejected the simplistic blunt, binary, lacerating official language that was applied to them and their writing at various times by the Stasi and nationalist Irish movements. Bowen complicated the binaries of Irish and English identity that prevailed in Ireland at the time as well as the wartime rhetoric and propaganda on the radio about Irish neutrality and in the culture of wartime England; Wolf rebuffed descriptions of herself in the police language of official Stasi reports. "When her "Perpetrator's File" was released by the STASI in 1993--she, having spied on fellow writers before this time, she was taken aback-- remembering, she said, "one of the many I's who have taken shifts in me, replacing one another in sequence, slowly or quickly," a past position or "I," now questioned. She was shocked to read her own STASI report, taken aback by names and descriptions in official police language that did not correspond to "who" she and others thought she was, asserting that her language and actions were "made of too fine a fabric, it slips through their fingers."[38]This splintering of self, becoming a spy in a divided nation--one might conjecture—also led both authors to turn their surveillance powers upon themselves to find, reveal and sometimes protect the selves hidden from the public, described here.

Wolf--born into a world of socialist art in which the artist is viewed as a "worker" dedicated to improve the state through his writing-- had to challenge political definitions and literary conventions to become an individual "author" in her culture and to achieve a voice that did not always reflect the views of the state, rather the multiplicity of her individuality. In Wolf and Bowen's novels, they develop a narrative method of saying less—silences and gaps-- or differently in their evanescent fiction. They signal that much cannot be said, is taboo, hidden or unknown. Bowen lived with the sound of Hitler's hectoring threats on the radio in London in the blitz and Christa Wolf also lived with the voice of the Fuhrer in Germany as a teenager, "The vehement overplayed words, the waving banners, the deafening songs, the hands clapping rhythms over our heads."[39] Words and their meanings rang hollow and dangerous when motivated by political calculation and craftiness. Bowen notes that the fine words and ideas spoken before World War II transformed and could no longer be trusted during the war given the blare of loudspeakers and daily bombings announcing advancing fascism every day. Public and national declarations were empty and violent. The interruption, fragmentation or lack of words as well as shifting selves within the authors filtered into their characters emerged as a theme as they did for many modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett. The Derridean acknowledgment that language was *manqué* led both authors to find ways to both preserve and cloak their changing selves within fiction.

Bowen and Wolf write introspectively and their novels, and their autobiographical writings present an uncertain "I"; Ferrante denies the autobiographical "I" in refusing personal and public identity. Wolf feels an unease with the first-person pronoun in recounting her childhood and its influences, and despite the autobiographical form of *Patterns of Childhood* (1976), she avoids using "I," in telling her story, addressing the remote child as "she." The child who knew, who grew up under Hitler, as she did--her German past-- is hidden in the character of Nelly who played games as a child in which she was compelled to salute the playtime Fuhrer with "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil." In a brief trip back to Germany as an adult twenty- six years after her family fled, 1971, Wolf feels an unease and guilt confronting this childhood self. Was she or was she not a Nazi? Not wanting to remain silent or abandon that child who participated in Naziism, Wolf names her "Nelly" in the memoir-novel, and divides her into three: Nelly, the child, sometimes speaks as an "I"; or she is distanced and referred to in the third person as "Nelly" or "she," by the adult remembering her; and then, "you" when the narrator moves closer to Nelly seemingly talking to her, and to herself as an author. The figure of the child is partly hidden as Wolf shifts the telling from the past to the present and from the first to the third, and, sometimes, second person in narration. The child has co-existing voices representing different periods of life. At a party, the narrator observes, "Nelly experiences—not for the first time but hardly ever as strongly—that she splits in two, one Nelly is playing 'the Jew has slaughtered a pig—which is part of what you want!'—while other Nelly watches the others and herself with different feelings from the corner."[40] In school, Nelly again splits in two as her compassion for an abused and weak "Jew boy" who the students taunt and "sock" as they walk by is aroused, and yet this feeling this turns into fear and hate as she follows her classmates' lead. The adult narrator has complex feelings as she looks back at childhood places: "As soon as the river Oder lay behind you, you were back in your childhood summer, which you had given up as irretrievably lost: the dry continental summer that crackled with heat, you've always had a profound feeling for it, and have unconsciously compared all subsequent summers to it."[41]

Bowen's childhood "I," however, is more stable than Wolf's, as she asserted--like Proust-- that it was the one "self " of which she was certain. She cautioned, however, in her early memoir of her first seven years, *Seven Winters,* that it was "as much of my life story as I intend to write—that is, to write directly."[42] Her personal essays are published posthumously in *Pictures and Conversations*. She rejects, like Ferrante, the cult of personality of the author and she famously responded to the request for a PEN interview with the remark: "Even to my friends, I do not find that I talk much, often or easily about my writing. As for the outside world, I never can see why I should. Why can't they just read my books if they care to—and leave it at that." After the first seven years, Bowen left Dublin for Kent, England, with her mother after her father's breakdown, and her "I's"—her landscapes and becomings—ever more shifting and uncertain. Nothing in particular was the ever the norm again. She was at home and a stranger everywhere, a feeling that Wolf's character Christa T also expresses. Bowen's fluidity of personality, national identification and suspension of place augurs a modern life of "no place." Though Bowen experienced a difficult time after her father's breakdown as a child, she transforms the physical and geographical movement and emotional changes of life as a writer. Her descriptions are often negatively assessed by Bowen critics as "childhood dispossession," "dislocation," "displacement" or "trauma" (see Neil Corcoran, Maud Ellman, Jessica Gildersleeve). Maude Ellmann notes that Bowen's "deeply strange narrative line can be understood as an expression of a permanent self-estrangement." [43] Yet Christa Wolf reminds us that this "estrangement" is really memory keeping past selves in play: "we would suffer continuous estrangement from ourselves if it weren't for our memory of the things we have experienced."[44] This essay proposes that Bowen is not estranged but her narration contains past evanescent "I's" that have been formed in different places and times. They all move in and out of themselves--stored selves and relationships from different times embodying the modern author's restlessness, reflected in Virginia Woolf's observation of women writers, "all we can be said to do is keep moving".[45] All project the undecidability or shapelessness of identity--their own and their characters--as they deconstruct categories of thinking and being: national identities; political loyalties; gender identity; the animate and the inanimate; the visual and verbal; life and death—and invent a modernist female character.

Characters in Bowen's stories and novels, as those of Christa Wolf and Elena Ferrante leave the reader with the notion of a layered self and an unformed sense of what characterizes being a woman-man-person-object-author-civilian-spy. They challenge the autobiographical and fictional pronoun, "I," complicating the notion of an "author" as not only as a person but a fiction who seeks to protect and recover their actual and fictional "I's" through characters and narrators. Bowen never kept a diary, and stated that her stories were the only diary she kept of the war, foregrounding again the erasure of the autobiographical self. Wolf, on the other hand, did keep a *One Day a Year Diary,* 1960-2010, but revealed little about her actual informant activities in 1959-60. In tracing their layers and dimensions of self and non- self as writers and sometime activists, and juxtaposing their complex commitments as they lived in and adopted "sides" in partitioned nations and cities--this essay arrives at a broader, global understanding of their narrative style liberating them from their own geographies and times to escape nationalist critiques. It rescues these authors from polarized interpretation and casts their actions and writing into a global landscape with more nuanced language. Though separated by a generation and living in different countries and political climates, we are led to observe their similar retreat from the autobiographical, and sometimes, public and political language, into fiction as an expression, protection and enhancement of their multiplicity and fluidity. Each experienced a modern restlessness during times of surging national and cultural conflict yet they would live as writers of their time, journeying toward, recording and inserting their multiple "splits" into their writing style. They question current aesthetic forms as modernists recognizing the need to write about their unformed and transient identities and perspectives as women, citizens, and, sometimes, spies of divided nations in new ways. They continue to inspire other modern and contemporary writers. "It follows," as Christa Wolf says, "a new way of living in the world...we start to hear, see, smell, and taste 'differently' than we had just a short while ago. Our perception of everything has changed, transformed even memory, which had seemed inviolable. Once again we see the world—what is the world...in a different light." [46]

References

Ashraf, Ana. "The Spectral, the Uncertain 'I' and the Spectacle in Elizabeth Bowen's *Demon Lover." Elizabeth Bowen Review* no. 2 (2019)*:* 48-58.

Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

Bluemel, Christine. *Intermodernism and the Literary Culture of the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008.

Bowen, Elizabeth. "The Artist in Society." Graham Greene and V.S. Pritchett.*BBC Panel*, (July 8, 1948).

---. *The Death of the Heart.* New York: Knopf, 1938.

---. *Eva Trout*. New York: Anchor, 2003 [1968].

---. "Frankly Speaking." Interview by John Bowen, H.A.L. Craig, and W.N. Ewer. *BBC* (March 16, 1960).

---. *Heat of the Day.* New York: Knopf, 1949 [1929].

---. *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories.* New York: Knopf, 1946.

---. *Last September*. County Cork: Constable & Co Ltd., 1929.

---. Letters to Isaiah Berlin, 1933 ff. Bodleian MS: Oxford. Berlin 245, Folio 78-166.

---. *Love's Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Ritchie, Letters and Diaries*. Edited by Victoria Glendinning and Judith Robertson. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2008.

---. *Seven Winters.* Dublin: Irish University Press, 1971.

Cavareo, Adriana. *Relating Narratives: Stories of Selfhood*. New York: Routledge, 2000 [1997].

Cole, Joshua. "The Difficulty of Saying 'I.' *Journal of European Studies xxix* (1999), 405-16. Corcoran, Neil. *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.Diaz, Hernan. *Trust*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2022.

Donadio, Rachel. "An Open Letter to Elena Ferrante—Whoever You Are," *The Atlantic* (December 2018), [https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/12/elena-ferrante-pseudonym/573952—accessed 11/23].

Elkin, Lauren. "Across the Other Channel: Elizabeth Bowen and Modernist Mediation" in *Cross Channel Modernisms* ed. Claire Davison, Derek Ryan, Jane Goldman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022

Ellman, Maude. *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

Ferrante, Elena. *In the Margins: On the Pleasures of Reading and Writing*. New York: Europa, 2022.

---*My Brilliant Friend*. New York: Europa, 2012.

---*The Days of Abandonment,* Trans. Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2018 [2005].

Friedman, Susan Stanford. *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernism Across Time*. New York: Columbia UP, 2018.

Gildersleeve, Jessica. *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma: The Ethics of Survival*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014.

Kelly, Adam. *New Sincerity: American Fiction in the Neoliberal Age,* Stanford: Stanford UP, *2024.*

Kreilkamp, Vera. "Bowen, Ascendancy Modernist," In *Elizabeth Bowen.* Ed. Eibhear Walshe. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009.

Lane, Jack, and Brendan Clifford. *Notes on Eire: Espionage Reports to Winston Churchill,* 1940- 42. Third edition. Cork: Aubane Historical Society, 2009.

McMahon, Paul. *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916–1945*. Woodbridge, UK: Boyardell Press, 2008.

O'Faolain, Letter to Elizabeth Bowen, Austin: Harry Ransom Center 11.6 (April 22, 1937).

O'Halpin, Eunan. *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality during the Second World War*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Porter, David, *Comparative Early Modernities,* 1100-1800. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Raj, Anita. "Words Vs. the Ruin of the World: The Language of Christa Wolf." *Asymptote, (*October 2016).

Ricciardi, Alessia. *Finding Ferrante: Authorship and the Politics of World Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 2021.

Scott, Bonnie Kime. *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

----. *Refiguring Modernism I.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995

Walshe, Eibhear, ed. *Elizabeth Bowen's Selected Irish Writings*. Cork, UK: Cork University Press, 2011.

Walshe, Keri. "Elizabeth Bowen, Surrealist." *Eire-Ireland* 42, nos. 3, 4 (2007): 126–47.

Wolf, Christa. *The Author's Dimension: Selected Writings.* Intro Grace Paley. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995.

---. *The Divided Sky*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2013.

---. *Parting from the Phantoms*: *Selected Writing*, 1990-94. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

---. *Patterns of Childhood*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.

---. *The Quest for Christa T.* New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1979.

---."What Remains." In *Parting from the Phantoms: Selected Writings*, 1990-94. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." In *The Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953. [1925]
---. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981 [1929].

Notes

[1] Bowen, Death of Heart, 193.
[2] Bowen Heat of Day, 36.
[3] Ferrante, Brilliant Friend, 80
[4] Wolf, Quest for Christa T, 170.
[5] Wolf, Quest for Christa T, 174.
[6] Woolf, Room One's Own, 101.
[7] Porter, 1ff.
[8] Ferrante, In the Margins,
[9] Wolf, Parting from Phantoms
[10] Bowen, Seven Winters, 44.
[11] Wolf, Divided Sky, 43.
[12] Ricciardi, 2.
[13] Wolf
[14] Ferrante, Brilliant Friend, 32.
[15] Wolf, Quest for Christa T, 185.
[16] Wolf, Parting from Phantoms, ix.
[17] Carvareo 22,
[18] Brilliant Friend: 89
[19] Brilliant Friend, 249.
[20] Brilliant Friend, 227.
[21] Brilliant Friend, 277.
[22] Brilliant Friend, 23.
[23] Days of Abandonment, 121.
[24] Days of Abandonment, 124.
[25] Bowen, Ivy Gripped the Steps, vii-x

[27] Bowen, Ivy Gripped, 93.
[28] Ellman, The Shadow Across the Page, 128-175.
[29] Bowen, Eva Trout, 193-4.
[30] Bowen to Berlin, Aug. 19, 1937, Bodleian MS.
[31] Wolf, Quest Christa T, 16.
[32] Wolf, Quest Christa T, 117.
[33] Wolf, Quest Christa T, 117.
[34] See Gatti, Finding Ferrante
[35] See Laurence, "Art and Intelligence," *Bowen, a Literary Life*, 191-223.
[36] Bowen, Heat of the Day, 40-56
[37] O'Faolain, Letter, 1937.
[38] Wolf, Parting from Phantoms, 246.
[39] Wolf, Quest Christa T, 63.
[40] Wolf. Patterns of Childhood, 131.
[41] Wolf, Patterns of Childhood, 2.
[42] Bowen, Seven Winters, 9.
[43] Ellmann 211.
[44] Wolf estrangement
[45] Woolf, Room,
[46] Wolf , Author's Dimension, 20.