UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione Culturale (LTLLM)
Classe LT-11

Tesina di Laurea

The Blitz in the Wartime Narratives by Elizabeth Bowen, Agatha Christie and Henry Green

Relatore
Prof.ssa Maria Maddalena Parlati

Laureando
Massimiliano Caruso
n° matr.1222948 / LTLLM

Anno Accademico 2021 / 2022

Abstract

During World War two, specifically between September 1940 and May 1941, Britain was hit by numerous nocturnal air raids, known as the Blitz, that radically changed and altered many lives, especially of those who lived in big cities like London. Carried out by Hitler's Nazi Germany, these bombings created a sense of terror and insecurity that, along plenty of other topics, can be reflected in the novels set and written during these years. In these works that will be analysed, namely Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, Agatha Christie's *N or M?* and Henry Green's *Caught*, a landscape of ruins, fires, destruction and of a general sense of insecurity about the future is the background for these novels, great works of three immensely skilled authors, who, in their own way and style, manage to catapult the reader in a world which left a mark on all those who had to live through it.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In this dissertation, the aim is to understand and visualize the different means through which three English novelists of the twentieth century portray the advent and the effects of the Blitz in wartime Britain in their novels. The novels of Elizabeth Bowen, with her *The Heat of the Day* (1948), of Agatha Christie, with her *N or M?* (1941), and of Henry Green, with his *Caught* (1943) are all works of fictions, but with a great many elements and references to the reality of Britain that was under constant attack from Hitler's Nazi Germany.

First all, there is an in-depth analysis of the historical moment. As a matter of fact, in the first chapter I show the evolution of the Second World War up to the moment when the air raids on Britain started, including earlier and later phases of the conflict. I provide an overview of the British civilian morale during the course of the war, thanks to the numerous surveys and reports made by both public and private British survey groups. Following the information coming from these, a full picture of both domestic and social life is crucial to understand the nation's thoughts and feelings on the various aspects that characterised wartime Britain. This is the case of, for example, the black-out, the rationing of meat and gasoline, or the restriction of public transportation. Subsequently, I analyse how the British people reacted to the coming of the Blitz and how their life was affected, taking a closer look at the various means through which they sought cover from the nightly air raids. Shelters, either publicly shared or privately built in one's backyard, proved to be characteristic of this historical period.

In the same chapter, there is also an important section dedicated to the literary production during and, most of all, about the Blitz on Britain. I discuss why and how it is significantly different from the body of works produced in the First World War. Then I provide numerous examples of literary creations, varied in their forms, styles and contents, that show the war from within the nation, while also looking at those artists who, for some years preceding the official beginning of the conflict, knew that it was only a matter of time before it would eventually start. Furthermore, there is a synthetic analysis of two of the most representative literary works of Second World War in Britain, that is Graham Greene's novel *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and Elizabeth Bowen's short story *The Demon Lover* (1945), examining why they are considered to be so. Lastly, there is

also a mention to dairy writing, which, although not being work of fiction, provides an even clearer image of Britain's perception, feelings and anxieties during the Blitz.

The second chapter is about Elizabeth Bowen and her renowned *The Heat of the Day*. Firstly, I provide a general introduction to the author's main features of her books, analysing the style and some of her most common elements. Successively, there is a deep exploration of her wartime history and literary production, taking into consideration her Irish heritage and how it influenced and shaped her life during World War Two. What is more, I also look into the different employments she had while living in her London house, which proved to be compelling for the importance they carried. In the second part of the chapter there is an in-depth analysis of her book. Here I explore how, while developing the plot along the lines of a noir, she created an urban landscape, that of wartime London, which is nowadays still considered to be one of the most expressive and intense of the home front in the Second World War.

In the successive chapter, I put in place the notorious Agatha Christie and her solely novel that is based on the Second World War trope, *N or M?*. First of all I thoroughly describe the literary genre that made her famous all over the world, the crime or detective mystery, while also briefly elucidating on her experience in both the First and Second World War. Next, I provide an overview of the 'Fifth Column', or the 'enemy within', made up of those people who worked from within Britain in order to undermine its war efforts. Given its primary role on Christie's novel, I also provide a real-life example of a British national working against his country by selling secret military information to another world superpower. Later I analyse the novel, with its standard detective plot which has been adapted in the context of World War Two, and the relevance of the 'Fifth Column' elements in it. To conclude I also present a curious fact about *N or M?*, that is when the Security Service, or MI5, were suspecting the author to be in possession of secret military information.

The fourth and last chapter is about Henry Green and his novel *Caught*. After having introduced the author and the stylistic and rhetorical features that characterise most of his works, I shortly look at his autobiography to better understand his thoughts and feelings in the prospect of the Second World War. During the conflict, he served as an Auxiliary Fire Service warden, a post he acquired a year before the war started in anticipation of the upcoming Nazi Germany bombings, while also publishing three

novels, making it the most productive period of his literary career. Afterwards, there is a detailed study of his novel *Caught*, and its centrality in the initial phases of the war in Britain, the Phoney War and the Blitz. I show how this story develops on elements that reflected the author's own wartime experience, for instance the protagonist's role as an auxiliary fireman, while being set in an urban landscape, that of London, which is ready for a war that still has not come. The novel's ending, with its intense and spectacular description of an air raid, proves to be one of the most extraordinary pieces of writing of the Second World War.

1. The Context of the Blitz and Representations of War

1.1. Britain at War

Ever since the United Kingdom declared war on Nazi Germany, along with the French Republic, on 3 September 1939, and until the very final days of the Second World War, fears of invasion had been widespread. Among the civilian population, but for the government too, the six years of this devastating conflict were to be characterized by concerns of an armed aggression which everyone expected at some point, or at least an attempt at it. Yet this invasion never came, not even while Britain and its empire were standing on their own against Germany, after it had just successfully conquered France.

Indeed, the latest military campaign had showed the whole world how effective and powerful the German armed forces were, with the renowned Blitzkrieg plan that managed to defeat and conquer Poland, Denmark, Norway and The Netherlands, then the allied forces in Belgium and Northern France, with this last conquest carried out in little more than a month. Although for some years preceding the war, France and the United Kingdom had been increasing their annual military expenses due to the ever-growing hostility of Hitler's Germany, especially France whose military was one of the leading in Europe, if not the best one. So, it was expected that, as soon as the German offensive began, a more than fair fight would have been put on by the allied forces. Instead, the exact opposite happened, that is a quick and impressive offensive that surprised both the British and the French, which then culminated in the conquests of Belgium and France by Nazi Germany. The only positive aspect of the campaign, if it can be considered so, is the Dunkirk evacuation, codenamed 'Operation Dynamo', which allowed most of the British Expeditionary Force to escape from the continent back to Great Britain.

Following the humiliating evacuation that took place between 26 May and 4 June 1940, spirits were positive in the United Kingdom, as this retreat came to be seen as a miracle. But there was, too, a strong feeling that the country and its military were not ready to conduct a full-scale war with this mighty enemy. Soon followed the widespread realization that a real threat was now frighteningly close, right on the other side of the Channel, and the glorious accomplishment carried with immense pride, still to this very day, of not having been invaded since the year 1066 AD seemed on the verge of fading

away. Thus, the need to reorganize and reinforce military and civilian defences became the utmost priority.

What came next, referred to as The Blitz, was a trying time for government and citizens, especially those living in cities, like London and Coventry just to name a few, that were hit hardest by German bombers. These raids carried out by the German air force, the Luftwaffe, beginning in London on the night of 7 September 1940, soon became part of everyday life. As a matter of fact, it is important to note that German bombers did not drop bombs every night for the remainder of the war. Considering London's case only, it suffered seventy-six consecutive nights of bombing with only one night's respite on the 7th of November. Afterwards, bombs fell more frequently on other cities, such as Coventry, Manchester, Hull, Southampton and others, than on the nation's capital; still, later raids on London proved to be more devastating (Bell, 2009, p. 7). The last raid of the Blitz came on the night of the 10th of May 1941, and the subsequent major raid on the city would come as late as 1944. Notwithstanding the damage and death that these bombs caused, plus the amount of fear that was instilled in the wide British public, the nation alone managed to resist this major threat, and soon enough two world superpowers, first the USSR and later the USA, entered the war in 1941 alongside the United Kingdom in the fight against the Axis powers.

What the people of Britain would come to know during the Blitz were the terms 'total war': a war that did not engage merely the military forces of a nation, but its whole energies. Total war meant that every single citizen, reluctant or not, became involved in the war effort, participating equally with millions of others in the struggle, defence and organization of a whole country. And in order to achieve this enterprise, it became vital for the government to induce every citizen to dedicate all their energies in this direction, creating a phenomenon known as the 'home front'. One primary aspect involved in it then began growing in importance, that is civilian morale.

As the First World War had already demonstrated, the British people were able to respond with patriotic ardour to the sacrifices demanded to them by the government; a war which, although not on the same scale, saw bombs falling on streets, houses and workplaces as well. But the years after the Great War leading to the Second World War also saw an impressive growth in the scale and importance of the aerial forces, which were now capable to conduct more and heavier bombings on a greater scale, thus

involving and threatening a much greater number of civilians, who would become the primary target of the bombings (Mackay R., 2003, p. 19). It was obvious that doubts came to be raised as to how and to what extent would the wider populace react, therefore wondering how much civilian morale would be affected too. For the government it then became crucial to constantly monitor and contain negative thoughts and feelings on the war effort. In order to obtain a full picture of civilian morale, the British government relied on surveys and reports carried out, daily and then weekly, by two statistical survey groups, the Ministry of Information's Wartime Social Survey and the private-owned Mass Observation. These surveys and reports succeeded in creating a picture of civilian morale, which along with the unfolding of the war in its various phases, helped the government of the time but also contemporary scholars to get a full picture of how the British general public was really feeling about the war effort (Mackay R., 2003, p. 1). To give an example, during the first weeks of bombings on provincial cities such as Coventry, Liverpool and Bristol, Mass Observation detected signs of panic and frequent talks for an immediate surrender; this would have come to be seen as a sign of defeatism and a more general collapse of civilian morale, given that those were the centres of the country that were being hit the hardest. But subsequent reports from Mass Observation noted this was not the case for the rest of the United Kingdom, thus reassuring the government about the risk of a collapsing civilian morale (Bell, 2009).

Soon after the beginning of the heavy bombing, Mass observation reports of civilian morale began to look more frequently like the following statement, taken from a report by Home Intelligence in the city of Portsmouth:

> The morale of the city may be summed up in a sentence often repeated, "The spirit of the people is unbroken, but their nerve has gone". That is to say, though they have been badly shaken by their experiences and are afraid, they do not want to give in. [1]

This extract from the *Special Report on Portsmouth* is an indicator of the overall spirit of the British people, perhaps that they were steadily adapting to this new lifestyle: instead of causing outburst of panic and mass-hysteria, bombings were contributing to cement the idea that the nation would in the end be victorious. Part of this can also be explained by the fact that those who were in a state of panic had already evacuated from the major cities to the countryside, so those who remained were more adaptable and prone to get

[1] Home Intelligence, 'Special Report on Portsmouth', 19–24 May 1941, INF 1/292.

used to the bombings. Although for all intents and purposes British citizens were adapting and trying to live a normal life, many of them rightfully sought repair and protection from the Luftwaffe raids. Thus, private and public shelters became the primary place of protection; but apart from providing safety from the bombs, these places were far from being adequate and comfortable, at least at first (Mackay R., 2003, pp. 77-78).

Those who did not live in the city centres, and thus had a house with a stretch of garden near it, built themselves a garden shelter, known as the 'Anderson'. This was set half into the ground, it could accommodate six people sitting, but only two could lie down; also, spending a whole night inside it meant having to live in a cold, damp and narrow space with no basic services at hand (Mackay R., 2003, p. 71). Residents of city centres, on the contrary, did not have gardens to set their private shelters in, so they had to rely on public ones. The first street shelters proved to be an actual test of endurance for adults and the non-evacuated children: they had no ventilation, heating, electricity or running water, and it also soon became clear that they were unsafe from direct hits and blasts from falling bombs. Instead of having to spend the night in these rough places, many citizens found alternatives in the basements of big buildings or, in the case of London, in the Underground railway system. As much safer from bombs as they were, these locations were at first overcrowded and noisy, where privacy was not an option and where sleep was difficult on the hard floor. Soon enough authorities began providing solutions to make life and sleep in street shelters more reasonable: bunk beds, lavatories and refreshment providers were installed. Still, life in these refuges was hard to endure (Mackay R., 2003, pp. 71-72).

Granting that shelters were attested to be universally efficient in their offering protection, many people were not bombed out and in general plenty of people did not need to seek shelter during night raids. For them it nevertheless proved to be strenuous to carry on with their lives, in an environment, that of a city with bombed out houses and buildings, which would constantly place a constant strain on the morale of the population. Bombings also had various effects on the psyche of the population, particularly causing emotional stress and its related impacts: anxiety attacks, fatigue, loss of sleep, eating disorders, apathy and so on. But these consequences of enemy air raids were nowhere as terrible as many experts had predicted before the war. As a matter of fact, psychiatrists had warned about the high number of psychiatric casualties, while during the bombings

a weekly average of slightly more than two people affected by neurosis, that is about 5% of all air raids casualties, was registered (Mackay R., 2003). Although many less serious cases may have gone untreated, it is safe to say that both experts and government overestimated the number of acute mental consequences, which would only manifest themselves mostly through less severe emotional strains (Field, 2002, p. 15).

Blitzed London appeared as a considerably different city: public and private shelters, the removal of street signs, the blackout order for night-time hours and most of all the ruins remodelled the capital city into a front line of the war. Its inhabitants were aware of the strategic, military and political importance that came by living in the city, so also a consciousness of having themselves an important role to the waging and outcome of the war at least during the first years of the war. Maintaining positive morale was key to show the rest of world they could endure the hardships that were afflicting them, that they were not going to be broken by the still shocking nightly bombings.

Overall, there was an attempt, then proved to be successful, to harness all energies the nation had to offer for the war struggle, right after it had only produced defeats and retreats. The phrase 'A People's war' was in fact used to motivate and involve every British citizen, accurately describing the atmosphere of the time (Mackay R., 2003). Famous radio broadcaster J.B. Priestley summed everything up with the following statement, told during one of his radio programs shortly after the air raids began:

> "We're not really civilians any longer but a mixed lot of soldiers – machine-minding soldiers, milkmen and postmen soldiers, housewife and mother soldiers." [2]

So, it was in this atmosphere that British novelists and artists wrote and set their literary works.

1.2. Literary Reactions to the Blitz

The British literary production of the Second World War focuses not on the battlefield, but on what is called the home front. This is unlike the case of the First World War, when many soldiers and combatants on the front line of the battles would write pieces of literary works that reflected their immediate thoughts and feelings on that new, huge and

[2] J. B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (London, 1940). Postscript for Sept. 8, 1940, the day after the first major raid on the East End.

devastating modern war. In fact, the literature of the Great War presents common topics that foreground most of, if not all, the works with this setting. Such frontline testimony would be described as a literature of disillusion, of young men who had been educated in the heroic and patriotic ideals that were then blown apart by the horrors of industrial warfare, that is what famous poet and soldier Wilfred Owen called 'the old Lie' in a famous poem of his, *Dulce et Decorum est* (1920) [3]. It is pity, too, that was at the heart of this peculiar literary production: a pity for these young soldiers who were sent, with great and unconscious civilian support, to die in the battlefields. As the same Owen said in *Anthem for Doomed Youth* (1920), these helpless young men were sent on the battlefield to 'die as cattle'[4] (DeCoste, 2008).

The literature of the Second World War is far from this. It mainly focuses on the consequences of war being brought on civilian life. There is very little of actual Second War battles in the works of the time, battles that are only briefly appearing in later works; for example, Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1952-1961) or Olivia Manning's *The Levant Trilogy* (1977-1980). So, it is safe to say that the literature of the Second World War is not one of combatants. Rather, it is the literature of everybody, of those involved on the home front, the struggle that came to define this period as 'A People's War'. It is the war of blackouts, spies, evacuees, rationing, air raids and industrial mobilisation, set in the countryside, in cities, and small towns where fiction tends to focus greatly on lives and events involving civilians in their homeland, not their military counterparts active on the battlefields (DeCoste, 2008, p. 4).

Although the war officially began in September 1939, there were many, novelists included, who knew years before this date that another world war would break out, seeing it as inevitable due to the state of world politics but also of society. In fact, the Second World War as a literary event precedes the actual outbreak of the hostilities. This genre, dubbed by literary historians as 'Literature of Anticipation', dates as back as the early 1930s, where the imagination, the virtual representation of a Second World War is central to works such as Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), one of the first of the genre (DeCoste, 2008, p. 8). In this work of anticipatory fiction, the author introduces to the readers a world overshadowed by an absolute certainty of another global war. Another

[3] Wilfred Owen (1965) *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. and with introduction by C. Day Lewis. New York: New Directions.

[4] *Ibidem.*

example is Graham Greene's *A Gun for Sale*, which dates to 1936 and portrays a mobilizing Europe, where crowds brace themselves for aerial assaults and wear gas masks. These works, all focused on the home front, would then become an actual prophecy of what was truly coming to be, a bleak and urgent reality, that of the Blitz (DeCoste, 2008, p. 8).

As opposite to the atmosphere typical of the 'people's war', which is that of stoical resistance and social solidarity, the literature of the Blitz aims to mock this sense of solidarity and instead forms a picture of the home front inundated with egoism and unruliness, which is what the home front of this war really had to offer. Once again, chronicler of the time Evelyn Waugh provides prime examples of this. In his *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), the character of Hooper is unflatteringly portrayed as the 'common man', who is also part of a civilization amid social wartime change. Similarly, in *Put Out More Flags* (1942) and in *Men at Arms* (1952) Waugh depicts wartime society as not abundant with self-sacrifice and mutual solidarity, but rather characterized by futile squabbles and dishonest egotism. So, for example, in the latter work the characters of the officers should be battling against the Nazi foe or social injustice; instead, they spend their time and energy focusing on engaging one another. While in *Put Out More Flags* the protagonist exploits the evacuation of children for his own economic profits, and he later betrays his friend by reporting him as a fascist sympathizer. We can thus see how Waugh perfectly portrays this idea of childish squabbling and egotism, in novels where the home front looks more and more like the reflection of the enemy (DeCoste, 2008, pp. 11-12). There are other novels that instead stress how bombings completely change the nature of the urban landscape, making it more surreal if not alien. For instance, in Anthony Powell's *Casanova Chinese Restaurant* (1960) there is a description of a bombed-out pub through a vision out of a fairy tale: "a triumphal arch erected laboriously by dwarfs, or the gateway to some unknown, forbidden domain, the lair of sorcerers" (1976a: 1).

In Blitz fiction there is also the idea that war is uncovering what was always there, emotions, ideas and feelings, revealing how the conflicts of the private life reflect and enable those of the war, and generally of public history. So, Blitz fiction argues that war itself had been generated, conceived on the home front, and in the domestic space too. In *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) by Graham Greene there are affinities to this idea: the

protagonist of the novel is happy to see London being crushed by bombs, especially the destruction of those places that remind him of his past with his wife, whom he had killed out of pity. What he wants is a longed-for escape from his past at cost of everyone else's lives, thus making him, theoretically, on the same level as the novel's Nazi enemies. In these novels then, what the Blitz uncovers is not a world of heroic and stoic resistance, but instead the affinity with the very evil the war was allegedly being fought against; the threats and sickness coming from abroad are perfectly visible in the home front too. It is far from sympathizing with the struggling civilians who are the centre of the home front, it does not reflect the tale of the British valour and it dismisses any pretence of heroism.

It is important to note that the primary genres of British wartime are detective novels and thrillers. Perhaps a bit of a surprise, as one would have thought that people of the time would entertain themselves with something far from war and death. These two genres were popular and appealing because they were established and well-known, they reflected the uncertainties and dangers people of the time were suffering and they had comforting final resolutions (Bell, 2009, p. 172). An interesting irony in the context of the British home front.

Two of the novels that most manage to capture the atmosphere of Blitzed London, its darker sides and its reflexes on the population are Graham Greene's novel *The Ministry of Fear* and Elizabeth Bowen's short story *The Demon Lover* (1945). In both these outstanding works, London is portrayed as the scenery in which bombed-out houses, wrecked squares and ruins foreground the unfolding of the fiction. The two authors represent the capital as a place where social boundaries tend to collapse: boundaries between childhood and adulthood, real and surreal, past and present, private and public. The language that is being used reflects and highlights, through metaphors, civilian fears about the war and the threat continuously coming from above, but also personal fears that rise with the advent of war on everyday life.

In *The Ministry of Fear*, Greene finds interest in the morally ambiguous elements of war: war as a point where time and space are dislocated, where loneliness and terror are fragmented, making up the uncanny landscape of wartime urban life. The surreal of wartime London is immediately presented to the reader, with action beginning from a seemingly innocent fête to raise money for charity, where the protagonist Arthur Rowe almost gets lost in what looks to him like a trip back to childhood, a time of innocence

and happiness that he craves for. In this seemingly joyful place, there is also an introduction to what is described as the 'Fifth Column', a 'they' that works from inside the nation to undermine it and change the course of the war: a recurring motive in many wartime novels. Throughout the novel, London exhibits the contrast between the idyllic childhood life and the adult world, made up of failure, pity, betrayal and cruelty, but also of criminality, cruelty and murder: all these elements intersect in blitzed London, becoming a scene of confusion and transformation of the world into strangeness, threat and ambiguity. The strangeness appears for instance in the descriptions of the public shelters, places of "dim and lurid" subterranean life, and in the metaphors that describe the devastation caused to the city (Bell, 2009, pp. 169-171).

In a like manner to Greene, in Elizabeth Bowen's ghost story *The Demon Lover* the war produces on London effects that contribute to cancelling boundaries between the past and the present, the private and the public, the real and the surreal. Fear penetrates through a void caused by physical but also social destruction, creating a chilly landscape where the story develops and articulates itself; at times, wartime London seems eerie if not scary. The author herself, in the preface of the 1945 edition, explains what it meant to live through the Blitz in wartime London:

> I felt one with, and just like, everyone else. Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and somebody else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other. … People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves – broken ornaments, odd shoes, torn scraps of the curtains that had hung in the room – from the wreckage. In the same way, they assembled and checked themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk. [5]

This is what the destruction of walls meant, that is that there were no more boundaries with oneself and with the other, were they physical or virtual. It also somewhat produced a feeling of liberation, yet fearful, because the populace would find it hard to identify consolatory meanings in the scraps and ruins left behind them. The short story begins with an evocation of such a ruined landscape, immediately establishing uncanny and threatening undertones: war has made London, particularly the area described at the beginning, a place where one feels threatened, where fear is the primary agent that

[5] This quotation is from the preface to the American version of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London, 1945), retitled as *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories* (New York, 1946).

characterizes it (Bell, 2009, pp. 172-173). The story itself is left open-ended, leading to a series of various critical interpretations of what it might or might not signify. Yet its representation of blitzed London shows how war was an incredibly destructive element that produced chaos and the consequent perils everywhere.

Although not works of fiction, diary writing is still a means of literary description of thoughts, feelings and landscape during the 'People's war' that deserves to be mentioned. These diaries reveal in fact how they were, first and foremost, a way of disconnecting from the reality of war. They were also informal records of the war years, mainly written by those, belonging to the middle class, whose life had been worsened by the adversities of that period (Mackay R., 2003). These provide an intimate glimpse into their private world, disclosing personal and family strategies for coping with the privations, stresses, and dangers of war as well. Diaries written during the Blitz and later published show how fears of defeat, bombs and death were part of everyday life at that point, also a testament of how these fears were proving to be hard on body and mind. Although it is possible to find representations of London as darker and more sinister, thus presenting the opposite idea to the positive and optimistic images of the 'People's War', all these diaries were essentially written without showing signs of weakness or defeatism. Thus, being representative of the British culture of stoicism, and emphasizing the courage of the people who were able to carry on (Bell, 2009, pp. 158-159).

By the end of 1941, the United Kingdom had now two great allies in the USA and the USSR in the fight against Nazi Germany. The last raid of the Blitz came on 10 May 1941, and London would witness similar fears and destruction again in the 1944 and 1945 raids carried out by Germany with the V1 and V2 missiles. So, the months of standing alone were over at that point, and fears of death and of the end of British civilization were essentially gone. The patriotic narratives, typical of the memoirs of the preceding years, were now no longer part of private diaries. But what still laid ahead were years of struggle, work and privations without the excitement of the Blitz. During, but mainly after having experienced the Blitz first-hand, British novelists would start writing and publishing stories with several elements that would recall these years. For instance, in the novels that will be analysed in this dissertation, there is the 'enemy within' in Agatha Christie's *N or M?* (1941), the dark and sinister London of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and the first-person account of blitzed London in Henry Green's *Caught* (1943).

2. The Blitz and Neutrality: Bowen & *The Heat of the Day*

2.1. A Different Point of View

Born in Dublin on 7 June 1899 to Anglo-Irish parents, Elizabeth Bowen is among the most read and notable writers of the twentieth century. After spending the first years of her life between Dublin and the family estate in County Cork, in 1906 she moved to England together with her mother and began living there, alternating periods of living in the Republic of Ireland. She travelled abundantly as well, particularly in the USA, where she worked for the British Council and as a lecturer in various universities. During most of the Second World War she lived in London, working as an Air Raid Precaution warden but also for the British Intelligence, providing reports regarding the neutrality of her native country. She wrote numerous works, particularly she authored ten novels, more than one hundred short stories and a multitude of reviews and magazine articles. Her first collection of stories was published in 1923, *Encounters*¸ while in 1968 she published her last novel *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes* (Darwood, 2020).

A trope that lies behind most of her short stories and novels is that of the Gothic, the uncanny. Having always been intrigued by narratives which had the uncanny and the supernatural as pivotal elements, Bowen created characters and landscapes along these lines that feature most of her works, novels and short stories alike. As a matter of fact, she managed to embed these peculiar aspects in her works by means of different devices. For instance, the presence of haunted houses, like in *The Cat Jumps* (1934), a novel set in a house that had been the site of an atrocious murder. There are characters who act in peculiar manners too, such as Madame Fisher - in *The House in Paris* (1935) - who sits spider-like in her dark house. Another example is the presence of ghosts, as in the short story *The Demon Lover* (1945), set in wartime London where ghosts of the previous war come back to haunt the people living through the horrors of the Second World War. The short story *Mysterious Kôr* (1942) deserves to be mentioned too, also because it is one of Bowen's most anthologised stories. A tale set in an ethereal, perhaps ghostly, London, where the moonlight creates hallucinatory visions, a blurring of boundaries, which takes one of the characters to the imaginary abandoned city of Kôr (Darwood, 2020, pp. 86-87, 90-91). These are only a few examples of an entire collection of works which feature the

uncanny, also found in her novel *The Heat of the Day* which will be analysed later in this dissertation. Thus, this is unquestionably a recurring trope that characterizes the tales of the Anglo-Irish writer.

Concerning her wartime narrative, it is important to take into consideration a significant aspect, that of her being Irish. Given Bowen's mixed Anglo-Irish heritage, later critics and editors of selected Irish anthologies, for instance the Aubane Historical Society's *North Cork Anthology*, struggled to find an unambiguous categorization for her literary works. In this particular case, the editors of the anthology had to deal with Bowen's past and Englishness, so the difficulty to precisely identify her with either the Irish or the British national identity, and consequently with the Irish or British literary scene (Osborn, 2007). After having moved to England, Bowen never hid her strong Irish sentiment and affiliation as her home, and always considered herself accordingly although she found it unsettling at times. In fact, Bowen herself stated:

> I regard myself as an Irish novelist. As long as I can remember I've been extremely conscious of being Irish - even when I was writing about very un-Irish things such as suburban life in Paris or the English seaside. All my life I've been going forwards and backwards between Ireland and England and the Continent, but that has never robbed me of the strong feeling of my nationality. I must say it's a highly disturbing emotion. It's not - I must emphasize – sentimentality. [6]

This settles any existing doubt about her national identity and confirms her self-identification with Ireland. Nevertheless, she also declares to find this sentiment as "disturbing", thus carrying a doubt and a sense of insecurity about her feeling of identification, placing herself in-between the two countries and national identities. This acute sense of suspense is a peculiarity of her writing style that would characterize most of her fictional writings (Nagashima, 2012, pp. 5-6).

As wars go, neutrality and a sense of in-betweenness are generally not approved of. During World War Two, a time when Bowen lived in her house near Regent's Park in London, her loyalty towards Britain was tested and her consequent choice of conducting espionage in her native country on Britain's account seems to be taken as her definitive decision between the two sides. Although always claiming to be regarding herself as Irish, this employment was a choice dictated by her obligations towards Britain, as well as being a means of travelling more frequently to Ireland. She was then one of the five people sent

[6] Victoria Glendinning, (1977) *Elizabeth Bowen: A Portrait of a Writer*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 165.

in Ireland by the Ministry of Information to provide reports regarding Eire's neutrality and attitudes towards war, where she recorded that most if not all citizens agreed with Prime Minister Eamon de Valera's policy about non-involvement in the war. An interesting aspect found in these reports is her quasi-fictional description of Eire, just as though she viewed it as a protagonist, the heroine of one of her writings:

> In fact, neutrality = Independence. It is felt that Eire's decision in this matter should be respected qua decision. Eire regards her declaration of neutrality as a positive act. She regards it as an act of strength, not weakness. Eire shows, as a youthful and growing country, a youthful (but not wholly undignified) desire to be taken seriously. [7]

Bowen's description of her native country is comparable to that of her fictional young heroines, one who is frustrated with her environments and with aspirations of maturity and independence altogether. This is a testament to her questionable loyalty to Britain, at the same time giving a complicated and ambivalent description of neutral Eire and its relation to Britain (Nagashima, 2012, p. 7).

Granting these reports gave a positive image of Eire's neutrality and suggested agreement with this policy, later Irish nationalists viewed in them the evidence of Bowen's loyalty to Britain and her Englishness that went a step too far for them. This caused, in the case of the *North Cork Anthology*, the exclusion of the Anglo-Irish writer from the Irish literary anthology, provoking criticism because she was not seen as being 'Irish' enough. Despite this repudiation, editors of the *North Cork Anthology* included Bowen and her works in it, but with a line of cancellation through her name (Osborn, 2007). A paradoxical yet innovative solution that comes to terms with the issues of describing and evaluating the author's national identity, backed by the questions that her personal history presents.

In Bowen's wartime writing, it is possible to find interesting peculiarities that reflect both the historical situation and the author's social and personal conditions. As an upper-middle-class woman living and working in London during World War Two, she came to question, through her writings, the conventions and notions of the world which was in the process of unequivocal change. Seeing the devastation the Blitz brought on British homes, she made use of various stylistic and rhetoric strategies in her works in order to better explore the upheavals war brought on the private and public sphere.

[7] Jack Lane and Brendan Clifford (1999) *Elizabeth Bowen: 'Notes on Eire'*, Aubane: Aubane Historical Society, p. 13.

Notably, she adapted an image taken from well-known French writer Gustave Flaubert, introduced in her wartime memoir *Bowen's Court* (1942) when talking about her family estate in Ireland: "Like Flaubert's ideal book about nothing, it sustains itself on itself by the inner force of its style" [8]. What this means is that a house or structure of any kind is supported and remains standing even though it has no content, it is hollow inside, and only a force, its form, coming from within it allows it to sustain itself. Essentially, it tells no other story than that of its own. This would become the basis on which Bowen establishes the relationship between Stella Rodney and Robert Kelway, protagonists of her wartime novel *The Heat of the Day*, but also the way she describes her family estate in County Cork in her wartime memoir, indeed called Bowen's Court. Furthermore, the images conveyed by these two examples, the relationship between the two characters and the family estate, convey traditional ideas about security in the private and public spheres. A traditional romantic relationship that represents sexual security, and upper-middle-class land ownership that creates social security. Although Bowen viewed the Blitz as an agent of change, a means of interrogating and challenging traditional social and gender ideologies, she nevertheless accepts and welcomes such conventional class principles which foreground social security. Consequently, this brings about a conflict that Bowen herself uses in her wartime works to interrogate and question social issues, especially in *The Heat of the Day* (Miller, 1999, pp. 138-139).

Experiencing the Blitz first-hand meant that Bowen had all the means to portray and describe the impact of war on British homes. Yet in her works, there is no description of falling bombs, ruins, dead bodies on the streets or people rushing in bomb shelters. The war in Bowen's wartime writing is manifested through tense social encounters, dark landscapes, and the shattered minds of her characters. Especially in her short stories, Bowen manages to create sublime atmospheres and settings, both physical and psychological, showing all her mastery as a short-story writer. For instance, in *Mysterious Kôr*'s opening paragraph the reader is immediately transported in the setting and the story takes shape with all its power:

> Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon's capital—shallow, cratered, extinct. It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads

[8] Elizabeth Bowen (1942), *Bowen's Court and Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Childhood*. London: Virago, 1984, p. 21.

> and streets in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up. The soaring new flats and the crouching old shops and houses looked equally brittle under the moon, which blazed in windows that looked its way. The futility of the black-out became laughable: from the sky, presumably, you could see every slate in the roofs; every whited kerb, every contour of the naked winter flowerbeds in the park; and the lake, with its shining twists and tree-darkened islands would be a landmark for miles, yes, miles, overhead. [9]

Here Bowen carefully presents the location, London, which "looked like the moon's capital", and the time the story opens with, "It was late, but not yet midnight". "Naked winter flowerbeds" reveals the season when the story is set, that is spring. A reference to the blackout helps to contextualize the historical moment. To create atmosphere she employs the moonlight, which is traditionally known for its magic and fantasy symbolism. All these elements put together in the opening five sentences bring about the evocation of a surreal atmosphere and the intertwining of reality and illusion, which would function as a foretelling of the characters' experiences. The theme of the short story, that is survival in unreal conditions, is here brilliantly introduced. In *Mysterious Kôr*, the moonlight searches and pursues the city as much as German bombers would have done in London, with the moon itself levelling the city. The prose conveys a sense of desolation, passivity and sterility, as if it were describing the real blitzed London. It is important to note the way Bowen represents her female characters when compared to their male counterparts, like the author does in other wartime short stories such as *Summer Night* (1941) and *I Hear You Say So* (1945). Male characters are depicted almost only through dialogue and action, as she rarely represents their psyches as thoroughly as the females' (Medoff, 1984, pp. 73, 76-77, 79).

But it is in *The Heat of the Day* that Bowen creates the most impressive description of wartime London, perfectly capturing the historical context in all its degrees.

2.2. Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*: A Wartime Noir

The Heat of the Day is a novel set in and about wartime London, beginning from "the first Sunday of September 1942" [10] in Regent's Park in London, and ending in September 1944 in Seale-on-Sea in Kent. The female protagonist of the story, Stella Rodney,

[9] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (New York: Knopf, 1981), p. 728.

[10] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, United Kingdom, Vintage Classics, 1948, p. 10; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*HD* 10).

discovers that her lover, Robert Kelway, is secretly a spy selling information to the enemy. After having delivered the news to her, the British intelligence agent Harrison wants to bargain Robert's immunity for Stella herself. Along this main plot, in the novel there are other two sub-plots which at times cross the main one. The first one is about Stella's son Roderick, who inherits a country estate in neutral Ireland from the late Cousin Francis. The second one is about a young lady, Louie, a factory-worker who tries to find excitement through various adulterous encounters. Overall, this is a story about treason, espionage and personal displacement, with occasional references to actual World War Two events and battles that give the novel a more precise allocation in its historical context. The description of London is that of a typical wartime Bowen story. A city where the uncanny is predominant, where fears and the crumbling of boundaries determine the dark and uncertain terrain over which the story develops. And, although set after the major Blitz bombings, there still are constant reminders of the dangers that come with the unpredictable air raids, such as the ever-present night-time blackout, that contributes to shaping the sombre setting of the novel.

As already stated, Bowen directly experienced and lived through the Blitz in London, and such background is evident in the representation of the city in the novel. In Bowen's London, people and places start overlapping one another, the boundaries between houses, people, private and public spheres, the familiar and the unfamiliar become less and less evident. This uncanny blurring of boundaries is one of if not the main symptom of the Blitz on civilian urban life, which then translates into the strange and uneasy events that characterize Bowen's novel. The uncanniness of the novel is also present through the animism of domestic objects, that is objects seem to have their own integrity and independence, a strange and original materialism caused by the presence of ruins in the urban landscape. In fact, Bowen's representation of ruins works on the characters' minds and creates a sense of living among the wreckage, which then is reflected on the objects inside their houses, in this novel's case Stella's flat, almost becoming characters themselves (Zimmerman, 2015, pp. 44-45). An example is when Roderick has returned to his mother's lodging, on leave from his military duties, and as he lays on the sofa with Stella sitting on one side of it, he says "Now we're on the same boat" (*HD* 63). Later the narrator describes this opposition between the stationary sofa and the mobile boat, adding:

> The reality of the fancy was better than the unreality of the room. In a boat you were happy to be suspended in nothing but light, air, water, opposite another face. On a sofa you could be surrounded by what was lacking. Though this particular sofa backed on a wall and stood on a carpet, it was without environment. (HD 65)

This is the testimony of the effects the Blitz brings inside people's minds and houses, a disorientating experience of wartime spaces that disrupts otherwise normal concepts and configurations.

Once she has discovered her lover's role in working against the United Kingdom, Stella walks back to her flat after having had dinner with Robert and, during this walk, the narrator brilliantly describes the atmosphere that London emanates:

> Muteness was falling on London with the uneasy dark; here and there stood a figure watchfully in a doorway; or lovers, blotted together, drained up into their kisses all there was left of vitality in this Saturday's end. She began to feel it was not the country but occupied Europe that was occupying London – suspicious listening, surreptitious movement, and leaden hearts. The weather-quarter tonight was the conquered lands. […] The very tension overheard of the clouds nervously connected London with Paris – even, as at this same moment might a woman in that other city, she found some comfort in asking herself how one could have expected to be happy? (HD 149-150)

Perfectly portraying Stella's inner impression of the landscape she walks through, Bowen thus captures the elements that make wartime London dark and fearful. The "figure watchfully" standing here and there on the streets, the "uneasy dark" coming down on London, the "suspicious listening, surreptitious movement, and leaden hearts" are all characteristic of this place, warped and darkened by war and its fallout. London has become a place where everyone is suspect and acts oddly. This becomes even more emphasised by contrast when Stella goes to Eire to visit Mount Morris, the estate her son has inherited and where she had been on honeymoon a few decades earlier. The neutral nation is the opposite of blitzed London and Britain, first of all showing the lights shining in Dublin during night-time, where no blackout had been imposed:

> Stella assumed there to be no shortages of any kind in Eire. The exciting sensation of being outside war had concentrated itself round those fearless lights – though actually, yesterday night as her ship drew in, the most strong impression had been of prodigality: around the harbour water, uphill above it, the windows had not only showed and shone but blazed, seemed to blaze out phenomenally; while later, dazzling reflections in damp streets made Dublin seem to be in the throes of a carnival. Here, tonight, downstairs, those three yellow oblongs cast unspoilt on the gravel by the uncurtained windows had spelled ease, yes; but still more had set up a barbaric joy, as might wine let run soaking into the ground. (HD 198)

While they would be ordinary for any city in peaceful times, here the lights look ecstatic to Stella's eyes, who encounters this vision of lights illuminating the city in the

night as she had not seen since the war began. The lights and reflections appear as a "carnival", the "uncurtained windows" enhance the differences between Dublin and London, making the Irish capital appear as lit up as ever. Portraying Dublin accordingly, Bowen manages to contrast it with London's darkness, even though in this section the British capital city is not even cited.

Historical references to the unfolding of the Second World War are carefully placed by the author in the novel, although not in great number, introducing them through dialogues between characters who also give their points of view and reactions of the event. This is the case of, for instance, the second battle of El Alamein in Egypt, where the allied forces led by general Montgomery successfully beat the axis with a breakthrough victory. Stella is still at Mount Morris' estate, and housekeeper Donovan delivers her news he has just got to hear:

> '… Egypt!'
>
> 'Wait, I –'
>
> 'Montgomery's through!'
>
> 'Montgomery?'
>
> 'A terrible victory!'
>
> […] She panted: 'A victory in a day?'
>
> 'It's the war turning.'
>
> 'How did you hear?'
>
> 'It's all through the country.' […] 'I would give much,' he said, 'to have a hat to bare my head with: the day's famous.'
>
> 'It's a beautiful day, in any event', said Hannah, temperately, speaking for the first time. (HD 210-211)

Despite celebrating the victorious battle, the war is far from being won by Britain, just like the novel is far away from its resolution. Yet it is undoubtedly "the war turning", a change of balance in the conflict, also reflecting that of Stella at this very point in the novel. She is now ready to go back to London to confront her lover as a traitor, after spending some days in the Republic meditating on what to do with her situation. Interestingly, this passage also describes the feelings in neutral Eire about the war. The housekeeper Donovan is an Irish, catholic member of the working class who identifies

and celebrates, most of all, the Anglo-Irish general Montgomery, declaring: "We bred a very fast general, Didn't I say to you he'd be a fast general? Hasn't he got them on the run?" (*HD* 211) By contrast, his daughter Hannah remains indifferent and does not react to the news, with the chapter concluding thus:

> Stella, also making for the house, became becalmed in the orbit of Hannah's glaze. She smiled at the girl, but there was nothing – most of all at this moment nothing – to be said. Whenever in the future that Mount Morris mirage of utter victory came back to her, she was to see Hannah standing there in the sunshine, indifferent as a wand. (HD 212)

Hannah remains perfectly neutral, a personification of Eire itself which is neither delighted nor unhappy about this particularly important battle, an acknowledgement of the complexity of Irish wartime sentiment by Bowen (Teekell, 2011, p. 72).

In the novel, neutrality is not only present in relation to Eire's position in the Second World War. *The Heat of the Day* is in fact a story about loyalty and disloyalty, developing on attempts to stay neutral. Stella's quest for truth about her lover's possible treason, so the plot of the story itself, begins with the actions of the Anglo-Irish Cousin Francis, the landlord of Mount Morris' estate, in relation to Irish neutrality. Being discontent about his country's conduct and policy about war, he begins working for England, secretly passing information about neutral Ireland. It is in fact at his funeral that Stella and Harrison first meet. Stella has been blackmailed by him, but still she cannot prove her lover's innocence, thus taking a neutral position in her romantic relationship. She does not believe in Robert's disloyalty to her and Britain, but she also does not refute it. By doing so, Bowen shows how hard it is to remain neutral when being externally forced to take a decisive moral position in such complicate matters. Indeed, the novel does not take a stance about this wartime dilemma, showing its ambiguities and flaws and the complexity of the notion of neutrality (Nagashima, 2012, pp. 8-10).

What is more, Bowen partially projects her own experience into the characters of the novel. Cousin Francis, just like the author, passes information about Eire's neutrality to the British Intelligence; while Stella is an upper-middle-class woman living a rootless life in her London flat, and who is tied, through a failed marriage and her son's inheritance, to an Anglo-Irish estate. Especially in the figure of Stella, Bowen seems to reflect her image and experience during war in London, with her native country being an ever-present element, especially through the country estate which resembles Bowen's own.

In writing *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen creates a prose that echoes the main elements of the narrative, that is darkness, strangeness and the uncanny. Filled with inversions, ellipsis, subjunctives, and double and triple negatives, the writing style of the story contributes to causing a reading experience which at times is far from being smooth. Tellingly, this writing style is one of the reasons why it took the author a decade to finish writing it. In some moments the experience of reading the novel is more eventful than the novel itself, with the conversations between characters often subordinating the actions of the spy-thriller plot. As Bowen herself explained in *Notes on Writing a Novel* (1945), "Speech is what characters *do to each other*" [11]. The true eventfulness of the novel is made up of words, written for the readers and spoken for the characters, and the constant need of looking for interpretations and clues in them in order to progress with the story. Much more, several times the physical action of the novel is actually taken up by means of looking or listening, for instance: "There came to be something dynamic, as he entered, about her refusal to move at all" (*HD* 30). Here Stella meets Harrison in her flat for the first time, and the writing style underlines the intensity of the moment without the undertaking of an actual action by the character (Teekell, 2011, pp. 61-62). Chapter Five of the novel is a particular case, where Bowen's style reaches a great complexity in portraying a flashback that takes back to when the Blitz had just begun, in 1940. It is the most poetic passage of the novel, where stylistic complexities brought by the repetition of negated words and phrases contribute to the description of the landscape, in which the wartime dead are ever-present. The following extract summarises this particular writing style, with a telling description of the wartime dead in the blitzed urban scenery:

> Absent from the routine which had been life, they stamped upon that routine their absence – not knowing who the dead were you could not know which might be the staircase somebody for the first time was not mounting this morning, or at which street corner the newsvendor missed a face, or which trains and buses in the homegoing rush were this evening lighter by at least one passenger. (HD 109)

Here Bowen initially renders the images of a typical daily routine, only to swiftly overturn them through a sustained syntactic negation. The repetition of "not" physically empties the staircases, streets, trains and buses from those who faced the acute consequences of war on their homes. The author thus achieves the representation of the urban spaces, and the blurring of its boundaries, through its uncanny portrayal. There are

[11] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 41.

more absences than presences in wartime London, where reality transforms into unreality, becoming a haunted place filled with ghosts (Zimmerman, 2015, pp. 53-54).

Bowen's strategy of frequently using double and triple negatives is a way of tying the novel to a negative diction. Syntactically speaking, this specific pattern also amounts to a certain degree of ambiguity, based on the context. Double negatives may stand for litotes or emphasis, just as when Stella declares: "I am not a woman who does not know where to go" (*HD* 48), or it could express an unwillingness to speak clearly in the novel's devious world. *The Heat of the Day* is a novel about espionage, loyalty and distrust, and Bowen strictly links in its syntax the topics of the novel, especially the latter. By using the double negatives, she intentionally creates an ambivalence which holds resolution in suspense, as the narrator at times does in key aspects of the plot. With this peculiar syntactic construction, the novel holds a strong sense of suspense and unknowingness, contributing to its spy-thriller plot. Ultimately, it is symbolic of the novel's main plot, that of Stella's refusal to both believe and disbelieve her lover's alleged treason (Teekell, 2011, p. 63).

Bowen has thus achieved the goal of representing blitzed London with all its dark nuances, in a novel where the plot is itself subordinated to the landscape in which it is set. In the following novel, Agatha Christie's *N or M?*, another aspect of the home front will be explored, that of the 'enemy within', the fifth column.

3. The "Enemy Within" in Christie's *N or M?*

3.1. The Queen of Crime and War

Agatha Christie, neé Miller, was born on 15 September 1890 in the town of Torquay in Devon, England, the youngest of three siblings. As a young woman, she never thought of making a career in writing, as her only thought was to find herself a husband. She did eventually, marrying Archibald Christie, a member of the Royal Flying Corps, rightly after the Great War began. But they never completely bonded, and eventually divorced in 1928. In 1930 she remarried with Max Mallowan, an archaeologist 13 years younger than her. While her first husband was on leave to fight in the First World War, Christie began writing her first novels and, as she turned 30, she became increasingly successful in doing so. As a matter of fact, between 1920 and 1976 she published sixty-six detective novels, selling over two billion copies in forty-five languages, making her the most widely read novelist. She was also a noted playwright and romance author (Acocella, 2010).

The detective fiction genre was invented not long before Christie's time. It was in fact Edgar Allan Poe who introduced this genre in the literary scene with four novels, although it never fully struck him and he soon lost interest in it. The first writer who made a career with this genre was Arthur Conan Doyle who, between the years 1887 and 1927, published a series of novels and very numerous short stories with Sherlock Holmes as protagonist, first in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). By Christie's time, two conventions for this genre were already established, that is the detective's eccentricity and the key role of ratiocination. What the latter means is that when the detective is working on the case, he or she shows almost no emotion. It is the inductive reasoning that constitutes the detective's character and, ultimately, the pleasure of the story itself. Christie took these rules and elaborated her stories on them, also creating a more or less repetitive scenario, made up of the small places, interrogations, and the final revelation, which constitute the backdrop for most of her stories. This is all evident in her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), where she first introduces the famous detective Hercule Poirot. Poirot, an ex-member of the Belgian police force, is a peculiar character with his dandyism, his dyed black hair, and most of all his way of speaking. Indeed, he always exaggerates his foreignness while interrogating, as the suspects, upon hearing his

Franglais, begin to take him less seriously and thus reveal more information. Along with Poirot, it is the character of Miss Marple which contributed to Christie's success. Appearing in a series of novels, Miss Marple is not a professional detective and thus cannot/should not conduct conventional interrogations. Appearing as a sweet old lady, of whom nobody thinks anything in particular, she achieves the same result as Poirot by being discounted, getting people to say more than they should. She overuses platitudes, a method often found in her stories, and snoops round trying to get as much information without actually interrogating other characters (Acocella, 2010).

A typical detective story by Christie develops for the most part along these lines: a crime, a murder specifically, is committed although it is not pictured. Then, through a series of interrogations, the detective determines the motive of the homicide and the subsequent opportunity for each suspect. This seldom provides an answer, as people with motives often have strong alibis and, on the contrary, innocent-looking people have weak ones. Then, Christie may help or confuse the reader by means of the detective's confidant, to whom he or she summarises what has been discovered so far. Christie also occasionally recurs to the double bluff by giving the reader an obvious culprit right at the beginning of the novel, like in the case of *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930). This novel opens with the town vicar arriving home one evening, finding the character Lawrence Redding right outside it, looking pale and shocked. As the vicar enters his home, he finds the murdered body of the town's hated magistrate with a bullet in his head. From the reader's point of view, it seems too obvious to encounter the assassin of the story at once so soon, so he is not considered to be the one. In a twist turn of events, we find out his lover is involved in the crime as well. Ultimately, it is revealed to be a murder carried out by both of them together. This example perfectly illustrates how gifted and bright Christie was in writing crime novels, managing to shift the reader's thoughts from one suspect to the other, and then back again to the first one. This type of story has gained the name 'whodunnit', a mystery or crime novel in which there is a challenge for the reader, as to whether he or she can discover the culprit of the story before it is revealed at the end of it. This is still a hard task to accomplish for the reader, for most of the information needed is revealed by the detective only in the last pages. For Christie's contemporary readers, these stories were precisely what they wanted, thus making the author extremely popular and well-

known in little time, especially after her 1926 novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (Acocella, 2010).

Agatha Christie took an active role on the home front during both world wars. In the Great War, she volunteered as a nurse at the Town Hall Hospital in Torquay, her hometown, where she stayed for the entire duration of the war. During the Second World War, she volunteered again as a nurse, this time at the University College Hospital in London. On both occasions, her role allowed her to enter in contact with a variety of chemicals, poisons, and drugs, which instantly fuelled her imagination with ideas for her crime novels. In 1914, as part of the preparation to become an apothecary assistant, she took tuition from a pharmacist in her hometown. Thanks to this experience, she learnt all about preparing the right drug prescription and their dosages, developing ideas about overdoses of drugs and switched prescriptions, which would then become common features of her fiction. For instance, cyanide, which was readily available until the 1940s as a form of pesticide, is present as the method of murder in novels like *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962), *And Then There Were None* (1939), and obviously *Sparkling Cyanide* (1945). In other novels, she even resorted to toxic plants, such as yellow jasmine and foxglove, as well as more chemicals, like thallium, ricin, arsenic and strychnine (Thorpe, 2018).

Christie wrote assiduously during her time at the University College Hospital, proving the great impact that experience had on her literary imagination. Nevertheless, it is worth noting how very little of her stories, also considering those written in the years afterwards, take place during the Second World War or in its aftermath (Thorpe, 2018). For instance, in the novel *4.50 from Paddington* (1957) it is described how a character's son died during the war, while in *Taken at the Flood* (1948), one of the characters dies due to a bomb blast during the Blitz. Yet, it is in *N or M?* that, as I will later suggest, there are several elements about the Second World War and wartime England, such as the 'Fifth Column'.

3.2. The Fifth Column

The phrase 'Fifth Column' finds its genesis in the Spanish Civil War. It was fascist general Emile Mola who first coined these words during his march on Madrid in 1936,

meaning that, in addition to the four columns of fascist militants that were marching under his command, he had a fifth column constituted of Francisco Franco's supporters in Madrid. Indeed, in Spanish, it translates to "quinta columna facciosa". This can be seen as a modern equivalent of the Trojan horse, that is a group of people, working together or on their own, who covertly help the enemy from inside the country. Naturally, for the defending forces it is the worst of fears coming true, as the effort to try and resist the invading enemy is being undermined from behind their own lines, within the country itself. This definition quickly spread out in all of Europe, especially in those countries that were facing the fascist threat, and it soon became the image of fear for the victims of fascist and Nazi aggression, especially in both governments and public in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Here, fear of enemy agents like the so effective ones in Spain quickly developed and influenced the population. In the United Kingdom, like in the rest of Europe, the notion of 'Fifth Column' and its development immediately began with reports of the fall of Madrid in the Spanish Civil War. But even after the conflict in Spain had ended, the British press continued to publish stories of spies and saboteurs from all over the world, as alleged fifth column activities, which would then only increase during the first years of the Second World War (Prysor, 2005, p. 423).

In the context of the United Kingdom and its war against Nazi Germany, the 'enemy within' was made up of those willing and able to spy, sabotage and generally provide any kind of information to the enemy in Berlin. Most of these were Nazi sympathisers, anti-Semites and fascists, who all decided to sell out their native country in the hope of a final German victory. Files held by the Home Office, the MI5 and the Treasury Solicitor's department show that in total, between 1939 and 1945, more than 70 British men and women were convicted for helping Nazi Germany to win the war against the United Kingdom. Four of these had been sentenced to death, yet only two were executed, while the others all served lengthy prison sentences. Hundreds of others were still interned without a trial, on specific evidence that they were working for the enemy. Some were working on their own, others in small, localised networks, and at a certain point some of these even tried to stage a coup d'état, a fascist revolution which would then make Britain an ally of and under the dependence of Nazi Germany. There were three attempts to carry this out, and all of the plots were tried to be pursued when Britain felt weakest and most at danger, that is its darkest hour, right after the fall of France. This

comes as no surprise, for it was a period when the nation was preparing itself against the upcoming, expected invasion (Tate, 2018 pp. 5-6). Moreover, a number of spies and saboteurs managed to escape justice altogether, through their social and political connections, and bureaucratic diversions. It was also due to the British government's will to balance the nation's security with the protection of individual civil liberties, which inevitably helped a number of traitors not to get caught (Philpot, 2018).

One important aspect must be noted: some contemporary historians and legal scholars argue that the myth of the fifth column had been constructed by the Security Service, or MI5, in order to control and then intern thousands of enemy aliens. These were German and Italian nationals who were rarely genuinely guilty of treason, and most of them being jews escaping their country's severe policies of prosecution. Undoubtedly, the policy of interning these enemy aliens, as well as fascists, without any trial became a shameful practice. But in the following decades, this never came to be part of the narrative of the period between 1939 and 1945, called "Britain's finest hour". In fact, newspapers, television and cinema represented these years with other characteristic images, such as the Dunkirk spirit, the Blitz, and the catch phrase "Keep Calm and Carry On". As true as this narrative is, it does not tell the full story behind the main one, of the British people's brave stoicism, which is that of the thousands of innocently and unjustifiably interned (Tate, 2018, pp. 7-8).

In order to better understand the Fifth Column and what threat it was carrying to the country, I introduce the example of a British national secretly working against the United Kingdom. William Francis Forbes-Sempill, 19th Duke of Sempill, earned his reputation during the First World War as a decorated pilot, and after the conflict, as a civil aviator. As a matter of fact, between 1930 and 1936 he made several non-stop flights from London to Stockholm and Berlin, gaining international recognition for his vast knowledge about the mechanics of flying, but also contacts with governments across the world. Since the 1920s, his qualities appeared very attractive to a number of nations, most of all the Japanese, who were at that time in a period of military build-up, and Sempill was the right figure who could help them out. Between 1920 and 1923, he conducted a civilian mission to Tokyo, while also helping the Japanese Navy to establish an aircraft carrier and training the pilots. On his return to England, his correspondence began being monitored by the Security Service, determining that the dashing nobleman was selling aviation intelligence

to the Japanese. In 1926, he came to be questioned about his espionage, since his activities were known and monitored by the Secret Service, but he was not prosecuted and so subsequently he was let go, placing trust in him to not give any more secret information to foreign powers. He was then forced to be kept away from any military facilities. Still, between 1936 and 1938, Sempill tried to gain sensitive military information, trying to do so through his position in the House of Lords, while also being a member of a pro-Nazi propaganda organisation. As the Second World War began, he applied for a job in the Department of Air Matériel? and gained the rank of Commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, despite his well-known past espionage activities, and thus gained access to sensitive information about military aircrafts. In February 1940, intercepted correspondence showed that Sempill had been, and continued to be, in the payroll of the Japanese Intelligence for more than 15 years. Again summoned, to the Air Ministry, he solemnly declared to not give any more military information to Japanese subjects or of other countries, but this promise was short lived. He remained on the Japanese Secret Service's payroll, collecting information on both British and German military aircraft for the remainder of the war. And although, in 1941, Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered his dismissal from the Department of Air Matériel and MI5 planned his arrest, nothing happened to him. This can partly be explained by the fact that, in 1941, Japan was still not seen as a hostile power to the United Kingdom, although this would soon change soon (Tate, 2018, pp. 110-111, 113-117).

Sempill was only one of the dozens of British men and women who sold out their country, covertly working in the hope of having a government who would marry the fascist and Nazi cause. In Agatha Christie's *N or M?*, which will be analysed shortly, it is the presence of two agents working for the Nazi enemy that places the Fifth Column at the heart of the novel.

3.3. *N or M?* and War Outside London

Published in 1941 at the height of the Second World War, *N or M?* is a detective novel set in "the spring of 1940" [12], featuring the detective couple of Tommy and Tuppence

[12] Agatha Christie, *N or M?*, United Kingdom, HarperCollins, 1941, p. 1; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*NM* 1).

Beresford, who had already appeared in Christie's *The Secret Adversary* (1922) and *Partners in Crime* (1929). The story begins with the two of them struggling to find an occupation in wartime London, while reminiscing about the years when they were conducting activities as secret agents, as they had already worked with the British Intelligence many years prior. The couple is then approached by a secret agent, Mr Grant, who informs Tommy about the need to go once again undercover, this time in a boarding house on the south coast of England. It is in fact suspected that there are two secret agents, a male and a female nicknamed N and M, working and sending information to Germany. The couple then find themselves working undercover together to track down the two spies, in the town of Leahampton – a town that is entirely fictional, although it is possibly based on the real town of Bournemouth. In there, they each assume different names, Mr Meadowes and Mrs Patricia Belkensop respectively, and begin their quest among the people living in the boarding house, named 'Sans Souci'. Here they are dealing with the landlady Mrs Perenna and her daughter Sheila Perenna, the guests Major Bletchley, Mrs Sprot and her daughter Betty Sprot, Mr Cayley and the wife Mrs Cayley, the German refugee Carl von Deinim, Ms Sophia Minton, Mrs O'Rourke, and the maids Beatrice and Martha. At the same time there are some characters who do not sojourn in the boarding house but who still are part of the story, like Commander Haydock, Appledore, and the Polish refugee Vanda Polonska. Regularly reporting their discoveries to Mr Grant, the duo slowly gets an idea of who may or may not be committing treason, even going through a series of tumultuous events like Tommy's abduction. Eventually, with the help of their old-time friend and manservant Albert Batt, they discover N and M's real identities, successfully completing their secret operation against the traitors who were working for Nazi Germany.

This plot is the reflection of wartime England at the time it was written. In fact, the presence of appeasers and Nazi sympathizers in British society, but most of all of spies and secret agents working for Germany, was widely felt by the wider populace, who found in *N or M?* a pleasing resolution to their fears. The fact that Tommy and Tuppence are part of the middle class, or upper-middle class, renders them close to the ordinary citizens, contributing to the satisfaction of the country's readers in reading this novel (Benn, 2019).

The danger brought about by the Fifth Column is ever-present in the novel as the main topic on which the story develops, and one of the characters smartly explains this new battle that Britain had to fight. When speaking to Tommy about the task he has just given him, Mr Grant describes the impending threat:

> 'We're beginning to run the war as it should be run – and we can win the war – make no mistake about that – but only if we don't lose it first. And the danger of losing it comes, not from outside – not from the might of Germany's bombers, not from her seizure of neutral countries and fresh vantage points from which to attack – but from within. Our danger is the danger of Troy – the wooden horse within our walls. Call it the Fifth Column if you like. It is here, among us. Men and women, some of them highly placed, some of them obscure, but all believing genuinely in the Nazi aims and the Nazi creed and desiring to substitute that sternly efficient creed for the muddled easy-going liberty of our democratic institutions.' […] '*And we don't know who they are*…' (*NM* 9)

Mr Grant perfectly pictures every feature of the 'enemy within', representing it as a modern version of the Trojan horse ready to stab Britain from the inside. An invisible enemy, or better, invisible men and women working in the shadows, protected by the country's "easy-going" policy on individual civil liberties.

Later in the novel, when Tuppence is face-to-face with Commander Haydock, the male enemy agent, alias N, she listens to him as he explains the plans ready to come into action as soon as the war is won by Nazi Germany, or a fascist coup d'état is achieved:

> 'You've got grit and pluck. It's people like you that will be needed in the new State – the State that will arise in this country when your present imbecile Government is vanquished. We want to turn some of our enemies into friends – those that are worthwhile. […] Our Leader does not intend to conquer this country in the sense that you all think. He aims at creating a new Britain – a Britain strong in its own power – ruled over, *not* by German, but by Englishmen. […] You would be surprised if you knew how many there are in this country, as in others, who have sympathy with and belief in our aims. Between us all we will create a new Europe – a Europe of peace and progress. Try and see it that way – because, I assure you – it *is* that way…' (*NM* 222-223)

Here he tries to convince Tuppence to become part of the Fifth Column, the same threat she is trying to eradicate from her country, and of the "new Britain", although he then says that there are many who have "sympathy and belief in our aims". But he can never convince Tuppence to join him, because she has already worked undercover and knows what it means to fight for her country. It is a lost cause, even though he already knows she is one of those who are fighting against him and his aims. Nevertheless, this statement about a possible new future is short-lived, as his identity has at this point been discovered. Soon afterwards he is indeed neutralized by Mr Grant.

At various points during the narration, there are short descriptions of the lodging house and the town of Leahampton. A small town which, despite being only on the other side of the Channel, so that of continental war-torn Europe, would never witness the horrors of the war like other British cities hit the hardest from the air raids:

> The old pier was at the extreme end of the promenade. That part of Leahampton was known to house agents as the least desirable end. It was West Leahampton and poorly thought of. Tommy paid 2d, and strolled up the pier. […] There was no one on it but some children running up and down and screaming in voices that matched quite accurately the screaming of the gulls, and one solitary man sitting on the end fishing. (*NM* 45)

The apparent peacefulness of this coastal town is further confirmed by a conversation between Tommy and Major Bletchley. As they discuss the eventuality of the German refugee Carl von Deinim of being one of the spies, they portray the location at which they find themselves:

> 'But surely there's nothing of great military or naval importance hereabouts?'
>
> 'Ah, old man, that's where the artfulness comes in! If he were anywhere near Plymouth or Portsmouth he'd be under supervision. In a sleepy place like this, nobody bothers. But it's one the coast, isn't it? The truth of it is the Government is a great deal too easy with these enemy aliens. Anyone who cared could come over here and pull a long face and talk about their brothers in concentration camps.' (*NM* 42)

Being a "sleepy place", Leahampton is the exact opposite of wartime London. It is a coastal town with a number of hotels, and fishing is the inhabitants' primary pastime. War feels very distant for the time being, only being present on the newspapers and in people's discussions.

Finally, there is too a description of the town as the possible centre of enemy agents' operations. Tommy reflects over the reasons why it may or may not be it:

> 'Why Leahampton? Any reason? It's out of the mainstream – bit of a backwater. Conservative, old-fashioned. All those points make it desirable. Is there anything else?'
>
> There was a stretch of flat agricultural country behind it running inland. A lot of pasture. Suitable, therefore, for the landing of troop-carrying airplanes or of parachute troops. But that was true of many other places. There was also a big chemical works where, it might be noted, Carl von Deinim was employed. (*NM* 81)

The town and its surroundings are similar to those of many other towns and cities of coastal southern England, and there are not any other relevant landmarks if not for the chemical factory where Carl von Deinim works. Hardly a place to witness the eventual German invasion.

In *N or M?*, Christie deploys the basal scheme for the detective novel. At the beginning, a crime is committed, an "Accident case – but it wasn't' an accident" (*NM* 10) as Mr Grant puts it, that of secret agent Farquhar, who before his dying breath reveals the location at which N and M are hiding. Then the detective, in this case the duo of detectives, begins working and gathering information on each of the suspects, while occasionally summing up their discoveries and thoughts to each other and also to Mr Grant. Soon one of the spies appears to be Carl von Deinim, which then is proved to be wrong when the real enemy agent abducts Tommy and then threatens Tuppence. Having discovered both spies, they manage to neutralise them with the crucial assistance of two helpers, Mr Grant and Albert Batt. The full explanation is then placed at the end of the novel, where it is revealed how the final discovery was made. Thus, Christie has managed to write and recreate the standard detective novel scenario in a story set and about wartime England, in which the resolution of the detectives, who are undercover agents in this case, could determine the outcome of a battle in the Second World War's scenario.

An anecdote about this book deserves to be mentioned for his peculiarity. As *N or M?* had been published in the UK, the MI5 soon became concerned about the character of Major Bletchley whose name came to their attention. At that time, Christie was friends with Dilly Knox, who was working as a codebreaker at the secret location of Bletchley Park, where all attempts to break German Enigma machine cyphers were being made. As efforts in this location would be, and prove to be, vital to the outcome of the Second World War, maximum secrecy was to be needed, and any possible information leak could lead to disaster. The MI5 then launched an investigation to understand whether Christie actually had any knowledge about that place and what was happening within it. Her friend Knox agreed to ask her himself, even though he was almost certain she could not have possibly known anything about it. When asked about it, she reportedly responded with "Bletchley? My dear, I was stuck there on my way by train from Oxford to London and took revenge by giving the name to one of my least lovable characters." Once again proving her literary wits, MI5 was relieved to find this out, closing a curious and particular case over a fictional character's name (Norton-Taylor, 2013).

The novel that will be analysed shortly, that is Henry Green's *Caught*, is set approximately at the same time of Christie's novel, but in a completely different location, that of wartime London.

4. Experiencing the Blitz in *Caught* by Henry Green

4.1. A Witness of Blitzed London

Henry Green, pen name of Henry William Yorke, was born on 29 October 1905 in the town of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, England. Raised in an educated and business-successful family, he attended Oxford University although he never completed his studies altogether. During the 1930s, he lived with his wife Dig in a house in Rutland Gate, London, taking care of family business while also being involved in a few social and intellectual circles. As a writer, he authored an autobiography, *Pack My Bag: A Self-Portrait* (1940), and a total of nine novels, the first one being *Blindness* (1926), published when he was only 21 years of age (Lees-Milne, 1983, p. 387).

He was regarded as one of the most delicate novelists, admired in Europe and North America, especially in the 1930s, in consideration of his talent for extravagant wit and humour. Humour which would be reflected in and characterise all his novels, for its being amusing, fierce or even macabre, opposed to an ever-present gloomy lyrical feeling and an overall tenderness that contribute to make him one of the points of reference of the first half of the twentieth century. Since his very first novel, he was recognized for his ability to experiment in writing. This is the case of the 'rare image', which consisted in forging a style that catches the sensation of being intensely alive moment after moment (Pritchett, 1983, pp. 381). Moreover, being himself a self-confessed good listener, he cherished and admired the ordinary, moody human talk, especially that of the working class. He perceived this meaningless chatting as a form of unconscious poetry, a mosaic of repeated words, phrases, and sentences, an attempt to grope the way towards an exploration of the other and their intimacy, yet also towards self-protection. According to him, talk is part of human mystery, it is a type of music that is not sad or mournful, but rather strange, and which contributes to assert a character's pride. In creating his characters along these lines, he aimed at crafting their talk as a means for making them grow before the readers' eyes, without any interference from the author himself. As a matter of fact, he soon realised every person is a story-telling animal, repeatedly telling stories to each other and thus close to turning themselves to actual myths. This writing

style comes close to making his novels appear as theatre plays, such as the cases of *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952) (Pritchett, 1983, pp. 381-382).

The years of the Second World War are the most productive of Green's literary career, having published three novels, *Caught* (1943), *Loving* (1945), and *Back* (1946), his only three short stories and his sole critical essay, on his stylistic idol C. M. Doughty. These years were also the most emotionally charged of his life, when as an Auxiliary Fire Service warden he would regularly deal and battle with heat, smoke, high-pressure hoses, and most of all the terrifying air raids of the Blitz on London. While also directing his family business on his off-duty hours, it is perhaps a surprise that he managed to, or was impelled to, write all those works. It certainly was a surprise for Green himself, who could not have anticipated this literary development, especially when examining his memoir *Pack My Bag*. It became clear, between 1938 and 1939, that a total war with Nazi Germany was ultimately inevitable, so he began writing his autobiography, which he wrote at a time when it was widely believed, among British officials and their circles, that aerial bombings would cause as much as 175,000 deaths in London exclusively during the first day of air raids (Brunetta, 1992, p. 114). This predicted annihilation made him think that life as he knew it was about to come to an end. With war drawing closer, as Green himself explained in the memoir, it soon occupied more and more space in his thoughts: "Surely it would be too much to pretend one had a chance to live. […] we should be taking stock"[13] . The coming of the war made him think he would not be able to survive it, as it was an unrelenting concern that led him to look for the causes of such deadly conflict, brilliantly unravelling them in the autobiography. First, he found that Britain had raised its ruling classes through institutional doctrines which, when compared to the Nazi's state doctrines, were not too different. He also felt that in Britain's case there were too many dissimilarities between the social classes, contributing to an ever more divided society. Green learned about these concepts as he frequently came into contact, on his family business's factory floors, with people coming from various social classes, especially the working-class. He ultimately felt each class knew nothing about the other classes' lives. What is more, surprisingly, it is how irrelevant a role he believed Nazism played in what seemed the end of life as they knew it. Despite not attributing Britain's governments and people any sins or omissions in the years leading to the War, he believed

[13] Henry Green, *Pack My Bag*, London, 1940, p. 5.

his country and civilization had earned and deserved its imminent destruction, as every event in Britain's recent past had pushed it towards the impending crisis. This ought not to make his political position ambiguous since he still believed Nazism had to be eradicated and defeated, although he did not know what a British victory would mean. Still, in *Pack My Bag*, this image of calm, yet dreadful ambivalence pervades the whole book, symbolising Green's thoughts on the upcoming deadly war (Brunetta, 1992, pp. 114-115).

By carefully analysing Green's novels, the handling of time in their structures and in the characters' lives, one can see how he perceived time, to him an absurd element of life. Notably in *Caught*, but also in novels such as *Living*, *Nothing* and *Doting*, the narration is constructed in a way that sends the reader back and forth between different groups of character and periods of time, until it eventually is all part of the present, the novel itself. Furthermore, his carelessness towards time in general is visible in the little importance he accords to the realistic settings and events in his works. In his wartime novels, particularly in *Caught*, he is not interested in showing the landscape in which the story unfolds, with its more or less relevant historical events. Instead, he registers the characters and the effects the surrounding world has on them, placing little importance in man's ability to distinguish time and space and thus his perception of reality. This obscuring of historical events and of elements which provide a chronological, if not at least objective and known, order to the story, at times confuses the reader, seemingly leaving the novel without an actual plot. As facts and events are lacking, constructing a plot becomes a hard task. However, in Green's novels it is the dialogues that provide a backbone, a structure on which the stories develop, often suggesting the image of a circle which, at the end of the narration, brings the characters back at the beginning. For instance, in *Doting* the narration ends with: "the next day they all went on very much the same."[14] Time passes, but people do not change (Brothers, 1977, pp. 863-864-865). What is more, Green parodies the standardised novel's ending revelation through memory. In his stories, he creates a discrepancy between what the character remembers and what took place, with characters continually misremembering and attaching the wrong meanings to the images, facts and experiences they recall. Being an automatism for the characters, this distorted memory provokes hilarity in the reader. Doing so, Green comically brings

[14] Henry Green, *Doting*, London: Hogarth Press, 1952, p. 252.

memory to a dead end, leaving an illusive past which can never be grasped again. The times when characters, in his novels, seek in the past a meaning to interpret and grasp the present reality, they are left hanging and waiting for something that will never come. This is the case, for instance, of Richard Roe and another fellow fireman in *Caught*, who is holding the hose and is ready to extinguish the fires, but not realizing the water pump had been cut off "They had simply driven the pump off, abandoned him"[15]. As this brief quote explains, one's only hope is to commit himself solely to the present, to its demands, where he can finally reunite with the story and the natural flowing of time. At the end of the novel, experiencing an air raid frees him from the thoughts, evocations and sentimental esteem of the past, tying him to a new and destructive present. He is no longer caught in the past (Brothers, 1977, pp. 867, 869).

Before thoroughly analysing Henry Green's *Caught*, a brief introduction to the literary scene and main movement of the period before the Second World War is necessary in order to have a full picture of the time in mind. Green's novel is placed right at the concluding edge of canonical literary modernism. What is important about late modernism is its enduring connection with travel and mobility in general, the outcome of a series of ground-breaking new technological developments like the airplane, the motorcar, or the telegram. For modernist scholars such as Raymond Williams and James McFarlane, these were the new means through which bodies, but also ideas, could move and travel at never-seen-before speeds, having a decisive effect on the imagination of spaces. Moreover, the concept of movement and travel is also linked to the phenomenon of expatriate writers in the Anglophone modernist canon, which had been a central characteristic of modernism for decades. Therefore, modernism was the artistic tendency that had no frontiers, the result of an endless displacement of bodies and ideas. But once the Second World War came, movement for both entities became harder than ever, completely changing both literary and spatial horizons. This difference then became ever more pronounced, as the 1930s were characterised by a particularly travel-minded mentality, when journeys were seen as the opportunity to explore the world mainly for political scrutiny. Examples of this are the travels of W.H. Auden to Spain, of Christopher Isherwood to Berlin and China together with Auden. There were many English novelists

[15] Henry Green, *Caught*, New York, Review Classic, 1943, p. 183; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*Caught* 183).

who, since the 1920s, left their country to travel in other more or less known places in the world, a sort of diaspora that had as its final goal to witness war first-hand (Mackay, 2009, pp. 1600-1601).

But by 1939, there was no need and possibility to travel outside Britain to encounter war. Literary representations of the period produced a corpus of works characterised by textual reproductions of the confusion and disorientation of war, resulting utterly different when compared to the literary modernism of the 1920s. At that time, London was the place of an expansive and expressive possibility of movement, liberation, and where crowds of people were viewed as an opportunity. In wartime London the same crowds would assume a completely different meaning, being at that point seen as endangering and sinister. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) provides the perfect example in order to better understand this concept. In this novel, there is a "strange high singing of some airplane overhead"[16], which in the 1920s would attract a great number of individuals to observe and interpret the planes' movements. On the other hand, in wartime London a gathering of airplanes would be the utmost dangerous thing to the same individuals. Late modernist, wartime London is no longer the site of individual liberations, but an apocalyptic place, the city where anonymous and collective death would become an everyday reality once the air raids had begun. It is important to note how the anticipated death toll of the upcoming German air raids on Britain came nowhere to be equalled, as in the whole duration of the war a total of 60,000 British civilians was killed. As much as a tragedy this number of deaths proves to be, it is still far from the interwar perception of what aerial bombings would produce on urban civilian life. With varied numbers concerning the possible death toll, they were still incredibly magnified expectations of the kind of disaster people expected to come from the skies (Mackay, 2009, pp. 1602, 1604).

In Henry Green's *Party Going* (1939) it is possible to find this threat to the urban masses. This novel is about people who, despite their social and economic advantages, are not immune to the prevailing condition of entrapment that was more and more common before the war. In it runs an intense sense of foreboding, obscure and inevitable, created by an accumulation of people in a train station where a group of young wealthy folks cannot leave due to the sudden descent of fog. For these protagonists, being forced

[16] Virginia Woolf (1925), *Mrs Dalloway*, New York: Harcourt, 2005, p. 4.

to stay together with a large group of people becomes a dreadful and inexplicable experience, while the fears of something bad that could happen at any moment become ever more vivid (Mackay, 2009, p. 1603).

In *Caught*, this fear of something bad happening becomes reality as the Blitz, after months of waiting and of boredom since the outbreak of the war, ultimately hit London.

4.2. *Caught*: A First-Hand Account of the Blitz

Set right after the outbreak of the Second World War, *Caught* partially reflects Henry Green's own experience of that time. The protagonist, Richard Roe, volunteers in the Auxiliary Fire Service in anticipation of the air raids that would cause havoc and destruction in the city of London, while his wife Dy and his son Christopher remain at their country estate, far from the threatened city. Roe serves under Pye, the professional fireman whose insane sister once abducted Christopher, developing a difficult relationship complicated by this terrible episode. The novel follows the various members of the fire brigade as they spend their time in the uncertain, boring period of the Phoney War, since war has broken out, but no battles have yet occurred. The story ends with Roe back in the country estate for being injured in one of the first air raids, as he vividly describes his experience of the apocalyptic scenario in which he and his companions were caught.

Even before the novel itself begins, in the preface, the reader is advised by the author of what to expect in the book: "[…] In this book only 1940 London is real. It is the effect of that time that I have written into the fiction of *Caught*." (*Caught* preface) This declaration by Green hides the hardships he found in representing that landscape in his novel, the Phoney wartime London, which is difficult to locate and define precisely, accompanied by its imaginary, yet real-time inhabitants and the overall reality of the time into a work of fiction. This is particularly true in the representation of the firemen, fictionalised as though to represent the image of them that people have in mind, a caricature or simplification that has been distorted in order to fit the odd and deviating context of the Phoney War (Mardell, 2017, pp. 49).

Like everyone else in Britain and Europe, Green was surprised by the non-action of the Phoney War, the anticlimactic months after the declaration of war and before the

beginning of the hostilities on the field and in the air. As already stated earlier, he volunteered in the Auxiliary Fire Service in 1938, thinking he would spend most if not every night of the war battling fires and bombs that would fall on London. Instead, like all London citizens, he was caught in the limbo of the Phoney War, with the black-out in effect, the evacuation of thousands of women and children, the rationing of food and gasoline and other restrictions. As Hitler's army started threatening western Europe and Britain in the spring of 1940, Green began writing this novel which he would finish two years later after the main raids of the Blitz, on Christmas 1942. Like many other English novelists, Green saw the months of the Phoney War as an extraordinary time when very subtle and disturbing emotions characterised everyone's lives, resulting very distant from the clear opposition of night and day in the period of the Blitz. Like the author himself, *Caught*'s Richard Roe is unsettled by the contrasting, unfamiliar, strange surroundings and people of the AFS mobilization. Thus, the narration starts a few months later, in December 1939. This is when Roe, on leave from duty, sees his son for the first time since the summer, a moment when he realizes what war and death may cost to him (Brunetta, 1992, pp. 115-116).

There are several instances, during the narration, which describe the Phoney War and its effects on the characters' lives. For example, the firemen, who expected to always be in the midst of action, instead found themselves far from it:

> After the first excitement of the war had died down, as soon as it did when there were no raids, the fun and games started.
>
> The moment they opened, work was dropped. Everyone who could afford it went over to the local. (*Caught* 45)

As war has not yet come, and its exciting action with it, the firemen experience days and then weeks of boredom. Thus they recur to spending their nights in the "local", a night club, the only moments of excitement they can go through.

Nevertheless, the narrator, having endured the consequent air raids, pictures what the firemen would next experience after this period of non-action:

> But on those first evenings there was not one Auxiliary, fresh to the black-out, who could foresee the white flicker, then the red glow which spread and, close to, the greedy extravagance of fire which would be bombed and bombed and bombed again to increase the moth's suicide it was for firemen. (*Caught* 46)

This is a short, but intense, poetic description of the bomb-induced fires the firemen would soon have to fight, whose image the reader can glimpse thanks to stylistic choices like the repetition of the word "bombed". Almost assuming the form of an echo, of bombs continuously falling from the sky, it manages to capture one of the most terrifying aspects of an air raid.

During the nights of the months preceding the Blitz, the situation of uncertainty about their future was endured by several young ladies as well. Particularly when meeting men who could die as soon as the war came to Britain:

> This was a time when girls, taken out to night clubs by men in uniform, if he was a pilot she died in his arms that would soon, so she thought, be dead. In the hard idiom of the drum these women seemed already given up to the male in uniform so soon to go away, these girls, as they felt, soon to be killed themselves, so little time left, moth deathly gay, in a daze of giving. (*Caught* 46)

The thought of death is ever-present, and the uniforms would remind every girl of the possibility that any man, in the close future, could be as dead as a moth too close to the fire; a "moth's suicide", as referred to in the previous citation. When writing about a "pilot […] that would soon, so she thought, be dead", Green makes a reference to the Battle of Britain, during which pilots of the Royal Air Force would clash against those of the German Luftwaffe. It was a battle fought in the skies of Britain, won by the RAF, but which saw a high number of casualties on both sides. Later in the novel, the narrator comes back to the last citation's topic, picturing exactly those final moments before men would depart for war:

> In night clubs, it has been described, or wherever the young danced, couples passed the last goodbye hours abandoned to each other and, so Richard felt, when these girls were left behind alone as train after train went loaded with men to fight, the pretty creatures must be hunting for more farewells. […] he saw them hungrily seeking another man, oh they were sorry for men and they pitied themselves, for yet another man with whom they could spend last hours, to whom they could murmur darling, darling, darling it will be you always; the phrase till death do us part being, for them, the short ride next morning to a railway station; the active death, for them, to be left alone on a platform; the I-have-given-all-before-we-die, their dying breath. (*Caught* 61)

Each of these girls, waving goodbye and spending a few hours with the departing soldiers, saw in each of those men their own husbands, trying to compensate a loss they had all already suffered. These short encounters were felt as though they were authentic marriages, trying to create memories which would cancel their traumatic past memoirs.

In the novel, male characters are often together with the opposite sex, entangled in sexual encounters because, as the narrator says about one of Pye's lovers, Prudence: "War, she thought, was sex." (*Caught* 114) This idea was first theorised by famous neurologist Sigmund Freud, in relation to the theory of traumatic neurosis during World War One, which links war-related trauma and anxiety to a more or less dangerous sexual charge. For the central male characters of the novel, Roe and Pye, the effects of the months of the Phoney War are reflected in their recurring experiencing of traumatic past memories. For Roe, the death of his wife and the abduction of his son; for Pye, memories of incest. These evocations of the past are vividly described in the present of the novel, persistently bringing up images that affect the characters' view of the uneasy present they are going through, and the horrors of the Blitz they would soon witness. These images, especially in Roe's recollections of moments with his deceased wife, are always saturated by sexual elements. Even more in Pye's case, as the remembrance of the incestuous act haunts him throughout the story, also being constantly reminded by his sister's difficult mental condition. But the overall erotic charge that is found in the novel is to be attributed to an intense build-up of colour words in the two descriptions of the Blitz. Both accounts of it are similarly pictured as vivid rosy colour-fields, like Roe's description of the burning London docks: "a broken, torn-up dark mosaic aglow with rose" (*Caught* 176). As he describes his ordeal of blitzed London to Dy, he uses the colour rose to portray the numerous images of the fires and the bombed buildings that he reminisces (Stonebridge, 1998, pp. 25-26, 29). It is also worth noting how Green's own partial deafness is reflected on the novel's protagonist, confirmed by Roe's own words about the first bombing: "But when it did come there was hardly any noise at all" (*Caught* 173). As a matter of fact, it was expected by the general public that when the air raids finally came, they were exceptionally noisy, as most literary representations and witness accounts confirmed. This may be an explanation to Roe's choice to describe his air raid experience through visual images rather than through his hearing sense. Colours, as already stated, abound in the course of the novel, but there is an out-and-out chromatic explosion as soon as the first bombs start falling on *Caught*'s London, to a point where they result too numerous, in a few of the scenes that are being described. This makes it hard for the reader to imagine them in its mind, as in the following extract: "[…] the black, green, then mushroom skin river water" (*Caught* 177) (Ferguson, 2009, pp. 108, 110-111). Overall, it is not the Blitz

only that assumes this image of the colours' spectrum, mainly the rose-tinted ones, but the whole novel itself. Thus Green, like many other novelists have done, builds the images of past traumatic experiences with the use of chromatic forms.

The final chapter of the novel is set in Roe's country estate, with him having been sent away from duty after a bomb had come too close to him during an air raid. What affected him the most were not wounds or pain, but something called nervous debility. A short passage in the novel describes his condition:

> For a few mornings he could still taste the sour debris when he bit his nails. It made him shake. When he blew out a match he got the stench again. Until, after three days, he began to come out of it, although he was worse than he realised. (*Caught* 168)

Having fought bombs and fires during the night for over nine weeks, he experiences traumatic response through usually harmless deeds. The tasting the debris while biting his nails and the smelling the stench are triggering his senses, which bring him back to those terrifying nights characterised by these peculiar details. Notwithstanding the fact that after three days he, for the most part, overcomes this traumatic response, he would always associate those sensorial feelings to his experience of the Blitz. Experience of the Blitz which he recounts to Dy, starting from the first night of bombing after months of waiting:

> "… but when at last we drove through the Dock", he continued, taken up by his urge to explain, "there was not one officer to report to, no one to give orders, we simply drove on up a road towards what seemed to be our blaze. Of course it was half daylight in the glare reflected from the pall of smoke, but we couldn't see our fire, there was a line of sheds three hundred yards in front."
>
> As he gave this inadequate description he was avidly living that moment again. It had been an unwilling ride to a great destruction.
>
> (He was cold as they churned along in the taxi, which was boiling over from the distance it had been driven towing the heavy pump. Part of the steering wheel shone blood red from the sky. The air caught at his wind passage as though briars and their red roses were being dragged up from his lungs, The acrid air was warm, yet he was cold.) (*Caught* 174)

Reminiscing that night is an intense feeling for Roe, living those moments once again as if he was still there, fighting fires and destruction. Nevertheless, he cannot give an adequate description of what happened, and the narrator steps in to complete the explanation. Notably, it is possible to see how this description is accompanied using colour words, giving it a more intense tone.

As he continues his recollection of the first night to Dy, he explains the feelings of being suddenly thrown into war:

> "But what a night. Think of the way we'd waited a whole year behind those windows, then suddenly to be pitchforked into chaos. We used to think we'd get some directions. Instead we had about eight acres of flames and sixty pumps with the crews in a line pouring water on, when the bombing did not drive them off. And, because of the size of the whole thing, doing practically no good at all. And no orders whatever."
>
> […] "In some fantastic way I'm sure you only get in war, we were suddenly alone and forced to rely on one another entirely. And that after twelve months' bickering. Each crew was thrown upon itself, on its own resources, The only thing to do was to keep together." (*Caught* 178)

The beginning of the air raids is so sudden that the existing firemen's hierarchy has apparently dissolved, plunging every one of them into the chaos caused by the bombs. Each unit is on its own, having to deal with the fires they have been assigned to douse. Every expectation from the preceding months has been completely contradicted, catapulting every man in a hell they have to subdue.

Moreover, Roe looks back at the whole period of firefighting and goes on to reveal how hard it is to reorganize one's memories of those nights, which feel like a film to him:

> "The extraordinary thing is," he said, "that one's imagination is so literary. What will go on up there tonight in London, every night, is more like a film, or that's what it seems like at the time. Then afterwards, when you go over it, everything seems unreal, probably because you were so tired, as you begin building again to describe to yourself some experience you had. It's so difficult." (*Caught* 170)

Such tremendous, traumatic and horrifying were those nights of air raids, that a person's mind struggles to picture a clear image of them. As it all seems to be "unreal", it is difficult to even trust one's own memories of those nights, becoming like a piece of fiction to watch on a big screen. Therefore, in order to have a complete recollection of what happened, one has to go all over those pictures once again, making the whole experience even harder and daunting.

What is notable in these descriptions of the first night of air raids is the author's will to not portray any scene of spiritual triumph. Indeed the firemen are depicted neither as cowards, nor as heroes, the few of them who are killed are far from the narrator's point of view, and there are no thrilling rescues or a man's last words before death. The description consists simply of what is happening. But as Roe says in the book's last chapter, "[…] there's always something you can't describe" (*Caught* 175). As a matter of fact, Green represents the facts as they happened, without a resolving parable that is

typical of, for instance, most films that portray the war in Britain. These would in fact almost always settle on the myth of 'Britain's finest hour', as in *Mrs. Miniver*, or on the resolution and bravery of the British people, as in *Hope and Glory*. In *Caught*¸ there are the embodiments of many powerful and indescribable emotions, reaching a point where any war-story formula or fable would not be fit to the story. Green remains off course from using such canons, creating a novel that goes against the 'Britain's finest hour' myth, but at the same time he does not forge an anti-British story. His novel has several elements, like the gentle humour, the affection for the characters, and the new experiences that Britain is going through that confirm its complete political neutrality (Brunetta, 1992, p. 123).

Thus, in *Caught* Green has managed to portray the experience of an air raid of the Blitz like, perhaps, none other. With its intense chromatic descriptions and the depiction of the effects that bombs leave on those that experience their aftermath night by night, the novel stands as a pillar in the British home-front literature of World War Two.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have shown the different and peculiar ways through which authors like Elizabeth Bowen, Agatha Christie and Henry Green have created works of fiction that are set during the Blitz. Their works contain representations of war within Britain while it was fighting for its own existence, thus being characterised by an atmosphere of uncertainty and fears of an invasion by the enemy that would be reflected on the characters' traits.

By better understanding the historical context in the first chapter, I outlined the circumstances through which the British people had to live, especially those in big cities like London. As soon after the Dunkirk evacuation in June 1940, an immense effort was made in order to organise and prepare the country's defences for the upcoming air raids and land invasion. Just like the soldiers fighting the enemy on a battlefield, ordinary people were on the first line of battles too, in a total war which would not spare anyone from its atrocities. Afterwards, I focused on the literary reactions to the coming of the Second World War and the Blitz on Britain, analysing how, having focused mostly on the home front, it represented and showed an image completely different to that of the time. As a matter of fact, while the wartime period in Britain came to be defined by the images of the people's stoical resistance and social solidarity, the literature of the Blitz goes on the opposite direction, aiming to mock this portrayal and focusing rather on the egoism and carelessness of the people. Furthermore, I explained how the Blitz, the air raids and the bombs manage to uncover what had always been there, those sentiments, thoughts and ideas that only an impressive annihilation could have ever revealed. This is the case of works like, for instance, Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*. The Blitz, as brilliantly depicted by a number of writers, created an image of London characterised by ruins, bombed out houses and buildings, but most of all by a sense of fear, insecurity and of a blurring of boundaries, which would foreground the development of stories that are set in this environment.

Next I examined in depth the first of the three novels on which this dissertation focuses, that is Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. Taking into consideration her mixed Anglo-Irish heritage, that of Bowen is a rather peculiar case of allegiance to two different countries. Her representations of war are visible in her novels but also in her collection

of short stories, where she made use of several rhetorical and stylistic strategies in order to represent the radical change that the Second World War brought on both the public and private spheres. Her works are not characterised by common war-related images like dead bodies, ruins or falling bombs, but rather by tense social encounters and the sombre landscapes in which they develop. *The Heat of the Day* falls in this categorisation too, but this is like no other Bowen novel. Here, the uncanny is predominant, the fear of the other is ever-present and, although set after the major air raids of the Blitz, there are still strong and constant reminders of the dangers of war. There is a vivid blurring of boundaries, a place where people and places begin overlapping one another, and a peculiar animism of material objects, which overall help creating the landscape on which this wartime noir develops. It is a story of loyalty, neutrality, and fears, where the dark and uneasy setting of wartime London, reflected by Bowen's hard and intense writing style, is as much a protagonist as Stella is.

In Agatha Christie's *N or M?* there is a different setting, as it does not take place in the urban landscape of London, but in a seaside town on the southern coast of England, more precisely in a boarding house. Nevertheless, this novel contains another primary element in the context of World War Two, that is the Fifth Column. The 'enemy within', as I explained it, was made up of external spies sent by the enemy or of British nationals who turned their back to their country, and this is exactly the element on which Christie structured her novel. It is a detective novel, the genre that made the author a successful and worldwide known writer, that she adapted to the context of the war – indeed, it is the only one by Christie that is set during the conflict. The presence in the boarding house of two unknown spies, a German national, retired military officers, news about real World War Two events, and the overall sense of conducting a crucial operation in the war scenario are what make this novel so closely tied to the setting of the Blitz. The final resolution, the two German spies being caught and neutralised by the couple of middle-class secret agents, provided a model that readers of the time enjoyed, a good ending on a story about the Fifth Column as it was felt as one of the scariest elements in wartime England. A sensitive topic for the time, as it was published when the outcome of the war was still uncertain, that only an egregious novelist like Agatha Christie could treat in such a tense and pleasing novel.

Moving on to Henry Green and his wartime novel *Caught*, I showed how his own experience of the Second World War is partially reflected in it. First, by portraying the months of the Phoney War, a sort of limbo in which Britain was officially at war but no battles were being fought. He recreated the same atmosphere in his fictional London, with the firemen who are busy fighting boredom rather than blazes, and the subtle and disturbing sentiments that characterised all those caught up in that period of uncertainty. Green's experience as an AFS warden undoubtedly helped him catch more of the emotional side of the Blitz, as he based the protagonist of his book on his own war experience. The most powerful passage of the novel, in my opinion, is in the last chapter: an incredibly intense, colourful, neutral and straightforward representation of an air raid on London, in which Green uses all of his stylistic abilities to recreate a setting where the reader feels to be fighting fires together with the protagonist. All of this while also perfectly portraying the effects the Blitz has on a person's mind, being such a traumatic experience that one cannot clearly remember something that he or she witnessed a few nights before. Truly one of the best pieces of literary work of the Blitz.

To conclude, I have demonstrated how three substantially different English novelists portrayed the Blitz and the Second World War in Britain in their books. In my view, all of them can be taken as perfect examples of representations of the mentality and feelings that were widely felt by those years' people, as they also represent the sombre and uncertain urban landscape of wartime London in a way that few other writers have managed to do. Although not entirely realistic, as their novels do not contain perhaps the most characteristic element of those years' legacy, that is the British people stoicism and social solidarity, the three novelists, Bowen and Green particularly, stand as central figures in the literary scene of World War Two.

References

Primary

Bowen E., *The Heat of the Day*, United Kingdom, Vintage Classics, 1948.

Christie A., *N or M?*, United Kingdom, HarperCollins, 1941.

Green H., *Caught*, New York, Review Classic, 1943.

Secondary

Acocella J., "Queen of Crime", *The New Yorker*, August 16 & 23, 2010 issue.

Beebe M., "Introduction: What Modernism Was", *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 3, No. 5, From Modernism to Post-Modernism (July 1974), pp. 1065-1084.

Bell A., "Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 153-175.

Benn J.R. (11 September 2019), *The Crime Novels of WWII*, in crimereads.com.

Brothers B.H., "Henry Green: Time and the Absurd", *boundary 2*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring, 1977), pp. 863-876.

Brunetta L., "England's Finest Hour: And Henry Green's *Caught*", *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (Winter, 1992), pp. 112-123.

Darwood N., "Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973)", *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, No. 16 (November 2020), pp. 86-95.

DeCoste D.M., "The Literary Response to the Second World War", in Shaffer B.W. (edited by), *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945–2000*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005, pp. 3-18.

Ferguson R., "Blind Noise and Deaf Visions: Henry Green's *Caught*, Synaesthesia and the Blitz", *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 2009), pp. 102-116.

Field G., "Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940–1941", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 62, Class and Catastrophe: September 11 and Other Working-Class Disasters (Fall, 2002), pp. 11-49.

Lees-Milne J., "Henry Yorke and Henry Green", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Henry Green (Winter, 1983), pp. 387-392.

Mackay M. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War 2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Mackay M., “"Is Your Journey Really Necessary?": Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 124, No. 5, Special Topic: War (October 2009), pp. 1600-1613.

Mackay R., *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003.

Mardell O., “A Real Phoney: Wartime London in Henry Green's *Caught*”, *The Literary London Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Autumn 2017), pp. 48-65.

McLoughlin K. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Medoff J., ““There is no Elsewhere”: Elizabeth Bowen’s Perceptions of War”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Special issue: modern war fiction (Spring 1984), pp. 73-81.

Miller K.A., “"Even a Shelter's Not Safe": The Blitz on Homes in Elizabeth Bowen's Wartime Writing”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 138-158.

Nagashima S., “Reading Neutrality and Disloyalty in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*”, *Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 27 (2012), pp. 5-10.

Norton-Taylor R. (4 February 2013), “Agatha Christie Was Investigated by MI5 over Bletchley Park Mystery”, in theguardian.com.

Osborn S., “Introduction Elizabeth Bowen: New Directions for Critical Thinking”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2, Elizabeth Bowen Special Issue (Summer 2007), pp. 225-237.

Philpot R. (17 September 2018), “The Men and Women who Plotted to Stab Britain in the Back during WWII”, in timesofisrael.com.

Pritchett V.S., “Henry Yorke, Henry Green”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Henry Green (Winter, 1983), pp. 381-383.

Prysor G., “The 'Fifth Column' and the British Experience of Retreat, 1940”, in *War in History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (November 2005), pp. 418-447.

Stonebridge L., “Bombs and Roses: The Writing of Anxiety in Henry Green's *Caught”*, *Diacritics*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 25-43.

Tate T., *Hitler’s Secret Traitors: The Secret History of Spies, Saboteurs and Fifth Columnists*, New York, Icon Books Ltd., 2018.

Teekell A., “Elizabeth Bowen and Language at War”, *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 2011), pp. 61-79.

Thorpe V. (21 October 2018), “How Agatha Christie’s wartime nursing role gave her a lifelong taste for poison”, in theguardian.com.

Zimmermann E., “A ‘tottering Lace-like Architecture of Ruins’: the Wartime Home in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*”, *Literary Geographies*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 42-61.

Summary in Italian

La presente tesi si pone come obiettivo l'analisi dei modi in cui il Blitz viene rappresentato in tre romanzi pubblicati da altrettanti autori britannici durante la Seconda guerra mondiale. Le opere a riguardo sono *The Heat of the Day* (1948) di Elizabeth Bowen, *N or M?* (1941) di Agatha Christie e *Caught* (1943) di Henry Green. Previa introduzione del contesto storico su cui questi romanzi basano le proprie storie, sono quindi analizzate le strategie stilistiche e retoriche utilizzate dai tre scrittori per rappresentare l'avvento della guerra sul Regno Unito, particolarmente del Blitz su Londra.

Nel primo capitolo viene dunque spiegato nel dettaglio lo svolgimento della guerra fino al mese di settembre del 1940, momento in cui gli aerei della Luftwaffe cominciarono il bombardamento notturno su Londra ed altre grandi città del paese come ad esempio Coventry, Birmingham, Manchester e Sheffield. Un punto di riferimento è l'evacuazione di Dunkerque, avvenuta tra fine maggio e inizio giugno del 1940, ovvero la ritirata del massiccio corpo di spedizione britannico in Francia e Belgio a seguito di un accerchiamento compiuto dall'esercito della Germania nazista. Nonostante il successo dell'evacuazione, che permise ad oltre duecentomila soldati britannici e centomila soldati francesi di attraversare la Manica, ci fu il bisogno di dover completamente riorganizzare le difese sia civili che militari del paese, in quanto c'era la certezza che presto ci sarebbe stata l'invasione da parte del nemico. In previsione dei bombardamenti aerei, che già da qualche anno erano attesi dalla popolazione civile, furono costruiti dei rifugi antiaerei sia privati, nei giardini delle case, oppure pubblici adattando o i seminterrati di alcuni palazzi o le stazioni della metropolitana, come nel caso di quella di Londra. I bombardamenti arrivarono a partire dal 7 settembre 1940 e contribuirono, insieme a preesistenti misure di restrizione come l'oscuramento notturno, a cambiare completamente l'immagine della capitale, trasformandola in un ambiente cupo e riempito di macerie in cui i cittadini erano effettivamente al centro della battaglia così come i soldati. Regnava inoltre una paura di spie e sabotatori nemici, i quali avrebbero dovuto assistere la Germania nazista nel caso di un'invasione.

Ho quindi analizzato la situazione letteraria e le reazioni di vari scrittori all'avvento del Blitz, notando come, a differenza di quelle relative alla Prima guerra

mondiale, le opere del periodo si concentrano quasi esclusivamente sulla guerra e le sue conseguenze nel paese, non sulle effettive battaglie militari. La letteratura del periodo è infatti contraddistinta da elementi come l'oscuramento, le spie, le evacuazioni, i bombardamenti e i razionamenti, da ambientazioni come Londra o cittadine costiere, e da un costante presenza di personaggi ed eventi che inquadrano il fronte interno, non i soldati e i campi di battaglia. Le opere di questo momento storico non si focalizzano sull'elemento probabilmente più conosciuto del periodo, ovvero il mito dello stoicismo e della solidarietà sociale del popolo britannico. Al contrario, esse rappresentano delle immagini del fronte interno caratterizzato da elementi come l'egoismo e l'insubordinazione dei personaggi, una sorta di riflesso stesso del nemico che dovrebbero combattere. Invece, in opere come, ad esempio, il romanzo *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) di Graham Greene e il racconto breve *The Demon Lover* (1945) di Elizabeth Bowen, è presente una rappresentazione di Londra in cui elementi come le rovine, gli edifici bombardati e un'atmosfera cupa fanno da sfondo allo svolgimento delle opere, dove i confini tra sfera pubblica e privata, tra passato e presente, tra verità e finzione si assottigliano sempre di più.

Passando al secondo capitolo, viene fatto un approfondimento dell'opera di Elizabeth Bowen, ovvero *The Heat of the Day*. La protagonista della storia, Stella, scopre dall'agente segreto Harrison che il suo amante Robert vende informazioni al nemico, la cui immunità sarà garantita se lei si concede all'agente Harrison. La trama principale si sviluppa lungo questo filo, in cui Stella non riesce a decidere verso chi essere leale, il suo amante o il suo paese, trattandosi quindi di una storia di spionaggio e tradimento in cui il concetto di neutralità è messo a dura prova. Non è infatti casuale l'inserimento nel romanzo di un paese neutrale come la Repubblica d'Irlanda, patria dell'autrice, accompagnata da elementi autobiografici come la tenuta di campagna ereditata dal figlio di Stella, molto simile alla vera tenuta di Bowen stessa nella contea di Cork. Il romanzo in questione è ambientato a Londra a partire dal settembre del 1942, e si tratta di un giallo che rispecchia molto l'ambientazione della Londra di *The Ministry of Fear* e di *The Demon Lover*, ovvero un paesaggio urbano caratterizzato da paure, oscurità ed egoismo. In linea con le altre opere di Bowen, in questo romanzo ha un ruolo primario la presenza del misterioso, dell'inspiegabile, che si manifesta attraverso l'assottigliamento dei confini nella sfera sociale. Tutto ciò nasce dai bombardamenti aerei e dalle bombe, ma soprattutto

dagli effetti che le rovine nelle strade hanno sulla psiche dei personaggi: un'esperienza totalmente disorientante che altera la visione del mondo e dei suoi concetti. Non mancano inoltre riferimenti a battaglie della guerra, come la Seconda battaglia di El Alamein, che permettono di inquadrare precisamente il romanzo nel contesto storico del conflitto.

Successivamente, sono passato al romanzo *N or M?* di Agatha Christie, in cui cambia completamente l'ambientazione rispetto all'opera precedente. Questo è infatti ambientato in una pensione locata in una cittadina sulla costa meridionale inglese, dove una coppia di agenti segreti è chiamata a scovare due spie che lavorano per la Germania nazista, di cui conoscono solo gli acronimi, appunto N ed M. Si tratta di un romanzo giallo tipico dello stile di Christie, in cui si ripete a grandi linee la stessa formula che utilizza nei suoi altri romanzi: l'inizio della storia con un crimine che viene commesso, l'omicidio, le indagini da parte del o dei detective, una serie di colpi di scena, e la risoluzione finale. Tutto ciò, differentemente dal resto delle sue opere, ambientato nel contesto della Seconda guerra mondiale, in cui spicca la presenza dell'elemento della quinta colonna. Per quinta colonna si intende un gruppo o organizzazione di persone che, insieme o in solitaria, lavorano segretamente per aiutare il nemico da dentro il proprio paese. Nonostante non sia stato un fenomeno molto diffuso nel Regno Unito durante la guerra (infatti circa 70 persone sono state arrestate con l'accusa di aiutare la Germania nazista) ha avuto un forte impatto mediatico e nella popolazione, diventando un soggetto conosciuto e temuto nel paese. L'opera di Christie, vista l'appartenenza al ceto medio dei due protagonisti e della risoluzione finale a favore di essi, ebbe un discreto successo in quanto, trattandosi di un argomento delicato dato il periodo in cui l'esito della guerra appariva ancora incerto, forniva un modello che ai lettori del tempo piacque molto.

Nel quarto e ultimo capitolo c'è infine l'analisi del romanzo di Henry Green, ovvero *Caught*. L'opera segue le vicende del pompiere ausiliare Richard Roe, la cui mansione è di affiancare i pompieri regolari nel momento in cui bombe e incendi conseguenti avrebbero colpito Londra. Il suo capo è il fratello della donna che ha sequestrato il figlio piccolo del protagonista poco tempo prima l'inizio del racconto, e il libro segue l'evoluzione del loro complicato rapporto oltre a quello di tutti i pompieri in questo periodo di noia e attesa. L'opera si chiude con il protagonista, nella sua casa di campagna, che racconta delle terrificanti notti passate a combattere gli incendi causati dai primi bombardamenti sulla città. Così come nel libro di Bowen, anche in questo

l'ambientazione torna ad essere nella Londra in piena guerra, nonostante il racconto cominci nel dicembre del 1939, ben prima l'inizio dei massicci bombardamenti. Si tratta di un periodo del conflitto molto strano e frustrante per certi versi, in quanto la guerra alla Germania nazista è stata dichiarata ma non sono ancora state combattute delle vere battaglie, per le quali si dovrà aspettare la primavera del 1940. Nonostante ciò, rimangono tutte le restrizioni previste come l'oscuramento, il razionamento di cibo e petrolio e l'evacuazione dei bambini, e fu per Green stesso un periodo straordinario in quanto portatore di sentimenti strani e inquietanti che caratterizzarono le vite di tutti i cittadini. Il capitolo finale del libro, come già detto, contiene la magistrale descrizione dell'esperienza del Blitz. Questa trova pochi eguali nella letteratura inglese di guerra, in quanto estremamente intensa e diretta, in cui l'uso assiduo e ossessivo di colori caratterizza il paesaggio distruttivo in cui il protagonista si trova; viene presentata inoltre in modo neutrale, ovvero senza rappresentare scene eroiche o di trionfo. Vi si trovano per di più gli effetti che tale distruzione ha nella mente della persona, un'esperienza talmente traumatica che ricordare in modo chiaro tali devastazioni risulta problematico persino a pochi giorni di distanza.

Per concludere, la tesi dimostra i vari metodi stilistici e retorici con i quali tre diversi autori hanno creato tre romanzi in grado di rappresentare e riportare l'avvento della Seconda guerra mondiale e del Blitz in Inghilterra. Si tratta di tre opere di finzione dove l'ambientazione risulta essere un personaggio aggiuntivo alla narrazione, influenzando, in maniera più o meno marcata, lo svolgimento degli eventi e l'evoluzione psicologica dei personaggi. I bombardamenti aerei del Blitz, specialmente nei romanzi di Bowen e Green, creano dei paesaggi particolari che rievocano fortemente l'Inghilterra nel periodo di guerra, catapultando il lettore in una realtà cupa, distrutta e distruttiva. Le tre opere analizzate risultano quindi centrali nella scena letteraria britannica della Seconda guerra mondiale.