military career) is symbolic of his sexual inadequacy—that is, of his inability to commit himself to his own sexuality in the face of the demands society makes on him and of the values society has implanted in him. Society has scarred his sexuality indeed—aptly enough, in the aspect of his profession. The world and the flesh war in Lionel, and the outcome is so tragically wasteful that it is hard not to believe that the devil wins.

Forster's sketch of Lionel March suggests complexities beyond the young man's own cognizance. In India years earlier, Lionel's father had deserted family and class and gone native. Lionel bears something of his father's character, which tempts him over the borders of propriety, and also has his father's example, set before him by his mother, to redouble the horror and guilt if he should step across. Lionel March is unable to endure the relationship he has formed with Cocoa because so much of his being is established by his social context, and he is unable to quit because he is sensitive enough to love Cocoa and to respond to Cocoa's love for him. He is trapped in a situation which can have no good outcome. Forster does not blame some Cosmic Fatuity for all this, but Lionel's and Cocoa's tragedy is fated and inevitable nonetheless: they are both "caught" indeed. With Cocoa, Lionel may have established the only meaningful relationship he ever had to another human being, and society passes its judgment on that: "March had been a monster in human form, of whom the earth was well rid" (p. 196). Liaison with members of other social classes or races becomes in Forster's stories a phenomenon which emphasizes their distance doubly so for the homosexuals. Such is the case for the fantasy relationship Forster envisions is grim and tragic. The ideal cannot be brought into the real and survive. Nor can one retreat from reality. A man may wish to live in his private world always, companioned by his Gay Noble Savage. But to Forster the reality is that a man cannot live outside society—it defines him and he defines himself against it. Since homosexuality is generally unacceptable to society, the wish and the reality must always be in conflict. And that conflict, as depicted in stories like "The Other Boat" must destroy the one in whom it takes place. "Only connect," Forster had pleaded in *Howard's End,* but the connection the homosexual must make to live cannot be made.

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"Bend Sinister": Duration in Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris*

Duration, the continuous unconscious welling-up of the past in one's memory, is the major theme of Elizabeth Bowen's fifth novel, *The House in Paris.* This theme is illustrated both by the novel's three-part narrative structure and by a complex pattern in which the linear flow of time is bent back against itself in a series of images which work on the reader's subconscious so that the act of reading the novel becomes itself an instance of its major theme.

The division of the novel into three parts—a short introductory present, followed by a lengthy and convoluted excursion into the *imagined* past, and then a brief return to the present—produces in the reader an effect of an artificially induced *déjà vu.* Writing in an article called "The Bend Back," Elizabeth Bowen explains that "one route to the past (or the idea of the past) is factitious memory. That is to say, by art we are made to seem to remember that which we have not actually known."[1] This theory of factitious memory is exemplified in *The House in Paris* in the way that we learn of Leopold's past just as he does, simultaneously gaining revelations from disconnected fragments derived from a combination of hints and opinions filtered through all that he experiences in the house in Paris. The entire middle section of the novel is told, not as a factual story remembered by an omniscient narrator, but as the child Leopold constructs it "referring backwards and forwards between imagination and memory."[2] The voice of the middle section is Karen Michaelis's, intuited by her son Leopold: "In the course of that meeting that never happened, that meeting whose scene remained inside Leopold, she would have told what she had done without looking for motives. These he could supply, for he would understand. You suppose the spools of negatives that are memory (from moments when the whole being was, unknowing, exposed), developed without being cut for a false reason: entire letters, dialogues which, once spoken, remain spoken for ever being unwound from the dark, word by word" (p. 61).

What Karen "would have had to say" (p. 61), her words and motives imagined by Leopold, demonstrate almost perfectly the Bergsonian concept of duration, for they remain alive as if being unwound from the past on tape, as though the sound waves were still floating in air, waiting to be picked up by the clairvoyant links between mother and child. Although Leopold has never met his mother, never even seen a picture of her, he is still able to construct his version of the past by applying imagination to memory and to the few facts he knows.

Leopold's desire to see his mother is motivated by a burning wish to seek his identity, to find out the answers to the questions "Why am I? What made me be?" (p. 59). Although he is not able to see her, he is able to gather enough information about Karen directly from the Fishers and indirectly from things they have accidentally told Henrietta, as well as from the letter he reads about himself, and from the peculiar atmosphere of the house. As Elizabeth Bowen writes, "One might say, one invests one's identity *in* one's memory. To re-live any moment, acutely, is to be made certain that one not only was but is."[3] The search for identity in *The House in Paris* becomes an exercise in memory, designed to show Leopold in the act of creating his sense of self by simultaneously inventing and remembering the past.

In addition to the structure of *The House in Paris,* which is, in effect, bent back upon itself to represent duration, the novel's poetic language also suggests this theme through a series of images in which time is out of synchronization, warped or bent in an almost surrealistic way so that objects and emotions become indistinct and unreal. Elizabeth Bowen points out the importance of the idea of bending the straightforward chronological flow of time when she titles her essay on childhood and memory "The Bend Back." She further underscores the need

[1]"The Bend Back," *Cornhill Magazine,* 165 (1951), 223.

[2]Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (1935; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1957), p. 7. Parenthetical references refer to this edition.

[3]"The Bend Back," p. 223.

to warp time's flow when she writes "For the sake of emphasis, time must be falsified. But the novelist's consciousness of the subjective, arbitrary and emotional nature of the falsification should be evident to the reader. Against this falsification—in fact increasing the force of its effect by a contrast—a clock should be heard always impassively ticking away at the same speed."[4] The notion that time in a novel should be deliberately falsified takes the form in *The House in Paris* of multiple images of folding and bending.

The earliest example occurs when Henrietta first sees the Fisher's house, where so many of the important events of the story take place. She says of the street on which the house in Paris stands, "At each end, the street bent out of sight: it was exceedingly quiet and seemed, though charged with meaning, to lead nowhere" (p. 9). In this metaphor for time, the house signifies the present, while the two ends of the street, bending out of sight, stand for the past and the future. This image of a bending road is paralleled by a later description in which Karen says of Max, "Everything that she knew of him disappeared at a point, like a road running into a dark tunnel" (p. 116). Images of bending topography appear throughout the section of "The Past" in which Karen and Max meet in Hythe: "At that end, the High Street bends into a square . . ." (p. 160); "West of town, the canal bends under a bridge . . ." (p. 147); "She began to go upstairs, but turned at the bend . . ." (p. 159). Not only outside, but inside as well, in the hotel room where Leopold is conceived, Karen remembers and imagines in images which contain the idea of bending: "The grass sprang up when we took our hands away." "The maid will make this bed and fold back two corners of eiderdown as they were folded back when I put my hat on it" (p. 153).

The emphasis on bending and folding in this scene calls to mind an earlier image in which Karen thinks "vulgarity, inborn like original sin, unfolds with the woman nature, unfolds ahead of it quickly and has a flamboyant flowering in the young girl" (p. 104). For Karen, whose identity is caught between her conservative family tradition and the increasing fear of ending her life as had her Aunt Violet, without ever having lived, the sense of an innate vulgarity becomes another instance of warped time. For Karen's inner timing is off: her traditional life has stunted her development and the inborn vulgarity, nurtured by the evil of Madame Fisher's house, has flowered too late in her life for her to keep it safely under control.

Karen's expected chronological development from girlhood, which she realizes is "no more than a privileged looking on" (p. 62), to marriage in which "a woman's real life only began" (p. 61), is thrown out of phase by her trip to Ireland to visit her aunt and uncle, whose last name, *Bent,* reinforces the notion of time out of phase. Karen, who momentarily feels "as though she had lost her memory in the night" (p. 65), begins to experience waves of doubt about her upcoming marriage because of the shocking revelation that her dying aunt feels her life has been wasted in marriage.

Karen's confrontation with her aunt has thrown her off stride. Just before she leaves she writes to her fiancé, "Something in Ireland bends one back on oneself. One doesn't think exactly but it upsets one" (p. 83). As she boards the boat for her return to London, Karen's sense of inner time is temporarily off its natural rhythm. She has experienced in Ireland a kind of metaphysical time lag which keeps her out of synchronization with her former life. "The boat did not

[4]Elizabeth Bowen, "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Pictures and Conversations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 187.

sail up to time" (p. 84) because Karen is now in a time zone of her own. As Max says of her soon after, "You are certainly off your beat" (p. 108). Karen is repeatedly off her beat, in the sense of being off her usual track, but also in the musical sense; no longer satisfied with "the in-tuneness of her marriage" (p. 122), she moves now in a syncopated rhythm in which musical notes no longer "came stepping lightly on to the moment" (p. 73). She is off the beat, out of tune like the blue notes of jazz which are deliberately ahead or behind the beat, bent and flattened to produce their unique rhythm. In this mood, her life temporarily in abeyance, Karen finds she can no longer see her fiancé whose "face was gone as though a spot of acid had dropped on her memory" (p. 121). The influence of her family and their world in which "change looked like catastrophe" (p. 121), causes Karen to dwell "on the daylit side of marriage . . . her thoughts bent strongly to whatever in marriage stays unmapped . . ." (p. 122). In this Michaelis world "you lived to govern the future, bending events your way" (p. 121). But Karen is no longer able to bend events, for they have increasingly begun to act on her; out of step with her family's sense of time, she is drawn away from them by Max whose words "had dug in crookedly, like a bent pin" (p. 122).

Being out of tune with her family allows Karen momentarily to fit into the false harmony of Max who is also out of tune, his manner of speaking English which is correct "but never spontaneous . . . too tight or too loose" (p. 117) paralleling Naomi Fisher's speech which made her seem "to be translating, and translating rustily. No phrase she used was what anyone could quite mean" (p. 61). As Karen observes of Naomi and Max, "You two have another language, too" (p. 165). Unlike *Karen* and Max, whose "worlds were so much unlike that no experience had the same value for both of them" (p. 142), *Naomi* and Max share the strange and sinister upbringing in the house in Paris which allows Naomi to float with Max along the bizarre path of his life "like two twigs on a current that, apart, would have gone on twisting perplexedly" (p. 110), while Karen struggles, against the flow, back to the traditional shores of her family and her past.

The flow of the current in a river, emblematic of the flux of time, is echoed in a later image of Naomi, in which the stream of time is compared to the power of an electric current: "But at any time she had a way of making straight lines bend and shapes of things fluctuate as though a strong current were flowing over them" (p. 96). Naomi's almost supernatural psychokinesis, her ability to cause the world to go momentarily out of focus, is what Karen finds so compelling in Max. In contrast, the world of Karen's mother is distinctly focused, always precise and finely tuned: ". . . her well-lit explanations of people were like photographs taken when the camera could not lie; they stunned your imagination by *being* exact" (p. 115).

Karen's straightforward and conventional life, before and after this brief diversion into the passionate and mysterious world of the Fishers—her "bend sinister"—parallels the structure of the novel in which the doubly-fictional middle section is framed by two more conventional sections in the present. But the memory of that one brief moment in which her life was momentarily out of order remains deeply within Karen's subconscious. And the straight linear development of the novel's plot, like so many other straight lines in the book, is bent into a circle by Karen's sudden desire to see Leopold again and thereby to reenter the lost world of her past.

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