

Some Aspects of Elizabeth Bowen's Style in the Representation of Characters in *The Heat of the Day*

Eiko SUHAMA

—Style...is a means by which a human being gains contact with others; it is personality clothed in words, character embodied in speech.¹⁾—

In a discussion of the similarity between Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, both of whom are the most typical feminine novelists today, E. D. Pendry says:

...both are intuitive in personal issues; both are sensitive, in a high degree, to the jolts and jars of ordinary experience, and know despairs and ecstasies which other people may not feel, or having felt, ignore.²⁾

Then he relates the distinctive qualities of E. Bowen as compared with those of V. Woolf:

The major difference between the two writers lies in the way they look upon society and the individual. Psychology makes a valuable distinction between character (the unknown and often unknowable truth about an individual's mental make-up) and personality (the version of the truth which is revealed in speech and behaviour). In this sense Virginia Woolf's creatures are essentially characters. They are compounded of memories, aspirations and sensations which embrace the lives of other people; but they remain ultimately remote and inviolable. Elizabeth Bowen's creatures are more personality than character: in their own estimation, as well as in fact, they exist mostly in the eyes and consciousness of others...Elizabeth Bowen's creatures impress us as having an inner life—but we do not share it. Virginia Woolf gives us the tension within character: Elizabeth Bowen the tension

1) F. L. Lucas, *Style*, Cassell, London, 1956, p. 49.

2) E. D. Pendry, *The New Feminism of English Fiction*, Kenkyusha, Tokyo, 1956.

among personalities.³⁾

E. D. Pendry prefers the term 'personality' to 'character' concerning the people in E. Bowen's novels. Though the present writer agrees with his opinion so far as 'they exist mostly in the eyes and consciousness of others', the word 'characters' is more commonly used as to the persons in a novel, and E. Bowen herself uses it in her writings, so the word 'characters' will be used hereafter.

She is not the sort of writer whose interest chiefly lies in plot and character, but rather in 'atmosphere',⁴⁾ which is most vividly seen in her short stories and some earlier novels. In her later novels and especially in *The Heat of the Day*, the plot and the characters are made so carefully that it is sometimes considered even melodramatic.

The characters of this novel, however, are not described in the same way as in the novels of the last century. E. Bowen herself says in her *Notes on Writing a Novel*:

Characters must materialize—i. e. must have a palpable physical reality. They must be not only see-able (visualizable); they must be to be felt. Power to give physical reality is probably a matter of extent and nature of the novelist's physical sensibility, or susceptibility.⁵⁾

I

Stella, the heroine of this novel, is described not in an objective or realistic way, but in a suggestive way which would be sensed by others. Her picture reminds us of those of the French Impressionists:

She had one of those charming faces which, according to the angle from which you see them, look either melancholy or impertinent. Her eyes were grey; her trick of narrowing them made her seem to reflect, the greater part of the time, in the dusk of her second thoughts. With that mood, that touch of *arrière pensée*, went an uncertain, speaking set of the lips. Her complexion, naturally pale, fine, soft, appeared through a pale, fine, soft bloom of make-up. She was young-looking

3) *Ibid.*, pp. 123—124.

4) Jocelyn Brook, *Elizabeth Bowen*, Longmans, London, 1952, p. 6.

5) Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Impressions*, Knopf, New York, 1950. p. 252.

most because of the impression she gave of still on happy sensuous terms with life ... : her looks, after initial glance, could grow on you ; if you continued to know her, could seem even more to be growing for you. (pp. 22—3)⁶⁾

It is hard to get a clear outline of her features, whether she is beautiful or not from the above description. But the phrases—'in the dusk of her second thoughts', 'that touch of *arrière pensée*', 'uncertain, speaking set of the lips', 'happy sensuous terms with life', etc.—are effective in representing her unique personality and atmosphere.

In the next quotation, Stella is reflected in Louie's mind :

Louie...escaped from underneath that, in a minute more, into wondering how Stella had done her hair. But how were you to tell?—there had been the hat. Most of all, there had been the effect—the effect, it said, was what you ought all to go for. Black best of all, with accessories, if you were the type. The effect of this person?...Invisible powder, mutiny, shock, loss ; sparkle-clip on black and clean rigid line of shoulders ; terror somewhere knocking about inside her like a loose piece of ice ; a not-young face of no other age ; eyes, under blue-bloomed lids turning on you an intent emptied look, youth somewhere away at the back of it like a shadow ; lips shaped, but shaping what they ought not ; hat of small type nothing if not put on right, put on right, expositively ; agony ironed out of the forehead ; the start, where the hair ran back, of one white lock.—What had been done to her ? Where had she got herself?—Fine wrist-bone, on her reaching down to pick up the fallen gloves. (p. 239)

Meeting Stella with Harrison at a restaurant, Louie could not forget her and recollected how she looked on that night. As it is difficult to explain her impression concretely, her effect is represented by such obscure words as 'invisible powder, mutiny, shock, loss', and by the figurative phrase—'terror somewhere knocking about inside her like a loose piece of ice'.

On the contrary, Louie, a street-girl, who lives downtown in London is shown more clearly and realistically :

6) Page numbers after the quotations refer to *The Heat of the Day* by Elizabeth Bowen, Jonathan Cape Edition, London, 1949.

Her mouth was the only other feature not to dismiss; full, intimate, wound-ably thin-skinned, tenderly brown pink as the underside of a new mushroom and, like the eyes once more, of a paleness in her sun-coarsened face. (p. 9)

Her big lips, apart, were pale inside their crusted cosmetic rim. (p. 227)

Her features are vividly described in detail—especially, her mouth is compared to ‘the underside of a new mushroom’, which is quite different from the description of Stella’s lips quoted above.

When anyone took her up wrong, a look of animal trouble passed over Louie’s face. To talk, which she had to do, was to tender what words she had; to be forced to search for anything further, better, as persecuting as having to dip for escaped coppers into the depths of her handbag—yes, and that on top of a pitching black-out bus—with the conductor standing over her snorting. (p. 138)

Being an uneducated woman, Louie is very awkward in expressing her thoughts orderly and to the point. When somebody misunderstands her words, her expression is metaphorically described as ‘a look of animal trouble’.

And her appearance when she searches for better words is likened to such an experience as most of us could have had in the bus.

In the following passage, abstract adjectives—‘ungirt’, ‘artless’, ‘ardent’, ‘urgent’—are used to explain Louie’s sloveness, and then her impression as a whole is shown as ‘twisted stockings’:

Everything ungirt, artless, ardent, urgent about Louie was to the fore: all over herself she gave the impression of twisted stockings...(p. 227)

These images concerning Louie seem to suggest Bowen’s feminine observation and sensibility in ordinary life.

The personality and manner of Robert, Stella’s lover, is described as follows:

Robert’s manner to Ernestine was always less insolent than his words; it had, rather, a sort of provocative unindifference, as though there were always something

he could not leave alone. It was evident—as during that afternoon at Holme Dene—that he must trail his coat, and he felt for his elder sister a fondness which, having some element of perversity, was ineradicable. (p. 177)

The mysteriousness of Robert is shown by negative expressions such as 'less insolent', 'unindifference' and 'ineradicable', and the ambiguous manner by such expressions as 'a sort of', 'something', 'some'. The phrase 'a sort of...' is repeatedly used (cf. p. 180, p. 182, p. 187, etc.) to show an obscure or inexpressible feeling.

Robert's behaviour, on hearing Stella's confession, is shown in the following :

Robert could be felt turning round slowly, unwinding himself from lethargy, frivolity, forbearance, whatever it had been, to stare at the place where she invisibly was. Incredulity not only shook his voice but removed it to such a distance that he and she might no longer have been in the same car. He spoke, when he began to speak, as a man who, in an emergency more fantastic, more beyond the possibilities of experience, than any man should be asked to meet, casts round him for words at random, realizes their futility before uttering them, but does all the same utter them, as the only means of casting them from him again, rejected. (p. 182)

The unfamiliarity of such abstract nouns as 'lethargy', 'frivolity', 'forbearance', 'incredulity', 'futility', etc. seems to suggest the uncommonness of his experience and his agitated state of mind.

The impression of Harrison, the counter-spy, when Louie first met him in Regent's Park, is described as follows :

She...faced a man of round thirty-eight-or-nine, in a grey suit, striped shirt, dark-blue tie and brown soft hat. His unconsciousness, which had been what had mainly drawn her, was now, like the frown with which he had sat through the music, gone ; it was succeeded by a sort of narrow, somewhat routine, alertness she did not like. His 'interestingness'—had that been a lie of his profile's? No, not quite : now that she had him full-face a quite other curious trait appeared—one of his eyes either was or behaved as being just perceptibly higher than the other. This lag or inequality in his vision gave her the feeling of being looked at twice—being viewed then checked over again in the same moment. His forehead stayed in the hiding, his eyebrows deep in the shadow of his pulled-down hat ; his nose

was bony; he wore a close-clipped little that-was-that moustache. The set of his lips—from between which he had with less than civil reluctance withdrawn the cigarette—bespoke the intention of adding nothing should he happen to have to speak again. This was a face with a gate behind it—a face that, in this photographic half-light, looked indoor and weathered at the same time; a face, if not without meaning, totally and forbiddingly without mood... (p. 10)

It is difficult to explain his characteristics concretely, and the words ‘unconsciousness’, ‘alertness’, ‘interestingness’, etc. are used to show his ‘curious trait’. After briefly describing his eyes, forehead, eyebrows, nose, moustache and lips his face is compared to ‘a face with a gate behind it’—a face that looked indoor and weathered at the same time.

For Stella, too, Harrison is a strange person to comprehend:

His mind was, where she was concerned, a jar of opaquely clouded water, in which, for all she knew, the strangest fish might be circling, staring, turning to turn away. (p. 27)

And the strangeness of Harrison’s eyes is again shown as follows:

Remembering how embarrassingly repugnant the human eye, in almost all cases, was found by Robert, she looked at and into these eyes with curiosity, wondering whether now, if ever at all, she was not to be overtaken by Robert’s feeling. Also, this could have been the moment to establish what *was* queer, wrong, off, out of the straight in the cast of Harrison’s eyes.....it was in examining the start and growth of the lashes—irregular, neither short nor long—that she experienced a kind of pathetic shock. (p. 219)

With some exceptions of concrete expression, concerning Louie, E. Bowen describes the characters with abstract and suggestive epithets, and most of the characters do not appeal to us with picturesque or realistic force such as those of Dickens or C. Brontë, but rather impress us with some atmosphere peculiar to the characters themselves.

II

The people in this novel, as previously stated, are not objectively portrayed as they are, but reflected through another person's feeling or thought, which is sometimes intermingled with the narrator's point of view and the way of expressing becomes more elaborate and somewhat complicated.

The following quotation shows what Harrison felt and thought when he was questioned by Louie, who wondered at his unusual concentration. He had come to Regent's Park to pass time before he would visit Stella. Though he appeared to be listening to music, he was, in fact, thinking of something intently, music being 'no more than a running accompaniment to his fixed thought', (p. 7). Unable to 'leave it at that' (p. 8) she asked Harrison, 'Going to think some more?', and he reflected:

She had made that impossible. Had she not borne in on him, in her moron way, the absurdities to which thinking in public could expose one, the absurdity with which one exposed oneself? She had given him the watcher, the enormity of the sense of having been watched. New, only he knew how new, to emotional thought, he now saw, at this first of his lapses, the whole of its danger—it made you *act* the thinker.

He could, now, do no better than travesty, repeat in order to judge exactly how much it showed, his originally unconscious trick of the hands; he recalled this trick in his father, not before in himself—but it must have been waiting for him. Yes, he had had recourse to it, fallen to it, this evening out of some unprecedented need for emphasis in the body. Yes, he had been forced to it by the course of what in the strict sense had not been thought at all. The futility of the heated inner speed, the alternate racing to nowhere and coming to dead stops, made him guy himself. Never yet had he not got *somewhere*. By casting about—but then hitherto this had always been done calmly—he had never yet not come on a policy which both satisfied him and in the end worked. There never had yet not been a way through, a way round, or, in default of all else, a way out. But in this case he was thinking about a woman. (p. 12)

The repeated word 'absurdity' represents his psychological censure towards himself, and the sentence that follows is divided by frequent commas which suggest his intermittent thought. The inserted word 'yes' shows an emphasis on his uncommon experience

on that evening, and the double negation—‘never.....not’, repeated three times—explains the strength of his intention in the past.

In the following passage, Stella is impatient and uneasy waiting for Harrison who will come to her apartment house in spite of her disinclination to have him come :

Nothing is more demoralizing than waiting about for someone one does not want to see. She mimed by this idiotic play at the window the disarray into which the prospect of Harrison had thrown her—she was too uneasy, felt too much reduced by the whole affair, was too angry to wish to collect herself. From the first he had shown her his imperviousness to everything she felt—would she be able to show him the indignity, if for himself only, of this impervious return? He was forcing his way back.

It was some minutes since she had heard eight strike: she wondered why, since he had got to come, he had not come—she did not yet dare to hope he might not be coming. He was as a rule punctual, wheeling in on the quiver of the appointed hour as though attached to the very works of the clock. Eight had been his choice, and seemed a stupid one unless he intended to take her out to dinner—his not having said so had given her no chance of saying she would on no account dine with him. But it had seemed pointless to quibble as to the hour when he had gained his main point, was coming, and on his own terms. Indeed, she determined not to quarrel again till she had found out, as she should at once this evening, why he was taking this new tone of the person in power. On the telephone, the exaggerated quietness of his voice hinted at some undefined threat—she was at a disadvantage through having avoided knowing him; she had no way of knowing, now it had come to this, how valid a threat of his could be, or what its nature. Having gained his point, he was already—which made her ponder—being a little lax in being a little late. As one does when thinking about an enemy, she endowed him with subtleties, which, in his case, on second thoughts, were unlikely. (pp. 20—21)

Nobody is more offensive than those who are insensible to our feeling when we are too backward to speak our mind. Stella’s indignation towards ‘impervious’ Harrison is expressed in the form of Represented Speech, ‘Would she be able to show him the indignity, if for himself only, of this impervious return?’ But when the appointed time came and yet Harrison did not appear she became a little uneasy though she hoped he

would not come, and the word 'come' is repeated four times in different forms. In the sentence, 'Eight had been his choice.....', such negative expressions as 'unless', 'nothing', 'no chance', 'on no account', etc. are used to express her undulatory thinking.

While in the quotation above, her consciousness is flowing toward one direction because the source of uneasiness is comparatively plain, in the next passage, a more complicated and importunate stream of psychology is represented:

It was her heart that now sank; going back to her letter she did not regain speed or the first concentration: she wound up inconclusively, promising more tomorrow, recollecting, as she addressed the envelope, that she had no stamp. She then pushed back her chair and began to examine the many drawers of the table, with unusual stealthiness trying each in turn: all were as locked as they looked. Walking foolishly round the room she searched for the keys, opening boxes and cabinets, shifting objects at random, even attempting once to look in the drawers themselves. She came to the point of denouncing Cousin Francis as a conspiratorial, mischievous, too-old man; when anger ran out she was left alone with uneasiness—liking the library less and less. Now primarily it was the scene, for her, of those conversations late into the nights—what *had* they been up to in here? what had they been cooking? Evidently Harrison was not a man to have come back and back for nothing. Whatever it was, he had considered it worth while to give his host the impression that he, too, Francis Morris, was in it up to the hilt—therefore, that last London meeting between the two must have been a continuation of *some* actual story, however cock-and-bull. ...Yes, Harrison claimed they had met, and it now looked likely, or at any rate possible. Even the story of papers inaccessibly locked away with the dead man's luggage came up again for review—though who (as she had repeatedly asked herself, and did ask herself, if more faintly and for the last time, now) *would* hand over anything vital to Cousin Francis? Famous for honour, yes, for discretion no: above all, famous loser of all he touched? As to the existence, ever, or at any rate the importance, of those papers she had kept a valuable scepticism—valuable because it could be extended to everything else that Harrison said he had or was or did. Harrison, she took it, had simply thought that one up in hopes of involving her: he had not struck lucky ...But, what now? The conceivability of there being a grain of truth in anything he had ever, in any context, said shook her. What was her defence but this—that he lied, must lie, could not lie, had lied from the the very start?

He *had* then, in spite of his having said he had, really been there? This book-

dark darkening room, through which imperceptibly the current of time flowed, held truth sunk somewhere in it, as the river held the boat. The very possibility might not allow her to rest again—but what, now she was forcing herself to think of it, was the possibility? Cousin Francis might have indeed must have...taken a closeish look at Harrison's credentials and been satisfied. As against that, Cousin Francis was safely dead, so could not be asked—or rather, *could* be asked, as often as Stella chose, and could be relied upon not to answer. She understood, with a shock, that here was a question she would be prepared to put to the dead only—why? Because the answer could mean too much. She had not yet, in London, made one move towards checking up on Harrison. *Was* he what he had made himself out to be? Was he in the position to know what he said he knew, to act as he had told her he could?.....

What had he expected her to do? Or had he expected her to do nothing?—in that case, he had been right. She had asked nobody anything about Harrison—why, yes, but of course she had: had she not asked Robert? She had asked Robert nothing about himself—but, again, what but a question about Harrison? On that occasion—flippancy, boredom, love: how sweet, how grateful had the diversion been! Diversion, not answer; not end, only beginning— (pp. 163—165)

Stella came to Mount Morris for her son's inheritance. She had only once come here twenty years ago with her divorced husband, but the place had not changed at all, and it now appealed to her as a traditional reality and at the same time a solemn memory. And by coincidence she knew that a certain man resembling Harrison had come to Mount Morris and talked about something with her cousin Francis. She became agitated. When she saw that the drawers of Francis's desk were locked she became more uneasy, and walking to and fro in this room she asked herself, 'What had they been up to in here?' Reflecting on this and that, her mind grew more and more insecure and she hoped in vain that what Harrison had said about Robert could be untrue; her apprehensions are intensified by the repetitious use of the word 'lie'—'What was her defence but this—that he *lied*, must *lie*, could not *lie*, had *lied* from the very start?

The previous quotation (cf. p. 11) concerning the impression of Stella from the view point of Louie is followed by her monologue:

What had been done to her? Where had she got herself?—...Louie felt herself entered by what was foreign. She exclaimed in thought, 'Oh no, I wouldn't be

her!' at the moment when she most nearly was. Think, now, what the air was charged with night and day—ununderstandable languages, music you did not care for, sickness, germs! You did not know what you might not be tuning in to, you could not say what you might not be picking up: affected, infected you were at every turn. Receiver, conductor, carrier—which was Louie, what was she doomed to be? She asked herself, but without words. She felt what she had not felt before—*was* it, even, she herself who was feeling? She wondered if she would want to. 'But this is not goodbye, I hope,' had been said—but what, how much, had she meant to mean? This fancy taken to Louie, this clinging on, were these some sick part of a mood? Here now was Louie sought out exactly as she had sought to be: it is in nature to want what you want so much too much that you must recoil when it comes. Lying in Chilcombe Street, grappling her fingers together under her head, Louie dwelled on Stella with mistrust and addiction, dread and desire. ...She had come back and back to a son she had in the Army. Anxious?—why not; this was her only son...Having been walking fast, the talker had from that point on walked faster; Louie had been put to it to keep up with her even with her own famous big flat stride. Fast?—no, it had been something more than that: Mrs. Rodney walked like a soul astray.

Those three words reached Louie imperatively, as though spoken—memory up to now had been surface pictures knocked apart and together by the heavings of a submerged trouble. Now her lips seemed bidden. 'A soul astray', they repeated with awe, aloud. (pp. 239—240)

As has been said before, Louie is a poor hand at telling her thoughts. In the quotation above, the process of her thinking is represented by her questions and answers to herself. She dwelled on Stella with a mixture of 'mistrust and addiction, dread and desire'. Then at last her thinking took a distinct form in the words 'a soul astray'.

Although I and II have been dealt with separately, they have a close connection to each other; the description of characters is often made through other people's point of view, which is, in most cases extended to their psychological description.

III

In *Notes on writing a Novel*, E. Bowen says,

DIALOGUE—*Must* (1) Further Plot (2) Express Character.

Should not on any account be a vehicle for ideas for their own sake. Ideas only permissible where they provide a key to the character who expresses them.

The words used in the dialogue should be expressive of the individuality of each character. But such characteristics as could be easily seen are suggestive of more or less comical and exaggerated minor characters.

The speech of Ernestine, Robert's sister, is typical in using proverbs, similes, metaphors and exaggerated ways of utterance :

'Well', shouted Ernestine, bundling round invisible inside there like a ferret, 'better late than never! How-d'you-do, Mrs. Rodney? You must be dead.'... 'Never mind', said Ernestine, blood is thicker than water. And I snatched the chance to relax, which I rarely can. (p. 175)

'Goodness me,' cried Ernestine, turning to Robert's friend, 'I'm afraid *I* could not take the idea so calmly! Be told a lie?—I would sooner a spider walking down my back, or even a rat dead under the boards, or defective drains! I should be sorry for anybody trying to lie to *me*. (p. 178)

But Stella does not use such hackneyed or exaggerated phrases. It is more difficult to detect the peculiarities of the major characters, because the words they use are compact and connotative. The tone of dialogue changes according to the angle from which the writer is looking.

The following is a dialogue between Stella and Harrison. Though Harrison would like to get into Stella's mind, she does not give him a chance to do so, and her words are so scarce as could be felt blunt :

'Good evening?' he said.

'Good evening.'

'I'm a few minutes late. I was listening to that band in the park.' This was, for some reason, startling. She said: 'Oh, were you?' Harrison turned back to close the door behind him, but paused to ask: 'Not expecting anyone?'

7) Elizabeth Bowen, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

'No.'

'Good. By the way, I found your downstairs door on the latch. That in order?'

'Quite: I left it open for you.'

'Thanks, he said, as though touched.' 'So I shut it—that was in order, too?...

'Mind if I smoke?'

'Do.'

'You won't?'

'No.—Then you could have come earlier?'

'Well, I could, as it happened, as things panned out; but I took it that, as we had said eight, before that might not be convenient to you.'

'It has not been convenient that you should come at all.'

Harrison, looking about him for somewhere to drop his match, said: 'Ha-ha—you know, you're the frankest person I know!—*Should* I have found you, say, at around seven?'

'Yes. And I should have been glad to get this over.' (pp. 24—25)

By temperament she was communicative and affectionate, but here her state of mind is expressed in her short and blunt answers—'No', 'Quite', 'Do' etc.—which are in discord with Harrison's rather humble and crude way of talking.: 'Well, I could, as it happened, as things panned out; but I took it that,.....'

When two persons do not understand each other or one of them does not want to talk at all and yet cannot say so, the dialogue goes criss-cross and becomes incoherent.

At first Harrison talked without coming to the point and in a roundabout way—'I don't understand fine feelings—if that's what you mean. Fine feelings, you've got to have time to have: I haven't—I only have time to have what you have without having time, if you follow me? You and the types you go with, if I may say so, still seem to fancy love makes the world go round....' (p. 28) But when he offered his self-conceited proposition that she should break with Robert, she suddenly flared up and became eloquent:

'You're suggesting,' she asked, white with tension and rage, 'that I should break off one friendship, begin another—with you? And I'm to do both at once, in a minute, now, with no more questions than at a government order, less trouble

than I should have these days in changing my grocer, less fuss than I should make about changing my hat? Nothing, you take it, could be simpler—what I call feeling does not enter at all. Even so, with what may no more than look like feeling, one has got, I'm afraid, to waste just a little time. That you do not expect to waste time you make quite clear. You keep hinting at something, *something*, that should cut out all that. It may, of course, be simply that you see yourself, as you manifestly do, as a quite exceptional man. But no, no—you mean to convey there's something more. What, then?—then what? I should like to know what you mean. I should like to know what you think you have up your sleeve. You mean, I am to do as you say—“*or else*”, “otherwise”...? Well, otherwise what?

(p. 30)

She is so angry at his impudence that her tone is ironical and emotional and her figurative expression is—‘with no more questions than at a government order, less trouble than I should have these days in changing my grocer, less fuss than I should make about changing my hat?’ She is impatient and anxious because she has not known what his true intention is, and the latter half of this passage is remarkable for the repetition of ‘something’, ‘no’, ‘what then?’ ‘I should like to know’, etc. But when she is told that Robert is a spy, her answer again becomes short though she would ignore and deny it, saying ‘This is silly’ (p. 33). This time, however, she cannot but pay attention to what he is going to say, and they feel a strange intimacy between them (cf. ‘They were eye to eye in the intimacy of her extreme anger. p. 40)

On the whole, Stella's speech is distinct and emotional here using the indicative mood, while Harrison's is roundabout and ambiguous using the subjunctive.

After the death of Robert, Harrison again visited Stella at her lodge. The first words she uttered were an exclamation of ‘Where have you been!’ And when she heard him say ‘I hope this is not an awkward hour to drop in?’, she answered rather civilly ‘Why, no,’ ‘I wasn't doing anything particular...Come in.’ She looked so helpless and solitary that he said with intimacy and insolence, ‘Perhaps you were not so sorry I came, then?’ (p. 306)

Her answer was:

‘I wish you had come before. There was a time when I had so much to say

to you. There once was so much I wanted to know. 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 on talking and talking to any one of *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 had time to know. There still must be something that matters that one has forgotten, forgotten because at the time one did not realize how much it did matter. You most of all there is something one has got to forget—that is, if it is to be possible to live. The more wars there are, I suppose, the more we shall learn how to be survivors.—Yes, I missed you. *Your* dropping out left me with completely nothing. What made you? (pp. 306—307)

Her tone is quite different from that of the first time she talked with Harrison. There is a strange intercommunication between a man who never has been loved and a woman who has lost her lover.

The next quotation is a dialogue between Robert and Stella after she came back from Mount Morris. Though she has been uneasy about Robert's secret she must talk with Ernestine who came with Robert to meet her at the station.

Even when they were alone together, her mind was repeatedly returning to one thing and showed a psychological wavering. What she said seemed do be a monologue or reflection:

'You have no enemy anywhere in me !... '...My darling, who could 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"? The smallest, tritest thing I could be told about you by any outside person would sound preposterous to me if *I* did not know it..... (p. 181)

There is an idea of contrast such as 'everything' and 'nothing', 'ruin' and 'perfectness', and 'outside' is repeated three times to emphasize the world which has no rela-

tion to them.

What Harrison said and what she has thought about it all the time is still dangling about, when, abruptly and rather in an unconcerned tone she asks Robert about the important thing which might destroy the relation between them:

‘...Two months ago, now, nearly two months ago, somebody (to give you an example) came to me with a story about you. They said you were passing information to the enemy...’

‘I *what?*’ he said blankly.

She repeated the statement, adding: ‘I did not know what to think.’

‘I don’t wonder.’ But he reconsidered that. ‘Yes, I *do* wonder rather. At you—what an extraordinary woman you are!’

‘Why, Robert? What would a not extraordinary woman have done?’

‘Well, I don’t know, really—no, I have no idea. What did you do?’

‘Nothing: that’s what I am telling you.—It’s not true, is it?’

‘Two months ago...’ he marvelled. ‘You say, two months ago? There’s certainly nothing like thinking a thing over. Or did it simply happen to slip your memory till tonight? No, though; I don’t think you mean me to take it you never thought of it twice. In that case, why not just have come and asked me? What would have been wrong with that?—but that was too simple, apparently. Why, I suppose one will never know?’

She was unable to speak.....

‘My God, what a conversation! And you tell me you never meet anybody remarkable—who *was* this?’

‘Harrison.’

‘Who’s that?—Harrison who?’

‘No, just Harrison. The man I met at the funeral.’

‘...I remember you spoke of him, but I thought you said he was such a bore? He sounds far from a bore to me.’

‘But it isn’t true, is it?’...

‘But it can’t be true that you’re asking me this?..... Between you and me this is inconceivable. The whole thing’s so completely unreal to me that I can’t believe it isn’t unreal to you: it must be.’

‘Yes, it is. But it—’ (pp. 181—183)

Robert is in blank surprise for a while and does not answer her question directly.

Though she repeated her question—'It isn't true, is it?'—which shows her anxiety to know the truth, he does not come to the point and the words he utters are fragmentary and illogical. There is a queer contrast between them; the wordiness of Robert and the scantiness of Stella's words.

Robert, then, asks Stella in a pressing tone, which shows his agitated state of mind :

'*What* you're asking isn't the point—it's immaterial, crazy, brainspun, out of a thriller. Am I passing stuff across? No, of course not: how could I be, why should I, what do you take me for? What *do* you take me for?—I've never asked myself. What do I take you for?—You. As to one thing, we know we could never deceive each other; but that is just that, apparently—where you are concerned—just that, lovely but only that. Which I didn't realize—how was I to? How well you have acted with me for the last two months—two months, you say? 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? I, you see, simply thought we are happy. Happy?—I hardly thought that, even; I simply thought we were us. You couldn't—no?—just have come and said: "Listen, because this is what I've been told"?' (p. 183)

In the latter half of this passage, most of the words used are monosyllabic, and sentences are quite short and simple though psychologically indented. He blames her for not telling him at once what Harrison has said to her, and an unusually tense atmosphere is felt through their dialogue.

In their last dialogue before Robert dies, there is a discussion about country, law, freedom, order, etc. Stella wants, according to reason, to hate him for his betrayal, but it is impossible to be away from him.

When she asks him why he did not tell her the facts before, he apologises for his situation as follows :

'Think again: how could I have involved you? How could I? Was this a thing to put on anyone else;—It was quite a game.'

'Which you loved.'

He reflected, then said: 'Yes—What I mean, though, is that, as has been shown, it was not a safe game: you would have been anxious, I supposed. And again,

which surely you ought to see, it was not only a question of myself. In a ring, once any one person begins to talk...No, how was I to tell you in so many words?’

‘You could have told me not in so many words,’

He again reflected. ‘Sometimes I thought I had.’

‘When?’

‘When not? Not any one moment—but there were times when it seemed impossible that being as we were you should not know. There’s been no part of my disaffectedness that I’ve hidden from you: did it never strike you I’d have been unendurable if I hadn’t found some way, some way that didn’t meet the eye, to endure myself? In accepting this. Or I thought so sometimes—sometimes so much so that I found myself only waiting to speak till you spoke: when you didn’t speak I thought you thought silence better. I thought, yes, silence *is* better: why risk some silly unmeaning battle between two consciences? We’ve seen law in each other...There were other times when I was less certain you knew. But I did not *know* you did not know till you asked me.’

‘The night I came back from Ireland?’

‘The night you came back from Ireland.’

‘*Then*, you said “no” to everything point-blank.’

‘You didn’t want an answer you couldn’t take. That was the night I realized you couldn’t take it.’

‘You were angry with me.’

‘There’s a difference between being suspected of being what one is and being accepted as being what one is.’ (pp. 261—262)

Robert’s expression is conspicuous in the words with negative prefixes together with ‘not’, ‘no’, or ‘never’—‘it seemed *impossible*...that you should *not* know’, ‘There’s been *no* part of my *disaffectedness*’, ‘did it *never* strike you I’d have been *unendurable* if I hadn’t found some way, some way that didn’t meet the eye’, ‘I *did* not know you did *not* know...’, ‘You didn’t want an answer you couldn’t take’, etc. These double negations seem to suggest the desperate excuse and inconceivable reality of Robert’s mind.

In the dialogue of Stella and her son Roderick, there is a tone full of warmth, confidence, sympathy, which could not be seen in the dialogue of other persons; and Louie’s talk with Connie, both of whom are working-class girls, is also interesting, so far as they ‘converse in an extraordinary dialect which bears as much relation to Cockney as that of Synge’s plays to the speech of Irish peasants’, in order to ‘present

very ordinary people as it were *sub specie aeternitatis*⁸⁾.

But they are omitted here because the writer intends to show only those dialogues which play important roles in the advance of plot or express the feelings of major characters not through exaggerated peculiarities but through delicate changes of their tone.

The writer has made investigation into the major characters in this novel through the description of characters, their psychology (monologue) and their dialogue. The sentences so far quoted, especially those in I and II, are conspicuous for their involved subtlety, and even the dialogue, which has been pointed and almost realistic in her former novels, tends to become complex and connotative.

The fact that she could write simple and vigorous sentences is shown in those places which, lying between the psychologically complicated scenes, break the monotony and heighten the effect of the involved style. There seems to be some inner necessity of her consciousness to express characters in such style.

One more thing that must not be forgotten in this novel, is the description of the material background—weather, season, landscape, houses, furniture, etc.—which, preceding the important scene gives a tension to the character and produces an atmosphere peculiar to E. Bowen. Examples are omitted here, because the writer has the intention of dealing with those problems on another occasion.

8) Jocelyn Brook, *op. cit.* pp. 26—27.