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**BEING INCOMMENSURABLE/INCOMMENSURABLE BEINGS: GHOSTS IN
ELIZABETH BOWEN'S SHORT STORIES**

by

JEANNETTE WARD SMITH

Under the Direction of Dr. Marilyn Richtarik

ABSTRACT

I investigate the ghosts in Elizabeth Bowen's short stories, "Green Holly" and "The Happy Autumn Fields." By blending psychoanalytic feminism and social feminism, I argue that these female ghosts are the incommensurable feminine—a feminine that exceeds the bounds of phallogentric logic and cannot be defined by her social or symbolic manifestations.

An analysis of Bowen's ghosts as actual ghosts is uncharted territory. Previous Bowen critics postulate that Bowen's ghosts are imaginary figments or metaphors. These critics make Bowen's stories "truthful" representations of the world, but, as such, Bowen's ghosts become representations of the world's phallogentric order.

In contrast, I argue that these stories adopt a *mestiza* consciousness. Gloria Anzaldúa postulates that through a subaltern perspective developed outside of western logic, the *mestiza* reclaims the supernatural that exists outside of the masculine, symbolic order. The female ghosts are the feminine that Luce Irigaray explains, "remain[s] elsewhere" (76) as they live incommensurably in an alternate supernatural realm, disrupting phallic logic.

INDEX WORDS: Anzaldúa, Elizabeth Bowen, Feminism, Ghost, Luce Irigaray, *Mestiza*

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a degree of

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Georgia State University

2006

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPIGRAPH.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
INCOMMENSURABLE FEMININE.....	8
DEALING WITH GHOSTS.....	13
SEEING THE GHOSTS. SEEING THE INCOMMENSURABLE FEMININE.....	23
SOCIAL FEMINISM.....	24
PSYCHOANLYTIC FEMINIM.....	27
SEEING GHOSTS REQUIRES DOUBLE VISION.....	30
THE DIFFERENCE THAT IRIGARY MAKES.....	31
ELIZABETH BOWEN: THE GHOST LADY WITH CIGARETTES.....	33
ANGLO-IRISH.....	34
WAS BOWEN A FEMINIST?	37
THE DESTRUCTION OF WAR.....	38
“GREEN HOLLY”.....	41
ESTABLISHING “THE FEMMOSEXUAL” IN “THE HAPPY AUTUMN FIELDS”.....	51
CONCLUSION.....	79



“It is the haunted who haunt.”

“I am not placed: I do not qualify.”

—Elizabeth Bowen



Introduction

This project is about subjectivity or, more important, a lack thereof. And it takes its cue from the perspectives of those who would benefit most from a complete loss of subjectivity—othered women. An “othered” woman is someone who has very little to gain from the construction of her subjectivity because she is not the proper gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, class, or a combination thereof. Her position in the world of differing subjectivities is less than others. Her body matters less than others. Hers is a subjectivity of the grotesque. As Mary Russo explains in The Female Grotesque, “Subjectivity in the West requires the image of the grotesque body” (9). According to Russo, the “grotesque emerges [. . .] as a deviation from the norm” (11). The grotesque woman has two options: she can attempt to fashion a subject-position that will afford her more power of place, or she can look for an opportunity to destroy the mechanics of her oppression by destroying subjectivity altogether, thus losing herself completely. My project will explore this second option because the complete loss of subjectivity would provide not only better options for this woman, but better options for all men, women and others who in some way or another could benefit from a loss of subjectivity. I will explore this loss of subjectivity in the short stories of an othered woman, Elizabeth Bowen. An Anglo-Irish writer, Elizabeth Bowen certainly does not appear at first glance to be othered. Born in 1899 to an upper-middle class family, she had the class, skin color, and religion of the “normal” woman. But, as Russo explains, the grotesque is not always something one is born with, like a physical deformity. Women can slip into and out of the category of the grotesque, and the threat of being grotesque is a danger that haunts all women. Bowen understood the tenuous nature of subjectivity and the possibility of slipping into the grotesque because she was Anglo-Irish, making her different, “othered,” and homeless in both Ireland and England. Bowen’s family was plagued by mental

disease. Even among their Anglo-Irish peers, the Bowens were known as the crazy ones, the hysterics. And “she was a married woman who had several lesbian affairs” (Jay xvi). This double stigma of lesbian infidelity would certainly be considered a grotesque characteristic in Bowen’s day. Elizabeth Bowen knew well the threat of the grotesque, and this insight, this “othered” perspective, gave her the ability to see the expansive, positive possibilities inherent in the loss of the subject. In two of her most radical short stories, “Green Holly” and “The Happy Autumn Fields,” Elizabeth Bowen wrote about two women who, in becoming ghosts, destroyed the subject and escaped its oppressive bounds. When viewed through the dual lenses of symbolic feminism and social feminism, the female ghosts in “Green Holly” and “The Happy Autumn Fields” escape the oppressive bounds of subjectivity because they exist as the incommensurable feminine, pursuing an autonomous feminine path and destroying the truth of subjectivity in their spectral travels.

Incommensurable Feminine

The incommensurable feminine is a concept that springs from feminist psychoanalytic theorist Luce Irigaray’s concept of feminine difference. In Speculum of the Other Woman, Irigaray writes that “any theory of the ‘subject’ has always been appropriated by the ‘masculine’” (133), and in This Sex Which Is Not One she reiterates that “within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject” (78). This particular position is not unique, as countless feminists, most notably Simone de Beauvoir, have posited a similar idea, arguing in one way or another that the male holds the primary subject position and the female exists only in reference to the male as less than male, the inverse of male, property of the male, or simply as not male. What is unique about Irigaray’s

argument is the important stand she takes by arguing for “double mimesis,” which recognizes the role the feminine performs within the masculine economy and simultaneously posits the radical, autonomous existence of the feminine outside of that masculine economy. In a frequently anthologized essay, “This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray,” Naomi Schor compares Beauvoir and Irigaray to elucidate the critical importance of Irigaray’s take on feminine difference. Schor explains that Beauvoir believes that woman defined in deference to man “involves attributing to the objectified other a *difference* that serves to legitimate her oppression” [emphasis mine] (65). Elizabeth Grosz explains in her critical summary of Irigaray’s work that, in contrast, Irigaray views this relationship between the male subject and the female other as really “a relation of *contrariety*, not contradiction” [emphasis mine] (106). To reflect this contrariety, many feminists have represented this relationship as A/-A, which Marilyn Frye explains may appear dual at first glance but is really a monistic system and a monistic subjectivity (999). Irigaray calls this A/-A relationship “saming,” and she argues that it is highly problematic because it “denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to the laws of phallic specularities” (Schor 65).

Beauvoir would solve her problem of difference, as many feminists who followed in her footsteps have, by advocating that woman be defined as equal to, or the same as, man. In direct opposition, Irigaray shuns this goal, arguing that the feminine holds worth on its own terms and deserves its own space of recognition and representation outside of the masculine economy and its laws of phallic specularities. For Irigaray there is value in being a woman, and women should keep their difference.

I respond with a visceral affirmation to this claim because I believe strongly that there is value in feminine difference and other kinds of difference, including race, class, sexuality, and so

on. But how can that difference be articulated in terms that do not rely on dichotomous logic and language, which is akin to saming? Despite these problems inherent in articulation, one has to provide some road map (forgive the linear metaphor) for getting there. According to Grosz, “Irigaray wishes to explore the conditions needed for and the space occupied by a subject considered as female” (141). Asserting that she is taking up Irigaray’s wish in her essay “The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women,” Frye “displace[s] A/not-A dichotomy with a genuine plurality. Let there be two categories, two subjectivities, A:B. Conceive a positive category that is entered, occupied, animated by females [. . .]. Make that arrogant A *share* the universe” (998). Frye understands Irigaray’s goal of feminine difference, but I do not think she finds a solution that reaches that goal. First, giving the female a positive subjectivity that is different in relation to the male keeps intact the system of difference. In A:B, B is what it is because it is not A and vice versa. This scenario maintains the relational system of difference, rather than giving the feminine her incommensurable existence. Relational difference always means that A or B is “better” than or more valued than the other. Second, the A:B resolution assumes that B—the female—is a homogenous category (or that A—the male—is a homogenous category, for that matter), which can be represented with one sign and within one universal group. Frye’s articulation makes room for only two subject categories that assume that male and female are universally represented in the same way across race, class, ethnic, national, and sexual difference.

To be fair, Frye claims that her “B” is a system of difference within difference. Her example is the “Redheads’ Club.” She argues that it is a club “not because all the individuals who are members of it have red hair,” but “because individuals are involved, in various ways, in a structure” (1001). Frye is wrong, though, about structure as the defining feature of the club.

Structure may be a critical part of the club, but the club exists because of the similarity of those with red hair, which is defined against those who do not have red hair. This club, and like Frye's A:B system, is a system that depends on homogeneity and exclusion. And, as Russo explains, this is also how the system works to define the grotesque. She writes, "The grotesque is only recognizable in relation to a norm" (10). So setting B and A as two norms creates the homogeneity and exclusion necessary for grotesque others to be marked as such in relation to A and B. Thus, Frye's A:B system is really a system of A:B:C:D:E:F and so on. These other subjects may also get to share the universe along with A, but, no matter how many subjects claim subjectivity, the universe and its system of subjectivity will be kept in place. Some subjects will be better than others; some subjects will be the grotesque. The phallogentric system that *subjects* all will maintain its dominance over all. In Frye's example, the female gains her differing subjectivity, but that leaves the system of subjectivity in place.

The phallogentric universe should not be kept. It will only maintain the system that *subjects* one to another, bestows more value to one than another, and creates those who are normal and those who are othered as the grotesque. Irigaray's ultimate and radical goal was to dismantle the system, not to spread even wider the net of subjectivity to capture larger groups. In This Sex Which Is Not One, Irigaray writes, "The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of truth" (78). If it is now clear that developing alternate subjects is not the path to feminine difference, then what is? Irigaray vehemently argues that the feminine "*remain[s] elsewhere*" (76). In her essay, "Against Proper Objects," Judith Butler defines Irigaray's feminine: "Irigaray [. . .] maintains that the feminine is necessarily redoubled, that it exists first as a signifier within a masculinist economy, but then it 'exists'

outside of that economy (where nothing may exist) [. . .]” (18). Along similar lines, Frye comes the closest to articulating Irigaray’s incommensurable feminine when she postulates that what is outside of A is undifferentiated. In her example, A= vanilla; thus, Frye says, chocolate, strawberry, Halley’s comet, and all shoes in the world are not-vanilla (999). But, she argues, “So far as the category of vanilla is concerned, the category of not-vanilla is an infinite undifferentiated plenum, unstructured, formless, a chaos undelineated by any internal boundaries” (999). Eureka! This is certainly the idea of a feminine that jams the machinery. The feminine must be left outside of A. She must be left outside of subjectivity, so that she can remain unstructured, formless, chaotic—so that she can “exist” where “nothing may exist.” Butler explains that Irigaray “insists on the radical *incommensurability* of the feminine with any of its given articulations” (18). This is Irigaray’s feminine “double mimesis,” which posits the radical, autonomous existence of the feminine outside of that masculine economy in an incommensurable form. In other words, while the female is rendered discursively, symbolically, and socially as the lesser referent to the male, Irigaray posits that she also has a transgressive, autonomous existence outside of the masculine linguistic order. The feminine that is truly different is incommensurable with any other terms. She does not refer to, share a universe with, or speak the same language as any other term, sign, or subject.

To destroy the inequity of the system truly, the system must be dismantled and rendered baseless. The system rationalizes and naturalizes truths based on what can be articulated. What can be known through language and articulated through words comprises the entirety of what is accepted as real and natural. If the unnatural violates the natural by crossing into its marked territory, while remaining unnatural, if the unreal makes its presence known in the world of the

real and maintains its unreality, then the system loses its hold on truth and, to borrow from Karl Marx, what is solid melts into air.

Dealing with ghosts

What does not share our universe? What exists where nothing can exist? What could be called formless chaos? The answer: ghosts. In 1994, Derrida wrote, “There has never been a scholar, who really as a scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that can be called the virtual space of spectrality” (11). I believe in ghosts. I will deal with ghosts in order to articulate the incommensurable feminine. I will deal with ghosts as a scholar, and to do so I must abandon a scholar’s logic. The nonsense and unreality of ghosts are the shifting sands upon which my argument will be built. Sound impossible? That is exactly the point. The rational logic of this world will not help me explore the world of ghosts. Derrida explains, “There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being [. . .](11). Today, I am that scholar. I take my cues from Irigaray, who wrote in 2002 that “you can become and remain a mystery that illuminates me with a light different from the light of reason” (84). I argue that ghosts emit a light different from the light of reason. And I will attempt to analyze them (and thus articulate them) in such a way that they become and remain a mystery. And I am founding my project upon the assumption that ghosts are not a myth or a theoretical idea, but as “real” as all other articulatable concepts. Thus, I will analyze ghosts as worthy of critical study. The goal of my project is to reveal the artificial boundary between the real and unreal, being and non-being, in order to break down the “truth” of subjectivity. I argue that a true exploration of ghosts will reveal radically expansive possibilities that lay to waste the

boundaries of truth and subjectivity. To do this, I will use the ghost stories of Elizabeth Bowen as my haunting grounds.

Bowen is best known for her novels, but she is acclaimed for her short stories. She wrote eight short stories that include ghosts. I have chosen “Green Holly” and “The Happy Autumn Fields” to analyze because these two stories provide the best opportunity to focus a lengthy analysis on ghosts, as a ghost is the primary character in each story. These stories feature speaking, thinking, and acting female ghosts who clearly break the boundaries between the real and the unreal and tear at the limits of the subject by embodying the incommensurable feminine. Butler explains that the incommensurable feminine “marks that limit of representability which would undo the presuppositions of representation itself” (19). The distinction between the real and unreal, being and non-being, must be blurred and—if one is lucky—erased in order to achieve radical, expansive opportunities for losing the subject.

Perhaps in response to Derrida’s plea, other critics have located their critical studies in or near the realm of ghosts. One of the earliest studies was done by a literary scholar, Daniel Cottom. In his 1991 book *Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movement, Revolutions and Betrayals*, Cottom explores the relationship between nineteenth-century spiritualism and twentieth-century surrealism. Cottom studies the movements and the people who shaped these movements in order to “show how a confrontation with the monsters and abysses of reason may lead us to discover other, more satisfying worlds in that which we call the world” (21). To Cottom, ghosts and spiritualism are important because they threaten language, authorship, ownership, and the ability for anyone to interpret or analyze any linguistic text “truthfully” and absolutely. Cottom posits that spiritual mediums were controversial in the nineteenth century because they “expose[d] language, behavior, character, individual persons, and the entirety of culture as unfounded

representations” (56). Cottom helps start the discussion around ghosts’ ability to threaten the primacy of truth. As well, Cottom’s idea that ghosts threaten ownership ties directly with Irigaray’s belief, as I will discuss later, that ownership is a mark of the masculinist economy, and the inability to own a mark of the feminine.

Helen Sword builds much of her book *Ghostwriting Modernism* upon arguments made by Cottom. One of the longest of the ghostly critical analyses, Sword’s book explores popular spiritualism, the practice where the dead communicate with the living via a human medium, a practice that was a popular fad between 1848 to the mid-twentieth century, to show how modernist writers “steeped in ironic sensibility and material aesthetics” used spiritualism to explore paradox, fluidity, and a self-contradictory ideological space (9). While Sword makes many valuable points about spiritualism and modernism, a survey of her book reveals that Sword is not analyzing the spirits who inhabit the living, but the effects that this spiritual practice had on writers and their works. She argues that the writers who incorporated spiritualism into their work broke boundaries and explored uncharted territory, but the actual practice of spiritualism itself, or the ghosts the practice dredged up, are not of nearly as much concern to her.

Despite her disappointing lack of focus on spirits, Sword does pose a few significant questions. Sword asks, “How can we account for the striking persistence of popular spiritualism, that credulous Victorian fad, in the cynical age of literary modernism?” (x). She hypothesizes the answer to be that there are many connections between authorship and mediumship (8). Sword defines authorship as the claim to author literature, and argues that writers felt threatened by “spiritualists’ tendency to dwell on the inherent fragility and mendacity of language, laying bare, in effect, the tricks of the writer’s trade” (8). Building from Sword’s assertions, I see authorship as the phallogentric claim to author the world via language. I argue that to expose language and

logic and, ultimately, depose them from their reign of truth, a ghost must lay bare the “trick” that established the logic of the phallogocentric world. If this solid world of sense can be disrupted by pseudo-subjects that cross in and out of its boundaries, then the masculinist economy does not hold a monopoly on reality.

In Jean-Michel Rabaté’s The Ghosts of Modernity, another study centered on ghosts, Rabaté argues that ghosts embody the postmodern aesthetic. Indeed, there are certainly many similarities. Ghosts are slippery and escape concrete meaning; they are paradoxically neither present nor absent, yet both present and absent; they defy categorization; they are copies of copies, simulacra of our world. All in all, ghosts make clever metaphors for the tenets of postmodernism, and Rabaté extends this metaphor throughout his study. I agree with Rabaté’s conclusions about the similarities between ghosts and postmodernism. But his analysis is about a metaphor for postmodernism, not an analysis of ghosts themselves.

I was disappointed to find no other scholarly works on ghosts as ghosts. I was also disappointed, and surprised, to find that these book-length studies of ghosts, which mostly reference modern literature and modern writers, do not mention Elizabeth Bowen’s ghost stories. These analyses focus on other modern writers who wrote about ghosts or haunted subjects, or who dabbled in or practiced spiritualism, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Lewis Carroll, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, and W. B. Yeats.

To find analysis of Bowen’s ghost stories, one has to turn to critical analysis focused solely on Bowen. No critic I found surveys Bowen’s ghost stories together as a singular topic of study. Thus far, Bowen critics have analyzed her ghost stories in one of two ways. Most frequently, they mention all of the ghost stories in one brief breath, making a sweeping

generalization about them on the way to another, seemingly more important, point. Alternatively, critics isolate one ghost story to focus singly on. I am one of the very few critics who analyze more than one Bowen ghost story side by side.

As I have mentioned, most previous critics analyze ghosts not as ghosts, but as a conduit for theoretical metaphor or literary meaning. This is also true of the critics who analyze Bowen's ghost stories. In the introduction to the only complete collection of Bowen's short stories, The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen, Angus Wilson says that Elizabeth Bowen had an "apparent total acceptance of ghosts, of the occult" (10). I agree. I believe that Bowen's complete acceptance of ghosts and respect for the occult comes through in her ghost stories. Following this sentence, Wilson spends five more sentences on Bowen's ghost stories to conclude ultimately that in Bowen's ghost stories, "Ghosts make sense of life not nonsense" (10). I am vehemently opposed to Wilson's reading. I do not want Bowen's ghost stories to make sense of life. I want her stories and the ghosts in them to remain nonsense, if nonsense means an escape from the masculine economy.

The other critic who analyzes multiple ghost stories at once is John Coates in his essay "The Moral Argument of Elizabeth Bowen's Ghost Stories." Coates explores three Bowen ghost stories (none of which is "Green Holly" or "The Happy Autumn Fields") and posits that all Bowen's ghost stories are oblique criticisms of the English middle class and its emotional poverty. He argues that Bowen's ghosts represent the living characters' moral dilemmas and distinguish between the good and bad choices those characters make. Coates makes Bowen's ghosts representations of morality and the bad karma of problematic, yet pampered, lives. Thus, in Coates's version, the ghosts represent rather than exist.

In Twentieth-Century Suspense, an anthology of mystery and ghost stories, J. A. Morris analyzes several of Bowen's short stories. In his introduction, Morris says that in Bowen's stories "what we see hides a disturbing reality that we ignore at our own peril" (115). But, just when it looks as if a third critic will study a number of Bowen ghost stories at once, Morris says that this peril is "better seen in stories which ostensibly contain no influence of the supernatural" (115). He goes on to ignore all of Bowen's ghost stories but one—"The Demon Lover"—concluding that Bowen's suspense stories are an exploration of "what can make us insane" (117). Like Wilson's reading, this interpretation returns Bowen's stories to the real world through an exploration of the human psyche. Morris ends his essay by saying that "we haunt ourselves" (128) instead of accepting the real presence of ghosts as an external haunting that cannot be controlled.

Coates's conclusion that the ghosts are figments of unstable minds is the most popular assumption about Bowen's stories. Robert L. Calder provides several examples of critics who make that claim regarding "The Demon Lover," and Wilson suggests that the ghostly possession in "The Happy Autumn Fields" is not actual possession, but the living woman's means of mentally escaping the horrible realities of war (10). Martin Bidney echoes Wilson in his essay, "Nostalgic Narcissism in Comic and Tragic Perspectives: Elizabeth Bowen's Two Fictional Reworkings of a Tennyson Lyric," where he says that the possessed woman is really dreaming of another world to satiate her selfish will and idealized picture of the world.

Bowen's ghosts also appear as allegory in some critics' works. David Punter argues that the appearance of ghosts in modernist texts reveals fissures in the modernist project that betray its ultimate inability to sustain a linear, progressive narrative for the future. To Punter, her ghosts represent the breakdown of the modernist project. In his essay, "'A More Sinister Troth':

Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover' as Allegory," Calder argues that the ghost in Bowen's "The Demon Lover" is an allegory for war and symbolizes the Second World War's evil disruption of life and the complicity of society in that disruptive malice.

In Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return, Neil Corcoran analyzes a wide breadth of Bowen's work, from nonfiction to novels to short stories, as he focuses on Bowen's remembrances and returns. Remembering and returning were strong themes of Bowen's, and Corcoran looks at these themes in the short stories published in her The Demon Lover and Other Stories collection, the collection in which "Green Holly" and "The Happy Autumn Fields" were originally published. Corcoran plugs these stories into his overall analysis of return by saying that they "concern that more ultimate form of returnee, the revenant or ghost [. . .]" (148). Of the ghost stories in The Demon Lover collection, Corcoran focuses on "The Demon Lover" and "The Happy Autumn Fields." He posits that these ghost stories are really returns to the past, not ghosts coming into the present, as I see the ghost in "The Happy Autumn Fields." Corcoran argues that the returns manifest the symptoms and effects of war on people in the present.

The textual possibilities offered by these critics are interesting, in some cases viable, and above all "safer" as they reinsert Bowen's ghost stories into the logic of the "natural," "normal" order. These texts leave ghosts in the realm of the unreal and leave intact the boundaries that divide the "real" world from the ghostly world. These texts analyze the conditions that birthed the ghosts, such as a writer's mediumistic wife or the widespread popularity of an elite pastime; the implications of ghosts in texts, such as what metaphors can be drawn from ghosts or what function the ghosts hold in the stories; or what the ghosts tell us about the characters who see them. These critics make Bowen's stories easier to believe as "truthful" representations of the

world, but, as such, Bowen's ghost stories also become representations of the world's phallogocentric order.

It seems that any critic, including myself, who analyzes ghosts feels that her or his work is groundbreaking and unorthodox. What does set my work apart is that all of the criticisms that I have uncovered analyze the ghosts, mediums, spirits and séances as metaphors, literary tropes, indications of postmodernism to come, psychological slips that reveal cracks in the modernist project, or, as Sword does, reflections of writers' "real-life fascination with the historical phenomenon of popular spiritualism" (55). I do not use the ghosts as metaphors that lead me to conclusions about the natural world or the human psyche. I do not want to tell you why ghosts appeared in modernist works or the effects that these ghosts produced on the texts. I argue that the really important critical questions concerning Bowen's ghost stories are: What happens if one deals with these ghost stories on their own terms as ghost stories? What happens if the ghosts are not metaphorized out of existence, but left as ghosts to defy natural logic? What happens if the ghosts are real? I will abandon previous critics' belittling moves of ghostly metaphor and hysteric imagination and deal with the ghosts as ghosts. At the heart of my argument is my acceptance of the ghosts as real. And, as a result, I analyze the ghosts, not their causes or effects. I will use a feminist lens and the *mestiza* consciousness to show that the female ghosts in "Green Holly" and "The Happy Autumn Fields" remain ghosts and reveal the radical, incommensurable feminine.

How can I argue that ghosts are real? The idea that ghosts are real, and thus my thesis that rests on this idea, presents a few problems and raises many questions certainly. What makes a ghost real? Does seeing a ghost make it real? Does touching a ghost make it real? Certainly speaking about a ghost does not make it real; since language, as theorized by Jacques Lacan, is

the presence of an absence, language separates us from all things. So how do I plan to deal with ghosts? I have located my thesis within three differing theoretical perspectives—the theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, Irigaray and Lacan. All three of these theorists’ insights are necessary to reach a place where ghosts can be real and phallogocentric logic can be escaped. And if nothing in the symbolic realm can be considered real or concrete or imbued with any truth, and thus no argument can be made about reality, truth and nature, how can I argue that ghosts are real? I argue that it is important to consider ghosts to be as real as anything else. I put them on a level playing field with all other “real” things. Ghosts are as real as elephants, as real as automobiles, as real as dinosaurs. The logic of science—evolution, genealogy and paleontology—“proves” that dinosaurs existed. Archeology has “proven” what they looked like and where and when they lived. Museums display their bones and tell their “history.” Are dinosaurs real? Whether real or not, academia assumes that they are a legitimate field of study. Ghosts are just as “real” as dinosaurs and, thus, a legitimate field of study. Ghosts have “scientists” who study them. Women and men who believe in ghosts and spirits tell their history via ghost stories, and they disseminate these stories to others. One does not have to see a ghost to believe that they exist. I argue that they are as real as anything else can be real and that any opposition to their truth is an opposition that puts a singular value on the truths of Western logic. In the term coined by Anzaldúa, I have adopted a *mestiza* consciousness that does not dismiss the non-logic of the subjugated other. I have chosen Anzaldúa because she maintains that the spirit world is a valid locus for originating “truth.” To her, and other ethnic and racial minorities, what is true and logical is not something that has to be mapped and proven. It can be felt and believed.

The idea that nothing is real, that language separates us from all things, is the first layer of difficulty that I have to work through. The second layer is the fact that I am analyzing ghosts

that appear in fictional stories, not in eye-witness accounts or historical narrative. However, I see Bowen's short stories as microcosms of the "real" world and imbued with the influences of the socio-historical contexts from which they arose. How the ghosts interact in Bowen's text is illustrative of ghost's function in the grand text of the "real" world. In fact, the realm of fiction and storytelling presents the best space to purport the nonsensical and illogical, because it is a fictionalized space, a space that does not have to adhere to the logic of "truth." I plan to differ from critics who have taken Bowen's fictionalized space and returned it to the realm of logic by arguing away the ghosts or inserting them into a teleological metaphor.

Finally, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to argue for the concrete reality of anything via the incomplete system of language. But that is the point. First, I am not looking for concrete reality. I am looking for a reality that exists outside of the concrete. I seek a reality that ebbs and flows and does not hold its shape, a reality of chaos, a reality of nonsense. That is a reality that more closely aligns with Irigaray's incommensurable feminine. That is a reality outside of phallic logic. Second, I am looking for a reality outside of language, a reality that has not yet been co-opted by words, by those linguistic symbols that attempt to possess, define and own meaning. Like Cottom and Sword, I argue that ghosts exploit the incompleteness of language with their flagrant disregard for wholeness and the concrete. Ghosts manage to exist outside of phallic logic, while at the same time they are able to disrupt phallic reality by appearing within the "real" world. In "Exceeding Hegel and Lacan: Differing Fields of Pleasure in Foucault and Irigaray," Shannon Winnubst writes that "language is weaving always through the field of phallic pleasure and desire—erecting new concepts that are then enveloped by the Oedipal mother of discourse" (13). She is concerned with finding a way to speak the feminine—a difficult task, she admits, when the very act of speaking is rife with these problematics.

I recognize the same problems that Winnubst identifies. I plan to speak about ghosts even when speaking makes them less real and more absent. I plan to speak about ghosts, hopefully, in a way that avoids their envelopment into the “Oedipal mother of discourse.” I plan to speak about ghosts in terms that abandon this insistence on a singular reality and a singular truth as defined by Western modes of understanding the world’s order. Winnubst terms the “phallic field” traditional Western metaphysics. I am locating my argument both within and outside of Western metaphysics. Lacan provided Irigaray with a way to explore the place where the feminine was hidden in her incommensurable form. I am using Irigaray, Lacan and Anzaldù to find the incommensurable feminine as ghosts in an othered spirit world. The ghosts are not a metaphor for the incommensurable feminine. The ghosts are not a conduit for making meaning. The ghosts are the incommensurable feminine. My goal is to show how we can see the incommensurable feminine and believe in her reality. This requires putting value back into “to be” and finding a place where what is “real” does not require phallic teleology.

Seeing the ghosts. Seeing the incommensurable feminine.

What does it take for one to see ghosts as ghosts? What does it take for one to reach the incommensurable feminine? In Specters of Marx, Derrida articulates the difficulty scholars have faced when confronted with ghosts. In “Against Proper Objects,” Butler expresses her concern over the difficulty of finding and articulating the incommensurable feminine. If both ghosts and the incommensurable feminine are hard to get to, how will I reach both together? Butler provides the answer in “Against Proper Objects.” In her essay, she poses the following critical question about the incommensurable feminine: “In what manner of double-speak must the feminine proceed when it is understood as the unrepresentable in its paradoxical effort to represent itself?”

(19). She suggests that collapsing the barriers that divide two of the most prominent feminist theoretical perspectives will make it possible to represent this unrepresentable. Butler seeks to combine social feminism, which focuses on the sociological construction of gender, and symbolic feminism, which focuses on the symbolic encoding of sex difference into the subject, into one hybrid approach. I argue that the blending of these two theories, the melding of their seemingly dissonant parts, creates theoretical probabilities never before realized in the actualization of the incommensurable feminine. Social feminism and symbolic feminism will have to work together, despite their antithetical differences. The incommensurable feminine is a feminine that transforms the symbolic under pressure from the social. When these two worlds collide, she appears at the crossroads—in the gap previously thought to be barren—in no man’s land.

Social feminism

Social feminism is defined by two critical elements that make it extremely relevant to the future of feminism and the exploration of a revolutionized subjectivity. The first element is that the subject is constructed by more than gender or sex. Social feminism insists that the feminine—and what it means to be female—manifests itself in hundreds of varied ways, all of which prove that there is no universal or defining “truth” that can be posited about what constitutes gender, female or male. To social feminists, gender is a constructed category that is influenced by the “relations of power that help to constitute yet exceed gender” (Butler 17), including class, race, geopolitical positionality, sexuality, colonialism, and other determinants of a subject’s place within socio-historical contexts. Social feminism posits that the subject is constructed within and by this network. The determinants themselves are a construction, a

complex network of discursive ideologies that spins the subject within its web. Michel Foucault explains that the differences between subjects are the strategy of “individualization,” which makes “it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them into one another” (184). Identities are knowable, not by themselves, but because of their difference from and relation to other identities. The subject is constructed through an intricate and complexly webbed intersection of ideologies that individualize by making every being a useful subject. While Frye posits A:B as a plausible scenario for feminine difference, social feminism makes it clear that A and B can be an A and a B because they exclude others who are different. And the differences of the others are intricate, layered, complex and never-ending.

The second element of social feminism is that no subject is locked into the “truth” of its present subjectivity. Subjects can move between ideologies and adopt different stances and subject-positions. Pressure from groups and individuals can change discourse as well, thus changing the structure of the subject and the lives of real people. Because discourse shifts shape and changes over time, the subject’s shape can be altered through the transformation of discourse.

Not surprisingly, within the feminist camp that embraces multiplicity, there is a multitude of social feminisms. One school of social feminism in particular provides the lens for seeing ghosts—the feminism of the borderlands. Social feminist Anzaldù posits borderland feminism in Borderlands/La Frontera, her inter-disciplinary book of cultural theory, poetry, and anthropology. In this work, Anzaldù establishes an evolved, hybrid frame of reference for reconstructing subjectivity. Her borderland feminism privileges a *mestiza* consciousness. The *mestiza* grapples with what it means to be a subject comprised of multiple and, oftentimes,

conflicting ethnic and national positions. Anzaldùà argues that the influence of these conflicting, multiple apparatuses of power creates a hybrid consciousness. She writes, “From this racial, ideological, and biological cross-pollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness” (77). The *mestiza* is characterized by “psychic restlessness” (78); “she can’t hold concepts in rigid boundaries” (78); her flexibility allows her “to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (79). Stretching the psyche beyond its limits means pushing in reverse out of the ordered consciousness into the chaotic unconscious.

Thus, the *mestiza* consciousness provides an opportunity to escape the masculine economy. Anzaldùà writes, “That juncture where the *mestiza* stands is where phenomena tend to collide” (34). The *mestiza*’s constantly colliding phenomena eventually tear phallogocentric logic, and the *mestiza* embraces the supernatural order that stands outside the order of the masculine symbolic. The *mestiza* embraces the reclamation of a supernatural world that was once readily sensed and respected by the subaltern subject and, Anzaldùà argues, should be (re)sensed by the subjugated unconscious. Of herself, Anzaldùà says, “Like many Indians and Mexicans, [. . .] I allowed white rationality to tell me that the existence of the ‘other world’ was mere pagan superstition. I accepted their reality, the ‘official’ reality of the rational, reasoning mode” (36-7). After embracing the *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldùà writes, “No matter to what use my people put the supernatural world, it is evident to me now that the spirit world [. . .] does in fact exist” (38). *La facultad*, the *mestiza*’s ability to see ghosts, requires her to accept ghosts existence as truth. By embracing the ethnically subjugated consciousness, *la facultad* provides the *mestiza* with a truthful otherworld that exists outside of the patriarchal symbolic order.

Psychoanalytic feminism

Psychoanalytic feminism is founded on Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories about the formation of the subject. Freud postulated that the infant is not born a human subject; it becomes one through a universal socialization process termed the Oedipus complex. For the first six to eight months of its life, the human infant cannot distinguish between its own body and its mother's—it cannot tell where it ends and she begins. The mother fully satiates it. However, eventually the mother leaves the child, and the child experiences its first pangs of desire. It cannot possess what it wants. The child blames this separation from the mother on the father. The child wants to destroy the father until it realizes that the source of the father's power over the mother is the penis, an organ that its father possesses and its mother lacks. The boy-child, still desiring to possess the mother, enters into full human subjectivity when he diverts his desire for the mother into a desire for other women. In doing this, he realizes that he must protect his penis from castration, because his penis gives him the power to possess women and, he hopes, satiate his desire. The desire of the girl-child for the mother is converted into the desire for the father who possesses the penis. In her attempt to satiate her desire, the girl-child settles for possession of the penis by way of future penetration by a man who acts as substitute for the father.

Lacan extended Freud's psychoanalytic theories by adding language to this process. For Lacan, the Oedipus complex was played out through linguistic symbolism. The infant enters the symbolic order (enters language) simultaneously with its entrance into the Oedipus complex. Anika Lemaire's book-length critical study of psychoanalytic theory summarizes Lacan's theories and the theories of many other psychoanalytic critics who share Lacan's views about the subject. Explaining how language forms the subject, Lemaire writes, "The form of language is not a mechanical form imposed upon the subject from the outside, but an organic form like an

innate seed which develops from the inside” (28). Lacan argues that the subject’s genesis in language parallels the Oedipus complex. For the first six to eight months of its life, the infant lives in a primitive state, akin to the unconscious, where there are no words for things or distinctions between things. Lacan argues that the human infant perceives itself as one with its mother because it cannot distinguish itself as a body uniquely separate from others. Lacan considers the “mirror stage” the stage where “the child recuperates the totality of his body in an image and gradually becomes conscious of himself as an entity” (Lemaire 176). The mirror stage allows the child to understand the separateness of things, a necessary precondition for understanding that language will ultimately divide all things from other things, as well as divide (or “murder” as Lemaire calls it) physical entities (like a small, furry animal) from the words that act as their substitutes (like “cat”). And, most important, the mirror stage precedes the understanding that language will divide the infant into a distinct subject. Lemaire writes, “The mirror stage is therefore the first precursor of the ‘I’” (177).

Language continues to develop the subject through this process. Of language, Lemaire writes, “The symbolic order of language is an order of interdependent signs bound together by specific laws” (Lemaire 6). Lemaire explains that “In Oedipus, the father plays the role of the symbolic law which establishes the family triangle by actualizing in his person the prohibition of union with the mother” (7). It is the “father’s speech forbidding the child its mother in the Oedipus [that] puts the child in its position to divert its desire on to something else by accepting the law” (Lemaire 164). Lacan argues that the Law of the Father and The Law of the Phallus are the same law. When the child rejects the mother, Lacan argues that it does so because it recognizes that the mother lacks the phallus. The phallus is Freud’s “penis” within the symbolic order of language. When linguistic theories are applied to the Oedipus, the penis is no longer a

real object, but the concept of a real object represented by a linguistic substitute and raised to the level of myth. The phallus “takes on the symbolic meaning of absence of lack” (Lemaire 59). The child desires to possess the phallus because it represents the absence of lack. And, while neither the mother nor the father possesses the phallus, the father “has a penis, an organ which has been elected to the function of a ‘phallic’ symbol of non-lack and which consequently engenders the conflicting forms of the male and female castration complexes” (Lemaire 59). The male subject is formed by identifying with the father, so that he may not lose his penis—the phallus stand-in. The female subject is formed by diverting her desire for possessing a phallus for herself into a desire to be penetrated by the phallus stand-in.

Feminist psychoanalytic theorists who work seriously with the theories of Lacan and Freud do take issue with these men’s assumptions about the formation of the female subject. It certainly can be argued that many girls and boys do not assume their gendered subject positions this way. What makes Freud’s and Lacan’s theories valuable is the way that they explicitly express the underlying assumptions, prejudices and oppressions that are built into language, culture, and the *polis*. As Grosz explains, “psychoanalytic theory can itself be read as a *symptom* of a broader, underlying cultural and intellectual misogyny” (105). Psychoanalytic theory reveals two critical suppositions of Western culture: first, that the subject is not born a subject, but is formed by a linguistic process that creates a subject; and second, that “masculine and feminine are established in language prior to any given social articulation” (Butler 18). What makes these two suppositions problematic is that within the linguistic process the phallus is the ultimate signifier. And the primacy of the male and the feminine’s secondary status are eternally fixed. Lemaire writes, “The young child’s entry into the symbolic order will fashion him in accordance with the structures proper to that order: The subject will be fashioned by the Oedipus and by the

structures of language” (6). Grosz writes, “Phallogocentrism is the use of one model of subjectivity, the male, by which all others are positively or negatively defined” (101). Thus, the subject is constructed by a masculinist linguistic system that orders the subject according to phallogocentrism.

The difference that Irigaray makes

Irigaray uses the discourse of psychoanalysis to undo its own phallogocentrism and create a space for the radical feminine. As Grosz explains, “Irigaray uses psychoanalysis without being committed to its fundamental presuppositions” (104). For Irigaray, Freud’s and Lacan’s systems “institute a phallic economy, an economy based on sameness, oneness or identity with the masculine subject—an ‘a priori of the same.’ [Freud and Lacan’s] position, in short, is phallogocentric” (Grosz 105). For the sake of the feminine, Irigaray seeks to escape the symbolic order of the subject. Butler explains, “When Irigaray insists that the feminine exists elsewhere, she is marking out a space for the feminine that exceeds and defies any of its given articulations. This becomes a necessity on the presumption that the existing field of articulability is governed and strained by phallogocentrism” (Butler 18).

Lacan and Freud identify a crack in the phallogocentric order and call it the unconscious. Lemaire writes, “[. . .] we can say with Lacan that the appearance of language is simultaneous with the primal repression which constitutes the unconscious” (53). The unconscious is thus the result of a primal repression. It is what is subdued and repressed when language forms the subject. Irigaray takes advantage of the unconscious as “primal repression” and uses it to tease out a space for the incommensurable feminine. Grosz explains that

Irigaray suggests a close resemblance between the unconscious in its relation to consciousness and women in relation to patriarchy [. . .] it is possible to regard women not as having an unconscious but as *being* it [. . .] the threat the unconscious poses to civilisation in its symptomatic return. (106-7)

Irigaray finds the existence of the incommensurable feminine within the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious. Coupling the unconscious with Lacan's notion of the symbolic, Irigaray teases out a space for the feminine that falls into the undefined, unregulated space of the unconscious and the real—a space that not only escapes language and the teleological ordering of the world, but also disrupts the phallogocentric order of the symbolic. Irigaray does not wish for this feminine to be a subject equal to or the same as man. Because language orders the feminine's subjugation prior to subject formation, phall-logos makes it impossible for the feminine to overcome this subjugation within the phallogocentric economy. Irigaray does not wish to work within the bounds of this economy to find an alternate articulation for the feminine. Irigaray's feminine is incommensurable, "capable of representation and recognition in its own defined terms" (Grosz 101). As Butler explains, Irigaray's redoubled feminine exists both within the masculine economy and outside that economy, "where nothing may exist" (18).

Unfortunately, Irigaray does not leave instructions for unlocking the door to her radical otherworld where the feminine lives. Many feminists who have followed Irigaray grapple with finding the keys to free the feminine from her symbolic prison. How does one get beyond the masculine economy to access the incommensurable feminine? In "Against Proper Objects," Butler points toward the answer by calling for the fusing of symbolic feminism and social feminism. But, as Butler concedes, combining these perspectives is not a simple task. This combination requires a radical re-conception of language, the symbolic realm, and the given

social order. As she thinks through the challenges of her proposed hybrid feminism, Butler asks, “how ought the relation between the social and the symbolic to be reconfigured? [. . .] and how might ideality (possibility, transformability) be reintroduced into feminist accounts of the social?” (79-80). I argue that fusing these vital elements of social and psychoanalytic feminism into one transformative feminist theory unlocks the door to the incommensurable feminine. This radical incommensurability is important because it carves out a space for the feminine that is not subject to any laws, whether social or symbolic, by radically rethinking psychoanalytic notions of the unconscious and language. The feminine exists on her own terms and her terms alone.

Seeing ghosts requires double vision

The trouble with social and psychoanalytic feminisms, both critically important feminist perspectives, is that they oppose each other in fundamental ways. However, their oppositional stances, when brought together, make it possible for real ghosts to light the way to the incommensurable feminine. For social feminists, the subject cannot be considered solely a product of sex difference. The subject is constructed through a much more complex network of determinants, each determinant affecting the subject’s shape. Psychoanalytic feminists take issue with exactly this notion of sex sharing the driver’s seat with other determinants. They see this as downplaying sex difference into “gender,” a less relevant category. As Butler writes,

Gender presupposes a notion of cultural construction in which the subject is taken as a given, and gender then requires a supplementary meaning or role. Some would argue that such a view can recognize neither the way in which the workings of sexual difference in language establish the subject nor the masculinity of that subject—and the exclusion of the feminine from subject formation that that subject requires. (16)

Social feminism's notion of gender becomes increasingly problematic because, as Butler posits, social feminism can "misidentify the construction of the feminine within a masculinist economy with the feminine itself" (Butler 18). This is an unfortunate conflation because then the limits of, the totality of, the feminine's life—her only life—is what is prescribed to her in the social realm, with all of its repression and oppression.

If the feminine can only exist within the social order, then she cannot exist incommensurably elsewhere. She is trapped within the repressive and oppressive boundaries of the masculinist social order. Psychoanalytic feminists theorize a critical gap in the masculine/feminine dichotomy that refuses to accept the feminine as represented within the masculine economy as its one and only truth. Summing up Irigaray's position and the similar positions of other psychoanalytic feminists, Butler writes, "Whereas some cultural constructionists might claim that gender is equivalent to its construction, those who work within—and in a productively critical relation to—the Lacanian frame of sexual difference would *insist on the radical incommensurability of the feminine with any of its given social articulations*" (18). Psychoanalytic feminists construct the door that leads to the incommensurable feminine, but they lock the door shut with their insistence on linguistic logic.

What social feminists—specifically non-Western social feminists—bring to the table is a belief in a system of non-logic that is not bound to Lacanian linguistics or teleological project of progression and sense. Social feminists unlock the door that psychoanalytic feminists have drawn with the key of non-logic. The non-logic of the *mestiza* consciousness is the different economy that Irigaray seeks. Irigaray writes about the feminine's "symptomatic return" as the unconscious; ghosts are those returns.

Through my analysis of Bowen's stories, I will bring social and symbolic feminism together. The symbolic will provide the opening necessary to escape the subject because it assumes that subjectivity is not a given, but something that one takes on through the adoption of language; and the social gets us on the train that rides through that opening because it says that language and understanding are not fixed, but varied, fluid, and open to change. On the other side of the opening, we meet the incommensurable feminine.

Elizabeth Bowen: The ghost lady with cigarettes

Why is Elizabeth Bowen able to capture the incommensurable feminine in her ghosts? I argue that Bowen's Anglo-Irish background gave her the ability to see the ghosts, that her understanding of woman's place helped transform the ghosts of her Anglo-Irish background into the incommensurable feminine, and that the Second World War provided the impetus that brought it all together and helped the incommensurable feminine cross over, breaking the boundary between the natural and supernatural realms.

Anglo-Irish

There were two characteristics of Bowen's Anglo-Irish background that gave her the ability to see with *la facultad*. First, as Anglo-Irish she was a hybrid, well-positioned to embrace border-crossing. The Anglo-Irish are a group of people who migrated to Ireland from England, largely in the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, settling land with their "rights" as English colonizers. Over time, their ties with England were weakened and their connection to Ireland strengthened. The result was that they became distanced and "foreign" in both Ireland and England. Irish historian James C. Beckett argues that the Anglo-Irish are "in fact Irish,

without any hyphenated prefix; and the fact that they must be distinguished by some special term reflects the unhealed divisions of Ireland” (11). What Beckett overlooks is what social feminists have sharpened their eyes to see. The subject is created through many varied apparatus of difference. Anglo-Irishness is part of the “différance” of Irish people. This difference set Bowen and other Anglo-Irish people apart from the rest of Ireland. Phyllis Lassner, one of the first feminist critics of Bowen’s work, writes that Bowen was “Irish in England and English in Ireland” (3). Lassner goes on to say that Bowen’s “dual identity is the source of her insights into two cultures” (3). Using a social feminist lens, Anzaldúa sums up this insight as the *mestiza* consciousness. She writes:

[. . .] the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny [. . .]. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands. (100)

This borderland positionality gives the *mestiza* the ability to cross borders easily and continually. In a poem that follows this passage in her book, Anzaldúa writes, “Because I, a *mestiza*,/ continually walk out of one culture/ and into another/ because I am in all cultures at the same time” (100).

Bowen herself is explicitly clear about the influence of her Anglo-Irish ancestry on her writing and about her ability to cross borders. In her second autobiographical work, Pictures and Conversations (the title of which was taken from the first page of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, one of Irigaray’s favorite texts), unfinished and published posthumously, Bowen writes:

I am not placed: I do not qualify. The Bowen terrain cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecified. Ireland and England, between them contain my stories, with occasional outgoings into France or Italy: within the boundaries of those countries there is no particular locality that I have staked a claim on or identified with. (35)

During her lifetime, Bowen lived both in England and Ireland, bouncing back and forth between the two countries. As Heather Bryant Jordan explains, Bowen believed that her hybridity “gave her a special passport to cross many fictional borders” (Jordan xvi).

Like Anzaldúa, Bowen sees the positive in her *mestiza* background: “I have thriven, accordingly, on the changes and chances, the dislocations and (as I have said) the contrasts which have made up so much of my life” (Pictures and Conversations 37). Lassner writes, “The past that forms the central concerns of Elizabeth Bowen’s stories is her Anglo-Irish ancestry” (3). She takes this past and the fluidity it has afforded her to cross through and over boundaries and puts it to work crossing boundaries in her fiction. She is well-positioned to see that boundaries can be crossed and that on the other side of every boundary is something illicit and unknown to explore.

Her background prepared her both for border crossing and for seeing ghosts. Bowen’s Irish roots embrace the idea of ghosts as a commonplace part of the everyday world. When Jordan writes that she can see the Irish in Bowen’s writing she uses the ghosts as one example of Bowen’s Irishness: “This [Irish] orientation manifests itself in her love of ghosts” (ix). Corcoran relays an interesting ghost story contained in the Bowen family history. The very first Bowen in Ireland, whom Elizabeth Bowen calls Henry I, was alive and well in Ireland when he appeared to his wife, who was still living in South Wales, as a putrefied carcass. The story became well-known among acquaintances and neighbors of the Bowens. The stigma of this ghost story

supposedly drove Henry I insane and became a frequent theme for the rants of Bowen's father (also Henry) during his bouts of mental instability (Corcoran 26-7). In Bowen's Court, Bowen refers to the story twice, at the beginning and the end of the book. She wraps her family history in the shroud of this ghost story. This story is significant because it gives further proof of Bowen's possession of *la facultad*, which has a long and rich tradition within her own family. Moreover, Henry I's ghost is not a walking, talking ghost, but a dead ghost, a carcass, which very closely aligns this family ghost story with "Green Holly."

I cannot find any evidence that indicates positively or negatively whether Bowen was fascinated with ghosts in her "real life." She was born near the height of popular spiritualism, and she certainly would have been familiar with ghosts from that angle, as well as with the ghost legends in her Irish ancestry, the most popular of which was the banshee. In her nonfiction work, Bowen's Court, she is matter-of-fact about the existence of ghosts in her family's past and in the house and on its grounds. She is neither fascinated nor repulsed by ghosts; she simply accepts their existence as truth. I will do the same as I analyze her work.

Was Bowen a feminist?

If the same question were posed of her contemporary and friend, Virginia Woolf, it would evoke a relatively simple response, "Yes, but she did not like the term 'feminist.'" Some would argue that the answer for Bowen is just as simple in the inverse, "No, and she did not care for the entire feminist movement." In her book-length study on Bowen and war, Jordan writes that "Bowen readily admitted that she was not a feminist" (3). I do not think that it is useful to determine whether or not Bowen considered herself a feminist. The ways in which popular culture distorts and has distorted this term and the people who profess it have given many cause

to distance themselves from it. What I do find enlightening about Bowen is how she combed the history of her family and repeatedly pointed out the “othering” and silencing of Bowen women in deference to Bowen men. In Bowen’s Court, she gave voice to long-dead female members of her family who could not speak for themselves. Corcoran writes, “Bowen frequently notices the scant attention paid to the family’s daughters and sisters compared to its sons and brothers in her documentary sources,” which included wills, marriage documents, journals and letters (23). In Bowen’s Court, two sisters—Mary and Hester—are mentioned in their father’s will along with their brother, John. Of the sisters, Bowen notes that their “sex did not even allow them capital letters in their father’s will” (77). Bowen goes on to lament the fact that these sisters do not get any further mention in the family records that have survived and which she now possesses. She conjectures that the sisters were “oppressed” and “no doubt led a muted existence, creeping about. [. . .] They were not important, and they left little trace” (78). When Bowen drops variants of the line “It is the haunted who haunt” repeatedly into her work, I cannot help but think of these two sisters who sound very ghostly in Bowen’s description of them, “creeping about” and leaving few traces of themselves. Bowen concludes her reflections on the sisters by observing that “the past does certainly seem to belong to men” (78). So, it could be said that the “haunted” are these women who led haunted lives in the masculine economy and go on to haunt a different economy after their death. Of Bowen’s Court, Corcoran concludes, “the book has a subliminally corrective and revisionist feminist impulse [. . .] it works from beneath through a subtle alteration of interpretative perspective [. . .]” (23-4). I agree with Corcoran. I believe that Bowen recognized the silencing of women in an economy that belonged to men. And I believe that she sought to reclaim women’s voices for the future.

The Destruction of War

Bowen's background and her perspective on women's place in history informed her senses about ghosts and women. War brought the two together by disrupting all notions of the subject and subjectivity. Elizabeth Bowen's birth year is again significant, as 1899 is "the eve of what has been called by many the century of 'total war'" (Jordan xvii). Jordan says that "while Bowen endured the several preceding wars [notably WWI, the Anglo-Irish War, and the Irish Civil War], the brutality and totality of the Second World War affected her with a new kind of intensity and urgency. She shared with her many contemporaries the horror of a war that came so close to them" (1). Bowen wrote "Green Holly" and "The Happy Autumn Fields" during World War II, between 1941 and 1944, while living in London. In her postscript to the first U. S. edition of The Demon Lover and Other Stories, Bowen writes solely of war and its effects on people, experience, and narrative. Bowen makes it clear that she believes war has a fragmenting, destabilizing impact on subjectivity. This postscript is published in The Mulberry Tree, an anthology of her nonfiction essays. In it, Bowen writes: "People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves [. . .]" (97). She writes, "Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and somebody else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied" (Mulberry Tree 95). Selves and subjects are only seemingly solid things, because the subject is a product of language and discourse. And if the violent destruction of war can level a city block or destroy a countryside, what other seemingly solid things can this violence undo? It can and did undo the solidity of the self.

Bowen writes that war and war-time experiences strongly influenced the stories in the collection: "These are, more, studies of climate, war-climate, and the strange growths it raised"

(Mulberry Tree 95). While the American edition of The Demon Lover was published after WWII ended, she does not conclude that the end of a war brings one's identity back to oneself. Instead, she writes, "In wartime, even in Britain, much has been germinating. What, I do not know—who does, yet, know?—but I felt the germination; and feel it, here and there in these stories [. . .]" (98-9). I propose that this germination raised the "strange growth" of the incommensurable feminine in the appearance of ghosts.

In this same postscript, Bowen explains that the ghosts in her stories are linked to fragmented subjects. Of the ghosts, Bowen says, "It is the 'I' that is sought—and retrieved at the cost of no little pain. And the ghosts [. . .] They are the certainties. . .they fill the vacuum for the uncertain 'I'" (95). Here, Bowen acknowledges that the "I," the subject, is uncertain, thus unstable. Bowen's unstable "I" sounds a lot like the subject, which is a constant dialectical becoming, always in flux and never fully stable, shifting as language shifts on the instability of meaning and the impossibility of satiated desire. After acknowledging that the "I" is unstable, Bowen goes on to say that ghosts are stable. To conflate Bowen's statements would produce the following logical progression: If the "I" is unstable, the opposite of that "I" must be something stable. What Bowen poses as the stable opposite of the "I" is in fact a ghost, an apparition, a figment. This sounds a lot like non-logic, like something outside of phallogocentric reasoning and sense. Bowen says that in the vacuum of the "I" is the ghost. And, as Lemaire has pointed out, it is the unconscious that is repressed when the "I" comes into being. I argue that what gets repressed when the "I" comes into being and what appears in the vacuum that the disappearing "I" leaves behind is one and the same—ghosts. As Irigaray explains, the unconscious is the place of the incommensurable feminine. So ghosts are the beings—not the subjects, but the beings or apparitions—that appear where the "I" is not.

As Bowen explains, war produces a world that is “out of proportion to our faculties for knowing, thinking, and checking up” (Mulberry Tree 96), and when those ways of “normal” knowing and thinking consist of masculinist logic, then ghosts appear as the incommensurable feminine, who is incapable of subjectivity, incapable of being known, out of proportion in the normal world. Bowen calls the war “abnormal” times (Mulberry Tree 95). By proposing these ghosts as what appears when the “I” disappears, Bowen presents the first step towards Irigaray’s attempt to “jam” theoretical machinery through an incommensurable feminine—the feminine that Irigaray seeks in the vacuum of the unconscious.

“Green Holly”

In “Green Holly,” Bowen presents the incommensurable feminine in its most obvious portrait with a thinking, talking, feeling ghost, who has her own voice and her own place within the story. What evidence provides proof of my claim that the ghosts in these stories are the incommensurable feminine? In her critical summary of Irigaray’s work, Grosz writes that philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of alterity is critical to Irigaray’s articulation of feminine difference. Grosz explains that Levinas’ definition of alterity has four characteristics:

[. . .] first, it is a form of *exteriority*, separate from and unpredicted by the subject. [. . .] Second, alterity is the site of *excess*, an unabsorbable, indigestible residue the subject is unable to assimilate to itself. [. . .] Third, alterity is an *infinite* category: by this Levinas means that it exceeds all boundaries, borders, constraints and limitations which the subject attempts to impose on it. Fourth, alterity is conceived by Levinas as an *activity*, in relation to which the subject is passively positioned. (142)

This description of alterity, upon which Irigaray bases her conception of feminine difference, exactly mirrors the female ghost in “Green Holly.” This thinking, feeling, acting ghost is outside of the subject: she is a body that is both infinite and excessive.

In all my research, I did not find any sustained criticism on “Green Holly.” It is mentioned in passing in criticisms of Bowen’s ghostly works, but never more than mentioned. It seems that critics who seek to make sense of Bowen’s stories must avoid the story that most refuses alignment with the project of sense. “Green Holly” revolves around the Christmas Eve activities of seven characters living within the normal order and two ghosts that occupy the supernatural realm. The natural characters are employed in covert government work during World War II and have lived and worked together for several years in various country houses. The country house once belonged to the two ghosts, a husband and wife who, while still living, took part in a tragedy on Christmas Eve. The female ghost explains that she was bored with the country and her husband’s “uninteresting jealousy” (723). Then, on Christmas Eve, the ghost says that there were “so many men that one did not know where to turn” (723). So, she asks the reader via the narrator’s vocalization, “How could she not make hay while the sun shone?” (723). The husband discovers her infidelity at a Christmas Eve party and commits suicide that evening. Throughout “Green Holly,” the male ghost lies silent and motionless on the hall floor at the base of the grand staircase, gun in hand, with his blood smeared on the tile. The wife’s cause of death is never revealed. She, however, did not cease to live after her death. She continues life in a ghostly otherworld and begins an erotic relationship with Mr. Winterslow, one of the men in the house. She and Winterslow can see, speak to, and feel one another. This story’s otherworld of a thinking, talking, feeling, female ghost and the silence of her forever-dead husband can be

explained as the hybrid pastiche of social and symbolic feminism creating a radical space of feminine representation that exceeds the bounds of patriarchal logic.

The keys to unlocking the incommensurable feminine are forged when social and psychoanalytic feminism are used together, as one critical framework. Social feminism helps us to reverse logic and head backwards through sense into non-sense. Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness embraces a supernatural, paranormal realm that exceeds the natural, logical order to represent a feminine that exists on its own terms radically autonomous from the male.

The female ghost in "Green Holly" exists outside of the patriarchal symbolic order because this ghost, as Bowen describes her, is "the bodiless foolish wanton" (Mulberry Tree 98) who pursues her own desire at all costs. For Irigaray, the crux of the female's lack in the masculinist economy is her inability to access and explore her own sexual desire. Of the female, Irigaray writes:

How can this object of transaction claim a right to pleasure without removing her/itself from established commerce? [. . .] How could material substance enjoy her/itself without provoking the consumer's anxiety over the disappearance of his nurturing ground? (32)

In other words, how can woman, who belongs to men as an object for them to trade amongst themselves (from father to husband, from brother to brother) attempt to claim rights for herself and pursue her own desire? This is especially problematic since any desire expressed by woman creates anxiety for man because it reveals the possibility of woman's ability to pursue a path outside of man's control. The female ghost in "Green Holly" follows her own path of desire. While living, she was overwhelmed at Christmas by "so many men that one did not know where to turn" (723). She was her husband's object, but "his uninteresting jealousy, his dull passion" (724) drove her to pursue her own desire. That desire resulted in her husband's suicide and,

while this is not made explicit in the text, most likely her death as well. She has provoked her consumer's anxiety to a fatal end. Not a shred remorseful, the ghost says of her infidelity, "She had been silly, but it could not be helped" (723).

This reckless pursuit of her own desire is a mark of her position as the incommensurable feminine. Irigaray immediately follows the passage above with the following:

How could that exchange—which can in no way be defined in terms 'proper' to woman's desire—appear as anything but a pure mirage, mere foolishness, all too readily obscured by a more sensible discourse and by a system of apparently more tangible values?" (This Sex 32).

The "exchange" Irigaray is referring to is woman's desire, which is so out of bounds, so detrimental to the masculinist economy that it cannot be defined "properly," as no words can capture it and insert it into the sense of this world's system. When it crops up, the exchange of woman's desire appears as a "pure mirage," as "mere foolishness." And it is often readily obscured by the "sensible" phallogocentric system. Both Bowen and the ghost admit to this "foolishness": Bowen calls the ghost "foolish," and the ghost calls herself "silly." But, foolishness is a good thing when the goal is, as Irigaray describes it, to jam the theoretical machinery, to suspend "its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (This Sex 78). Woman's desire is "pure mirage." The woman who desires is "pure mirage," living and lusting as a ghost.

This ghost and Winterslow are having an affair. The details of their encounters are never revealed, but the passion is evident. What makes this passion interesting is that the ghost is not infatuated or in love with Winterslow as a man or a person. She is impassioned by her desire alone. She only seeks a release for that desire. She finds her release in Winterslow. The ghost

says, “Lovers cannot be choosers. He’d do. He would have to do” (724). By embracing her desire and pursuing her passion, this woman-ghost “claim[s] a right to [her] pleasure,” which, as Irigaray hints that it will, “remov[es] her/itself from established commerce” (This Sex 32). She becomes “pure mirage” outside of the masculinist system.

In “Green Holly,” the narrative twist of locating a good portion of the story from within the ghost’s perspective forces the reader to accept her as ghost—to accept the supernatural as an alternate production of “truth.” Bowen grappled constantly with blending two identities, two modes of thought, and two ways of being. Her hybrid position taught her that dichotomies not only can be broken, but they have to be broken for survival. In “Green Holly,” the supposed truth of the logical order is challenged and its logic is refuted by the equally true supernatural world. When Mr. Winterslow is startled by a noise and a movement in the air, Mr. Rankstock, noticing the same movement and noise, attributes it to a logical, natural cause. Rankstock says, “That is only Miss Bates’s holly, fluttering in the wind” (723). In response, Mr. Winterslow says, “But there isn’t a wind tonight” (723). Winterslow’s statement refutes Rankstock’s logic and makes the movement and noise the result of an otherworld. Even more convincing is the linguistic and physical disruption the ghost causes within the narrative. Much of the story is told from the female ghost’s perspective. In the middle of the narrative, the ghost’s voice—her truth—ruptures the phallogocentric logic and castrates its symbolic primacy. The narrator explains that the ghost “discarded the feather boa,” “heard laughter,” “smiled and moved down the corridor to the gallery,” and spoke several times to the living and ghostly characters (723). She thinks, moves, speaks, and feels, making it impossible to dismiss her as a figment of somebody’s imagination or a metaphor for something else, which is probably why, as I have mentioned, critics avoid tackling “Green Holly.” A thinking, feeling, acting ghost defies the logical realm of

understanding and criticism, unless one suspends logic and accepts her not a representation of sense, but as the absolute proof of nonsense outside of the given masculine economy.

Other signs that the female ghost in “Green Holly” is the incommensurable feminine are her speech and movement beyond her death, which stand in stark contrast to the silence and motionlessness of the male ghost. Lemaire writes about the unconscious as Freud and Lacan figured it: “the unconscious will be accessible only by way of a long and laborious analysis, as all the forms in which the subject believes in all good faith that he will rejoin himself belong to the autonomous order of symbolism which hold him prisoner” (69). Lemaire thus makes it clear that the unconscious is outside of symbolism, which holds the subject prisoner. Thus, when Irigaray posits that the unconscious represents the incommensurable feminine, then it must be concluded that the incommensurable feminine is not prisoner to linguistic symbolism nor a subject. She exists outside of its boundaries as something other than a subject.

In the masculine economy of logic, in the Lacanian symbolic order founded on the phallus, the man is the primary subject, and the woman is his lesser, silent referent. But after the male order falls away, the masculine subject ceases to exist and the redoubled feminine emerges, proving her incommensurability with the given social articulations. Irigaray writes that women are not “simply absorbed” in the function of the symbolic, “*they also remain elsewhere*” (This Sex 76). The “elsewhere” where the feminine exists is the unconscious where the masculine order refuses to go. Anzaldù theorizes the supernatural as interchangeably the same as the unconscious (17). So, in the supernatural world that exists beyond the symbolic, the female ghost continues to exist. It is interesting that Henry I, the ghost in Bowen’s family history, appears not as a moving, speaking, living ghost, but as a “putrefied carcass.” The ghost in Bowen’s past is a dead male, like the dead male ghost in this story.

In “Green Holly,” the female ghost speaks directly to the dead-male ghost saying, “You should have let me explain” (723) and indicating that she has asked him why he did not repeatedly to no avail. Following her statement, the narrator interjects: “The man made no answer: he never had” (723). In the world beyond phallogocentric order, the male ceases to exist as subject, and the radical, para-normal feminine emerges to disrupt the supposed concrete truth of the natural world. In the world beyond the masculine economy, the male has no voice, and the woman finds ways to make meaning of her own not mediated by the ultimate sign, the phallus.

In “Green Holly,” the female ghost thinks, “[. . .] because of her years of death, there cut an extreme anxiety: it was not merely a matter of, how was she? but of, *was* she—tonight—at all? Death had left her to be her own mirror; for into no other was she able to see” (723). This passage reveals two characteristics of the incommensurable feminine: one, that the mirror does not work to establish subjectivity; and two, the incommensurable feminine is not an alternate subject, but an existence that defies the logic of subjectivity altogether. Of the mirror stage, Lemaire writes, “In this sense, then, the final balance of the mirror stage shows a profit: a total representation of one’s own body” (Lemaire 177). But, as Irigaray explains, the “total” representation of one’s own body is an image only reflected back to the male, not the female. The female’s body is reflected in fragments. Irigaray writes that the woman experiences herself “fragmentarily in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) ‘subject’ to reflect himself, to copy himself” (30). For the incommensurable feminine the female body is not reflected at all in the mirror.

Thus, the mirror, a critical site for establishing subjectivity and recognizing oneself as a subject, has no place in the otherworld of the incommensurable feminine. In “Green Holly,” the ghost cannot see into a mirror. She can no longer establish her subjectivity through the logic of

the phallogocentric order. Post-death, in this paranormal world, she acts as her own mirror and as her own referent.

The female ghost in “Green Holly” provides a departure from the phallogocentric order because she has access to subjectivity in a world where subjectivity does not exist. The question of “*was she—tonight—at all*” (723) reveals that she is not bound within a defining structure but is loose and indefinable, sometimes to the point of not *being* at all. In “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,” Louis Althusser explains that the subject is tied up in the verb “to be” (in Althusser’s case “*être*”). He argues that the subject is about *be*-ing. This female ghost cannot hold onto her ability to be. The narrator explains that “now the mills of death with their catching wheels had stripped her of semblance” (Bowen 724). The ghost meets Irigaray’s demands for the incommensurable feminine to neither “be the *subject* or the *object*” (This Sex 78) and Anzaldúa’s goal of the *mestiza* consciousness to “break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner” (80) because the ghost does not hold up as subject or object at all.

Finally, her inability to maintain subjectivity is also the result of another important aspect of the incommensurable feminine: fluidity. In This Sex Which Is Not One, Irigaray posits fluidity to be the other, outside of philosophical discourse (112). Irigaray suggests that men are solid and women are fluid. She writes, “The self-understanding of male sexuality is based on a ‘mechanics of solids’” (This Sex 117). She goes on to say, “The solidity sought by masculinity is the result of congealing a feminine fluidity” (117-8). The female ghost’s fluidity is evident in many places. The narrator says, “Her visibleness was not under her own control [. . .] it began to dissolve in patches” (723). Here, her corporeal existence ebbs and flows like an ocean tide. Her feather boa has been “dropped into the limbo that was her wardrobe now” (723), indicating that her world and the things in it evaporate and condense depending on the situation. And she has

the ability to move fluidly between the natural and supernatural worlds. The narrator explains that the ghost “set up a sort of suction, an icy indrawing draught. Nor was this wholly psychic, for an isolated holly leaf of Miss Bates’s, dropped at a turn of the staircase, twitched” (725). So, in a supernatural world outside of masculine logic, the fluidity of the feminine emerges. The ghost reveals what Irigaray means when she says that when woman does speak she speaks fluid and where she speaks is in the “underside” of masculine economy (This Sex 113). And, as fluid, the ghost also epitomizes Anzaldúa’s “psychic restlessness” (78). She “can’t hold concepts in rigid boundaries” (78), and her flexibility allows her to stretch “horizontally and vertically” (79).

There is one last interesting twist to “Green Holly.” At the story’s end, Miss Bates, another government employee living in the country house, can see the male ghost lying on the floor. Miss Bates says that the male ghost is “stone dead” and “the man of [her] dreams” (726). Miss Bates does not desire this man, she longs for the pursuit of her own desire. Miss Bates ends her lament by seeking the ability to kill the male. In anguish, Miss Bates cries out to Winterslow, “Who was *she*, your feathered friend, to deceive him? Who could have deceived him more superbly than I?—*I could be fatal* [. . .] *I could be fatal—only give me a break!*” (726-7). She passionately longs to “deceive,” to “claim a right to pleasure” and thus “provoke the consumer’s anxiety.” Miss Bates’s zealous outburst aligns with what Irigaray says about woman’s desire: “Their desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole” (This Sex 29). The female ghost is also voracious in her desire. Bowen repeatedly punctuates her speech with exclamation marks. As if she had not heard him, the ghost replies to Winterslow’s rebuff that their affair cannot go on: “‘I know!’ she agreed, with rapture, casting her hands together. ‘We are mad—you and I. [. . .] It’s kismet,’ wailed the ghost zestfully [. . .]” (724-5). In Écrits Lacan states, “It is, therefore, the assumption of castration which creates

the lack through which desire is instituted. Desire is the desire for desire, the desire of the Other and it is subject to the Law” (quoted in Lemaire 164). Through a narrator’s vocalization, the female ghost says, “She was left with—nay, had become—her obsession. Thus it is to be a ghost” (724). Desire is not specific to what is desired. Desire is the same manifestation no matter the object or goal desired. Desire is a need born out of a distance from what is desired. Winnubst follows the concept of desire from Hegel to Lacan, stating: “This is no longer simply the desire to be recognized by the other; it now becomes the desire to be the cause of desire in the other. Desire thus performs itself in the symbolic register as the attempt to seduce the other— an attempt on which the subject is dependent [. . .]” (17). But no matter to what lengths the subject goes in response to its desire, as Winnubst writes, “desire still struggles to find its own impossible satiation” (17). The ghost (and the incommensurable feminine) has kept her cake (desire) and is eating it too. She is fully satisfied by her desire. Bowen has created in this ghost someone who overcomes desire through complete satiation. The ghost is not distant from her desire because she has become desire. By becoming desire, there is no longer a distance, which is necessary to create desire.

The desire of this ghost is not the Lacanian desire to be or to have the phallus—to be what the other desires. She has turned desire upon its head by possessing wholly that which cannot be possessed. The economy in which the ghost exists is not the phallic field. Irigaray ends the latter passage about woman’s desire by saying, “[woman’s desire] really involves a different economy [. . .] one that upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire [. . .] disconcerts fidelity toward a single discourse . . .” (29-30). “Thus it is to be a ghost” (724). Thus it is to be the incommensurable feminine.

Establishing the “femmosexual” in “The Happy Autumn Fields”

Like “Green Holly,” “The Happy Autumn Fields” (THAF) is set apart from other Bowen ghost stories because the female ghost in the story speaks and feels, inserting her own voice into the narrative. In this short story, the ghost of Sarah, a young woman of a Victorian countryside, inhabits the body of Mary, a young woman living in World War II-era London. Sarah’s ghost uses Mary’s living flesh as her host in an effort to restore wholeness to the female form by reuniting the feminine with itself at the moment the phallus disrupts and co-opts the feminine to define her as its referent. Sarah’s possession, timed at this moment in both her life and Mary’s, creates space for the incommensurable feminine and her articulation of a new self with new bonds, new values and new ways of being.

The story opens with Sarah taking a walk across her father’s fields in autumn. During Sarah’s walk, the story abruptly shifts to Mary, who is lying on a bed in her bombed London townhouse. The story follows Mary—or, as I argue, Sarah’s possession of Mary—for a time while Sarah-as-Mary interacts with Mary’s lover, Travis. The story then abruptly shifts to Sarah as she gathers with her family in the drawing room of their home. The last sudden shift of the story takes the reader back to Mary in her townhouse.

Out of the many texts I surveyed that examined “The Happy Autumn Fields,” all but two come to a conclusion that never even admits a possibility of possession. The overwhelming majority of critics argue that the flip-flop of THAF’s narrative between Victorian countryside and 1940s London is the result of Mary’s psychological instability and a dream that is an effect of that instability. Martin Bidney believes that Mary succumbs:

to the deadly lure of nostalgia, its power to keep one’s selfish will fixated on preserving an idealized mind-set held over from childhood. We will see that the narcissism here,

though less evident at first glance, is darkly pervasive, even tragic. A box of letters and photos, coming to the attention of Mary in blitzed-out London, serves as a departure-point for her dreams of a Victorian past [. . .]. (17)

Bidney is so convinced that Mary has “dreamed herself into the life of mid-Victorian Sarah” (17) that he haughtily refutes the only critic who argues an alternative possibility for the story’s dual realities. Of Brad Hooper’s essay, “Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘The Happy Autumn Fields’: A Dream or Not?,” Bidney says, “[Hooper] points out certain incongruous phrasings that seem to make the two stories coequal in reality-status rather than clearly Mary’s dream of Sarah.” Hooper does not believe that Mary dreams Sarah, writing, “Bowen did in fact create dual realities with a shared character, *not* one reality on one hand and a ‘saving hallucination’ (p. xi) on the other” (153). Corcoran makes a brief reference to the possibility of a ghostly possession when he writes that Mary is either experiencing a dream “[. . .] or, it is hinted, in some form of metempsychosis [. . .]” (148).

Hooper and Corcoran aside, all of the critics have simply assumed that this story is about a dream and not ghostly possession. By refusing to see beyond accepted logic, they close down all possibility of engaging in a truly transformative reading of this story, which I believe much more closely aligns with the tone and spirit of the story. I disagree with the critics who have preceded me. I argue that THAF is clearly a story of ghostly possession, not one about a dream or a hallucination. I read the story using lenses that are open to the possibility of ghosts. THAF is the story of a ghost, Sarah, who possesses the body of Mary in order to transform the symbolic world and articulate a language that unites man and woman at the moment that the phallus divides them.

As Elizabeth Grosz has noted, Irigaray sees the feminine in its incommensurable form as “the threat the unconscious poses to civilization in its symptomatic ‘return’” (Grosz 107). By possessing Mary and entering the natural realm via Mary’s body, Sarah manages to return to civilization, to overcome the “truth” and “primacy” of death and reinvade the phallic economy as a ghost, out of order and out of step with what is acceptable and logical. While her return as a ghost is an obvious disruption of the logical order, her intent in her return is also a disruption. Sarah intends to rewrite the moment of phallic disruption and maintain feminine autoeroticism, continuity, and wholeness of form. If the unconscious overcomes its repression/oppression and returns to disrupt, interrupt, disturb and defraud the phallic economy, then she returns as the incommensurable feminine. She disrupts the phallic economy because she comes to reunite the feminine with herself and, in doing so, to divert the supposed inevitability of the “A/-A” equation.

“The Happy Autumn Fields” opens with an idyllic, pastoral scene from a Victorian countryside. While never stated, the time of the scene can be placed by various clues from the women’s clothing, the gas lamps, the photos of the family, the phaeton (which appears in a photo), and the *carte de visite* that will also appear later. Most critics assume that the countryside is the Irish countryside. Corcoran writes that “Most readers instinctively feel that, although this is never stated, the Victorian part of “The Happy Autumn Fields” is set in Ireland, not only because of the descriptions of the landscape but also because of the quasi-feudal landlordism which its social system appears to suggest” (149). In this opening scene, Sarah and her younger sister Henrietta bring up the rear of a family excursion across her father’s fields in early autumn. The family processional is led by Sarah’s father, “Papa.” Papa is flanked by his eldest daughter, Constance, and his youngest son, Arthur. Walking behind these three is a son, Robert, who walks

with a cousin, Theodore. A daughter, Emily, keeps pace with the two older boys. Two primary school-age sons, Digby and Lucius, walk together. And, finally, Sarah and Henrietta fall behind the others. This scene, which comprises one-third of the entire story, is overly idyllic. It presents the perfection of this family jaunt but reveals it as staged perfection. It sets up the perfect familial tableau, and then undercuts it with subversive revelations articulated by Sarah and shared between the two sisters.

The title of the story sets the stage for idealism. Immediately, one assumes that “The Happy Autumn Fields” are the fields upon which the family treads, as the title leads directly to the first five paragraphs of the story, which describe fields in autumn and the family’s procession across those fields:

The family walking party, though it comprised so many, did not deploy or straggle over the stubble but kept in a procession of threes and twos. Papa, who carried his Alpine stick, led, flanked by Constance and little Arthur.

[. . .] The harvest had been good and was now in: he was satisfied—for this afternoon he had made the instinctive choice of his most womanly daughter, most nearly infant son. Arthur, whose hand Papa was holding, took an anxious hop, a skip and a jump to every stride of the great man’s. As for Constance—Sarah could often see the flash of her hat-feather as she turned her head, the curve of her close bodice as she turned her torso. [. . .]

The landowner’s daughters, from Constance down, walked with their beetle-green, mole or maroon skirts gathered up and carried clear of the ground, but for Henrietta, who was still ankle-free. [. . .] Behind them, rooks that had risen and circled,

sun striking blue from their blue-black wings, planed one by one to the earth and settled to peck again.

[. . .] while from the cottage inside the screen of trees wood-smoke rose melting pungent and blue. This was the eve of the brothers' return to school. (671-2)

In these initial paragraphs that describe the family procession, the scene seems ideally Victorian. The sun is shining and the male landowner, described as a “great man,” has just reaped his bountiful harvest. His fertilization of the earth has brought him an abundant return. He walks the land, marking the territory that he owns with his crossing of the fields. Along on his walk, he brings with him his bounty of children—the signs of his familial fertility, his masculine virility. Papa’s eight children span a wide breadth of ages and include both genders; however, the majority of the children are male when the eldest son, who will appear later, is included in the count. The male children are the signs that Papa’s line will continue and that the name of the father will be passed on. The narrative emphasizes the familial structure headed by the father and intended for the future command of the sons. He leads this procession as the archetypal father in the Oedipal drama.

This ideality of this Victorian scene, however, will not hold up under the weight of feminine scrutiny. Sarah interjects quick, short statements into the ideal description that closely read this family drama. In the previous quotation from THAF’s first five paragraphs, I have omitted several sentences. I will focus on each of these omissions, as each is one of Sarah’s interjections into this scene focalized by the story’s narrator. Most of the time, Sarah’s interjections into the narration are marked by her name. For example, “It was Sarah who saw [. . .], Sarah knew [. . .], and Sarah could often see [. . .].” Occasionally, her thought is not marked by her name. In these instances, Sarah is making her most subversive observations. In

these cases, one can distinguish between Sarah's thoughts and the narrator's narration because Sarah's observations are below the surface. They are the observations of one who can hear what is not said, sense what is not made plain, and see those things that do not appear readily to untrained eyes. They are the observations of someone who understands that other worlds and other truths exist below the surface and beyond this realm. The narrator's utilitarian descriptions are of the outsides of things, including objects, people, and the landscape. Sarah's interjections are in excess of the obvious and intimately connected with the personal, the insides of people and landscapes.

When Sarah's close readings are closely read, the family drama is revealed as a production of phallogentric order, which represses and oppresses the drama's actors. A close reading of these lines reveals Sarah's acute critique of this phallic portrait of perfection and normalcy. As Althusser explains in "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus," "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (137). As a Marxist, Althusser's "real" is the truth of each subject's negotiations as both oppressor and oppressed. The oppression that one lives under and the oppression that one inflicts upon another are dressed up and covered over, then presented as something else in order to continue the work of oppression. This is ideology at work. It co-opts people into the system by presenting an "imaginary relationship" that mediates the truth of an existence by making it look pretty, or at least palatable. Althusser says that "these world outlooks need only to be 'interpreted' to discover the world of reality behind their imaginary representation" (158). Sarah recognizes this patriarchal ideology, recognizes its tenuous staging, and interprets the reality of the places that her father and her siblings hold. Specifically, Sarah recognizes the critical roles of the feminine

and the masculine in this staging. Sarah interprets the Victorian and Oedipal allusions around her to discover the “realities” behind the ideological myths.

In Sarah’s first critical reading of this scene, she recognizes and reads the varying subject-positions of her family members and their difference from each other. The narrator says, “It was Sarah who saw the others [. . .] who knew them, knew what they were to each other, knew their names and knew her own” (671). Althusser explains that the name and the recognition of the name are markers of subjectivity. He says, “calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it is, that you have a name of your own [. . .] means that you are recognized as a unique subject” (162). It is the recognition of one’s own subjectivity, and one’s difference from another’s subjectivity, that interpellates beings as subjects. Sarah knows her name and her siblings’ names, which is akin to saying that she knows her position as subject in relation to her siblings and recognizes their subject-positions in relation to each other.

Sarah continuously interrupts the autumn afternoon to make quietly subversive observations about the various subject-positions of herself and her siblings. As for the daughters, Sarah notices that the fate of her father’s daughters is predictable and circumscribed. They will marry, and each marriage will mark a transfer of the daughter from father/brother-owner to husband-owner. The narrative makes clear that the daughters’ part to play in this familial structure is that of items of exchange passed from father or brother to husband. The female children are Papa’s units of exchange.

The occasion for the walk provides the first evidence to support the idea that the women are valued as units of exchange, not for their unique familial contributions. The occasion for the walk is to commemorate the day before Papa’s sons—all but Arthur, who is too young—will return to school. His sons are afforded the privilege of education and his daughters are not under

the assumption that the sons will contribute to society and further its projects, while the daughters will not. His daughters will not go to school, but we learn that their fate, though different, is scheduled with the same rigor, regularity, and resolve as a school term. The daughters will marry.

His eldest daughter is chosen as his female companion because she is most ripe for this exchange with another man. As Irigaray explains, “Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value [. . .]” (31). THAF’s description of Constance emphasizes this fact by playing up her sexuality. The description mentions her “turned” head, her “turned” torso, the “curve of her close bodice,” the “flash” of her feather. Constance is ready for her marriage, and she has already given her mind to her future husband. The narrator says, “It was Sarah who located the thoughts of Constance” (671). Sarah notices that Constance has shifted from her father’s object to her husband-to-be’s object by marking a shift in Constance’s thoughts. Sarah observes, “Constance gave Papa her attention, but not her thoughts, for she had already been sought in marriage” (671). This is an example of an instance where Sarah interjects her voice into the narrative, without focalization from the narrator. This is an example of Sarah’s ability to hear and see what is below the surface, what must be sensed. Sarah says that Constance has been sought in marriage. “Sought” indicates that a suitor has made the legitimate pursuit of Constance as a wife by seeking her father’s permission to take her hand in marriage. Sarah is not a confidant of Constance, as the text will reveal later. Thus, Sarah’s knowledge of this fact indicates that the proposal has been accepted and made public to the family. Constance has been exchanged, and she has moved her alignment as a female subject from the “A” of her father to the “A” of her husband.

Emily, the second-oldest daughter, is also near the appropriate age for exchange, which is why she attaches herself to the one male in the party who is not a sibling. Emily is described as being “attached but not quite abreast” of Robert and Theodore (671). The narrator says that Sarah “felt to the depths of Emily’s pique at Cousin Theodore’s inattention” (671). Sarah notices that Emily works fervently to little avail to capture the attention of Theodore. Emily is beginning to make herself available on the “market” and wishes to attract someone who will seek her in marriage. Interestingly, the mother, who is married, is not on this walk. Unlike the daughters, she is no longer available as a commodity for exchange. Thus, the mother is sequestered in the private, domestic realm, removed from public display. Sarah sees the women’s subjectivity within the context of their market availability. She knows that where women stand in relation to the marriage market determines their position as subjects.

However, Sarah does not end her observations of the female family members with this pithy understanding of how women are exchanged from man to man. She deepens her observations into criticism when she makes an observation about all the daughters, including herself but excluding Henrietta. Sarah surveys the daughters’ heavy skirts, which each has to “gather up” and carry “clear of the ground,” and thinks, “They walked inside a continuous stuffy sound, but left silence behind them” (671). The women’s dresses, which Sarah describes before making this comment, are symbols of their repression. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia’s suicide by drowning is successful thanks to her heavy skirts. No stones are needed; the heavy dress that is prescribed as appropriate for a woman to wear sinks her to the bottom of the river—literally oppresses her to the point of death. These women’s heavy dresses are likewise symbols of the weight of the ideology that represses them. The repression is “continuous,” there is no end to it. “Stuffy” gets at the oppression and repression. A stuffy room is oppressive. It is hard for one to breathe in

stuffy air. A stuffy person or a stuffy dogma is repressive. The silence behind them references the lack of voice given to women in this society. In Bowen's Court, Bowen recognized the silence forced upon her female ancestors and sought to rectify it and give them their voices back. Here, Sarah recognizes the silence that these women leave behind them, not because they cannot speak, but because their voices are muffled and repressed by the stuffy oppression of ideology that privileges the male.

Sarah observes that the men are privileged, but she also perceives that there is a hierarchy that affords more privilege to some than to others. What determines the men's subject-positions is their position within the family's line of inheritance. The narrator says, "The field and all these outlying fields in view knew as Sarah knew that they were Papa's" (671). The father is clearly the current possessor of this wealth. He will pass this property on to his eldest son, Fitzgeorge. Of the second-eldest son, Robert, Sarah thinks, "Robert, it could be felt, was not unwilling to return to his books; next year he would go to college like Theodore; besides to all this they saw he was not the heir" (672). Of the younger brothers, Digby and Lucius, she says, "these two were further from being heirs than Robert" (672). Sarah understands that the privilege of the male is not a privilege that is spread evenly. Sarah reads what is not said, sees through what is imaginary, and senses the oppression that undergirds the success of this masculine project.

Why does it matter that Sarah makes these acute, quietly subversive observations about her siblings' subject-positions? It is because she recognizes the falsehood of phallogocentrism that she can and does return as a ghost. She knows that this ideology does not hold the monopoly on truth and that another "truth" does exist and even co-exists alongside this "truth." Sarah disrupts the phallic order as a ghost because she knows it can be disrupted. Sarah mirrors Anzaldù's *mestiza* consciousness, which allows the underside of things to be seen, accessed, lived and

accepted when perceived through *la facultad*, an alternate lens of truth. Sarah certainly sees the underside of the Oedipal truth. She disrupts that truth in order to present an alternative truth with alternative values and ways of being outside of phallic logic and phallic context. The alternative truth will make it possible for a new logic to coexist beside, and thus disrupt, phallogocentric logic.

Henrietta and Sarah are extremely close. The two sisters walk next to each other, slightly removed from the rest of the family procession as a sign of their sameness with one another and their difference from the rest. The narrator says, “Between the two [Henrietta and Sarah] and the others the distance widened; it began to seem that they would be left alone” (673). Their difference from the rest of the family is a mark of their unusualness and their unusual closeness to each other. As Sarah considers her siblings and the afternoon walk in the story’s first paragraphs, she thinks most passionately about Henrietta: “Most she [Sarah] knew that she swam with love at the nearness of Henrietta’s young and alert face and eyes which shone with the sky and queried the afternoon” (672). When Sarah laments that the brothers are leaving, Henrietta questions the sincerity of her remorse, and Sarah responds, “More I was thinking that you and I will be back together again at the table. . .” (672). Henrietta concurs with Sarah and responds by saying, ““You know we are always sad when the boys are leaving, but we are never sad when the boys have gone.’ The sweet reciprocal guilty smile that started on Henrietta’s lips finished on those of Sarah” (672). The two sisters will not be sad when the males leave the house. They relish the months they spend without the male presence. It is the presence of each other only that satisfies them. Sarah thinks, “She must never have to wake in the early morning except to the birdlike stirrings of Henrietta, or have her cheek brushed in the dark by the frill of another pillow in whose hollow did not repose Henrietta’s cheek. Rather than they should cease to lie in the

same bed she prayed they might lie in the same grave” (672). Henrietta shares Sarah’s attachment to her sister. Henrietta, the younger of the two sisters, says to Sarah, “But I cannot forget that you chose to be born without me; that you would not wait —” (672).

Their extreme emotional and physical closeness resembles the closeness of the feminine as Irigaray argues that she exists before the male divides her. Irigaray writes that the feminine—the feminine as she exists in her incommensurable form—“*is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person or as two” (This Sex 26). The two sisters are so close that “they looked around them with the same eyes” (673), they “cast one shadow across the stubble” (674), and they “were seldom known to address or question one another in public” (681). And between the two of them they have vocalized their wish to be born together from the same womb and die together lying in the same grave, as if having lived one life. They embody Irigaray’s feminine who is both one and two.

This idea that the feminine is both one and two and neither one nor two defies logic—specifically phallic logic. It coincides with the logic of the female sexual organs instead. Irigaray writes:

Thus, for example, woman’s autoeroticism is very different from man’s. In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument [. . .] As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation [. . .] woman “touches herself” all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself she is already two, but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other. (24)

Henrietta and Sarah are sustained by the tangible touch of each other and the emotional touch of having another female so close. Their closeness seems slightly uncanny, and it distances them

from the other siblings. Their falling so far behind the other siblings on this walk is indicative of their distance from them. Their closeness is strange because it defies logic by situating the sisters outside of the “normal” progression/matriculation/socialization of the Oedipus. It also exemplifies Irigaray’s concept of autoeroticism because the sisters are certainly not homosexual lovers. They are fulfilled and gratified by one another. However, they find this fulfillment and gratification specifically because they are the same as one another, yet different from the rest. They embody autoeroticism. Their sameness is their pleasure. Their nearness is their joy.

Within the phallic economy, Henrietta and Sarah have managed to get close to the realization of an incommensurable feminine. However, autoeroticism does not last in the phallogocentric economy. Sarah and Henrietta’s close relationship can be threatened by outside forces. And, on this happy autumn day, it is threatened by a male intruder.

As Sarah and Henrietta discuss their impending separation from their brothers when the boys return to school, Henrietta worries about another kind of separation, a separation that she will experience for the first time. Henrietta says, “But oh how should I feel, and how should you feel, if it were something that had not happened before?” (672). Sarah responds by mentioning the elder sister, Constance: “For instance, when Constance goes to be married?” (672). Henrietta responds quickly, “Oh, I don’t mean *Constance!*” (673). Henrietta does not refute the marriage part of Sarah’s statement. It is the reference to Constance that she takes issue with. Being separated from Constance is not the separation that Henrietta fears. Henrietta fears being separated from Sarah, and she fears that, as in marriage, a man will separate her from her beloved sister.

Like Henrietta, Sarah senses something on the horizon, but she hopes that this something will not pull them apart: “‘So long,’ said Sarah, considering, ‘as, whatever it is, it happens to

both of us?’” (672). Sarah articulates this thought as a question, because she ultimately understands that “it” cannot happen to both of them at once. It must divide them. The “it” is the entrance of the phallus into their female equation. The phallus will divide them from each other and, ultimately, from their own feminine selves. Irigaray explains that “autoeroticism is interrupted by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis, an instrument that distracts and deflects this woman from this ‘self-caressing’ she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure” (This Sex 24). In this case, the phallus is represented by a man who seeks to divide them by attaching himself erotically to Sarah. If he succeeds in gaining Sarah’s affection, he will pull the sisters apart and, like the penis that Irigaray references, he will “break in” between the two sisters and separate them from themselves. The one that is two, which is one, will become distinctly two and fall into the pattern of “A/–A.” In response to Henrietta’s concern at a new, previously unexperienced separation, Sarah says, “You and I will stay as we are” [. . .] “then nothing can touch one without touching the other” (672). But, if the phallus is to touch them, then they cannot stay as they are. And the act of its touching—its break-in—will do just what Henrietta predicts; it will tear them apart.

As the two sisters fall further behind the rest of the family, they are gained upon by their eldest brother Fitzgeorge and his friend Eugene. It could be said that at the moment that they further separate themselves from phallic logic, ideology finds them and finds a way to co-opt them. It is a critical moment in the sisters’ lives. Henrietta waves vigorously to Fitzgeorge and Eugene as they approach the two sisters on horseback. She entreats Sarah to wave, and Sarah refuses. The prospect of Eugene’s appearance creates tension between the two girls when Henrietta realizes that Sarah is affected by Eugene:

“I can see you are shy,” [Henrietta] said in a dead voice. “So shy you won’t even wave to *Fitzgeorge*?”

Her way of not speaking the *other* name had a hundred meanings; she drove them all in by the way she did not look at Sarah’s face. [. . .] her eyes—till now at their brightest, their most speaking—dulled with uncomprehending solitary alarm. (674)

It quickly becomes obvious that Eugene is the other name. The narrator says, “The ordeal of awaiting Eugene’s approach thus became for Sarah, from moment to moment, torture” (674). Sarah and Eugene have established a connection, and both sisters seem to sense that today the connection will become a tie that breaks the sisters’ bond.

Upon approaching the sisters, Fitzgeorge attempts to ride ahead and join the rest of the family. He does not, however, because Eugene quickly dismounts his horse to walk with the sisters. The narrator says, “Eugene had dismounted. Fitzgeorge saw, shrugged and flicked his horse to a trot; but Eugene led his slowly between the sisters. Or rather, Sarah walked on his left hand, the horse on his right and Henrietta the other side of the horse” (675). The description is clear, Eugene has separated the sisters. It is worth noting that the “his” that is led slowly between the sisters is not explicitly stated. The text leaves the “his” ambiguous. The “his” may literally be the horse, but, figuratively, it is him; it is his penis, which is the stand-in for, the closest thing to, the phallus. He has broken between them and chosen Sarah as his “-A.” Henrietta, on the other hand, has to stand on the other side of the horse. This separation immediately divides the sisters and creates single subjects, where previously they were two as one and one as two. The break-in of Eugene leaves “Henrietta, acting like somebody quite alone, looking up at the sky, idly holding one of the empty stirrups” (675). The break-in has left Henrietta alone and made separate subjects of them both.

Sarah and Eugene share a few erotically charged moments as they walk together. There are smiles exchanged, heads bent toward each other, mutual blushing, and “the consummation would be when their eyes met” (675). This exchange is interrupted by Henrietta’s pain of separation, “At the other side of the horse, Henrietta began to sing. At once her pain, like a scientific ray, passed through the horse and Eugene to penetrate Sarah’s heart” (675). Sarah is affected by this pain, but she is not necessarily affected at the moment in time that Henrietta sings. The next few thoughts of Sarah’s are rife with extreme urgency and emotion. But they are not completely the urgency of Sarah, the girl in the Victorian countryside. They are also the urgency and emotion of Sarah the ghost, as very shortly the narrative will shift forward to the future when Sarah wakes up in Mary’s body. What Sarah says as she crosses over to WWII-era London is: “Stop oh stop Henrietta’s heartbreaking singing! Embrace her close again! Speak the only possible word! Say—oh, say what? Oh, the word is lost!” (675). Sarah seeks to embrace her sister again. To overcome the phallic break-in and restore the autoerotism she needs to have Henrietta near. Sarah’s strong desire to speak is related to her loss of a shared language with her sister. But she cannot find the language necessary to speak this loss.

Words are important to Sarah because language is what structures the subject and prevents her from articulating a scenario that will allow her to remain near Henrietta. Lacan believed that language is “always seeking to ‘rationalize,’ to ‘repress’ the lived experience” (Lemaire 53). There is little language available in this world to describe the supernatural and its sightings and apparitions that disrupt the truth of the normal, symbolized order. That is precisely why these worlds are called paranormal and supernatural. While they are undoubtedly outside of the “rational” world of the symbolic they cannot be encapsulated in language in any defining terms. So they are simply called super[above, more than]natural and para[beyond]normal. Lemaire

writes that “language is above all the organ of communication and reflection upon a lived experience which it is often not able to go beyond” (53). It is fortunate for the incommensurable feminine that language cannot fully encapsulate this beyond world. All that language can do is shove the paranormal sightings into darkened attics, abandoned graveyards, or irrational (often female) minds. An occasional brush with this world is inevitable, but language always seeks to find “concepts [that] organize things which were at first sight confused” (Lemaire 67). As the story will soon reveal, Sarah searches for a language and a symbolic world that will allow her to express herself as the incommensurable feminine. She does not find the language, which is (paradoxically) how she remains the incommensurable feminine.

Later in the story, but shortly following Eugene’s break-in, when Henrietta asks Sarah a question, the narrator says, “The sisters were seldom known to address or question one another in public; it was taken that they knew each other’s minds” (681). The sisters have lost their ability to communicate with one another without language because phallic language—the language that marks the feminine as the inverse of the male—has entered. The sisters no longer know each other’s mind—no longer are affirmed by each other. Sarah’s mind is shifting, not from father to husband, but from sister to husband—from woman to man. They no longer communicate with one another via a system outside of language.

To live as the unconscious one must live outside of the symbolic order. Living outside of the symbolic order is to live as a ghost. The woman is uniquely positioned to live as a ghost because she acts as medium in the phallogentric order. Irigaray writes, “Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself” (This Sex 193). She insists on a fluidity of the feminine, where the feminine slips in and out of the world like a ghost. Irigaray writes that the “woman-thing”

“speaks ‘fluid’ in the paralytic undersides of that [phallogocentric] economy” (This Sex 111). In her later work, still seeking to find a place for the feminine outside of phallogocentrism, Irigaray writes in “Is the Subject of Science Sexed?”:

Feminine sexuality could be better brought into harmony...with...‘dissipating structures’ that operate via the exchange with the external world, structures that proceed through levels of energy. The organizational principles of these structures has nothing to do with the search for equilibrium but rather with the crossing of thresholds. (81)

The fluidity and dissipating structures of women make it impossible for them to be “simply absorbed” in the function of the symbolic; women must “*also remain elsewhere*” (This Sex 76). The “elsewhere” where the feminine exists is the supernatural – the realm of ghosts. She exists there as a ghost—a ghost that takes the unconscious and its non-order as its life. So in the supernatural world that exists beyond the symbolic order, the incommensurable feminine as ghost continues to exist.

It is at this moment, when Eugene—the male—has entered the narrative and separated Sarah and Henrietta, that the story crosses over from Victorian Ireland to WWII London during the blitz. This is the scene, the point in time, to which Sarah keeps returning via Mary’s body as a conduit. Why this point of disruption? Because it is the ultimate point of disruption for the feminine; it is the moment that divides her from herself and causes her to become the referent to the man. Sarah follows her cry of “Say—oh, say what? Oh, the word is lost!” with “*Henrietta...*” (675). And yet “*Henrietta...*” is spoken by another body in another place and time. Physically, the text records this gap by inserting an entire blank line between “Oh, the word is lost!” and

“Henrietta...” The reader must cross over this emptiness, this abyss, and make the leap to Henrietta’s name spoken by Sarah through Mary.

Why does Sarah choose possession of another woman as her mode of haunting? Before answering this question, I find it necessary to prove that this is possession and not the hallucination of a psychologically unstable mind. There are good reasons why Mary could be psychologically unstable. She is living in a war-torn country, and her home has recently been bombed. Travis, her boyfriend, certainly thinks that she is unstable—and takes the opportunity to inform her of his diagnosis more than once. But I would argue that his “diagnosis” simply reflects his inability to comprehend feminine logic, as it is the un-logic of non-logic. What I draw on to prove that Sarah possesses Mary is the voice of Sarah that clearly speaks from within Mary. Sarah “[. . .] all but afforded a smile at the grotesquerie of being saddled with Mary’s body and lover” (677). And, “Rearing up her head from the bare pillow, she looked, as far as the crossed feet, along the form inside which she found herself trapped: the irrelevant body of Mary” (677). Then, later, “she yawned into Mary’s hand” (677). There seems no question that another mind inhabits Mary’s body.

And why Mary—why this “irrelevant” body? She has two things of value for Sarah. In her home, Mary possesses many records, mostly photographs and letters, of Sarah and Henrietta’s family. Moreover, Mary is herself positioned at a critical moment of phallic break-in. Her male friend, Travis, is attempting to co-opt her life and move her from her home to a hotel room that he has reserved for her. To be fair, Mary’s home is not safe. It has been severely damaged by a bombing, and more raids are expected in her neighborhood. However, Sarah, her perception still keen, notes the heavy-handed way in which Travis attempts to direct Mary’s life. Sarah thinks, “His possessive angry fondness was part, of course, of the story of him and Mary [. . .]”

. . .]” (677). And, in this instance, he is specifically separating Mary from her home and from these artifacts that help articulate the story of Sarah and Henrietta’s life.

These artifacts are of great value because they speak with a feminine language the story of a feminine form. In response to Travis’s belligerent insistence that Mary leave the house, Sarah says from Mary’s body, “But I’ve made a start, I’ve been pulling out things of value or things I want” (677). Travis’s response to this statement reveals what is valued in the phallic economy and what is disvalued: “For answer Travis turned to look down, expressively, at some object out of her sight [. . .] ‘I see,’ he said, ‘a musty old leather box gaping open with God knows what—junk, illegible letters, diaries, yellow photographs, chiefly plaster and dust. Of all things, Mary!—after a missing will?’” (677). He sees the items that do not have monetary value—letters, diaries, and photos—as valueless. Thus, he assumes Mary must be searching for an old will, something that will bring monetary gain by providing Mary with ownership and possession—possession of a concrete kind, that is. His statement places value on what can be owned and exchanged and renders Sarah and Henrietta’s bond and their autoeroticism of nearness valueless. Irigaray argues that “Ownership and property are quite foreign to the feminine” (This Sex 31). Instead, what the feminine values is “what is so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself” (This Sex 31). Irigaray says that this reversal of thinking causes an upset in the “prevailing” phallic economies (This Sex 31). Sarah knows what is valuable, and she seeks to re-establish this value. As he rifles through the box of mementos, Travis describes what he finds. His description of the last photo that he picks up is “a *carte de visite* of two young ladies hand-in-hand in front of a painted field —” (678). Sarah immediately recognizes this photo to be of herself and Henrietta, and she cries out: “*Give that to me!*” (678). Travis relinquishes the photo, and “she instinctively tried and failed to unbutton the bosom of Mary’s

dress [. . .]” (678). The dress will not easily unbutton, so Sarah “fling[s] herself over on the mattress, away from Travis, covering the two faces with her body” (678). The best way she can, Sarah wrests the sisters away from phallic interference and tries to reestablish nearness. Travis calls “Mary . . .,” and in response Sarah says, “Can’t you leave *me* alone?” (678). On her request, Travis leaves. His exit restores Sarah to Ireland and to Henrietta.

Sarah returns to the same autumn afternoon. The walk has ended, and the family has returned to the house. Eugene, Henrietta, Sarah, Arthur and their mother sit together in the drawing-room. Henrietta has turned away from Sarah. The narrator says of Henrietta, “Only by never looking at Sarah did she admit their eternal loss” (679). Sarah notices the separation between the two sisters, and, even more significant, she notices that Henrietta has given up on embracing the difference of the feminine in its incommensurable form. Henrietta has become the “-A,” absorbing and adopting the break-in. Of the two sisters, Henrietta was slightly more of an alternative and subversive force. As the sisters walk in the field, the narrator explains that “Papa [. . .] found Henrietta so hopelessly out of order that he took no notice of her” (673). It is a fit of Henrietta’s uncontrollable laughter that causes the narrator to reveal this fact about Henrietta. The narrator says that Henrietta “fairly suffered with laughter” (673). Sarah describes Henrietta’s spirit as a “laughing shiver” that runs “into an element of its own” (679). And “Henrietta so wholly and Sarah so nearly lost all human reason” when they ran around together in joyful “play that was full of fear, fear that was full of play” (679) that when the two girls can be alone together and near each other their activities fit the description of feminine *jouissance*. This “play” causes the girls momentarily to “lose all human reason.” In those times, the girls shed phallogocentric logic or reason and lose their subjectivity in the excess of their joyful play. Now, however, as the family sits in the drawing room, Henrietta “has locked” that possibility of play

“inside her breast” by being “seated beside Mamma, in young imitation of Constance, the Society daughter” (679). The otherness of Henrietta was critical to her and Sarah’s nearness to the incommensurable feminine. Grosz writes that Irigaray uses “Derrida’s concept of difference to clear a space in which women’s self-description in terms other than those which define men’s self-sameness becomes possible” (104). Now, Henrietta’s physical proximity to Mamma and her imitation of Constance reveal that she has given up her otherness to opt for a self-sameness that supports the phallogocentric project.

Sarah is feeling remorse and regret at Henrietta’s and her separation and at the loss of Henrietta’s otherness. She surveys the drawing room, and she finds it just as produced and “imaginary” as the fields. She takes note of the staging and the props: “[. . .] sofas, whatnots, armchairs, occasional tables that all stood on tottering little feet [. . .] the towering vases upon the consoles, the albums piled on the table, the shells and figurines on the flights of brackets” (680). She observes that these things “all had, like the alabaster Leaning Tower of Pisa, an equilibrium of their own. Nothing would fall or change. And everything in the drawing room was muted, weighted, pivoted by Mamma” (680). The public space revolves around Papa—the man. This private space is anchored by Mamma—the woman. All is as it should be in this proper Victorian scene. But, again, Sarah reads that just below the surface of this scene, a second truth reveals itself. These room embellishments teeter on little feet. Everything threatens to fall, but it will not, not as long as Mamma keeps it anchored. Here, “Mamma” is woman, any woman, who is plugged into the phallic economy and defined as “-A.” As long as woman continues to feed the “theoretical machinery,” the wheels of the machine will stay greased and the production line will continue. Before the break-in, Henrietta threatened to “jam” the machinery’s “pretension to the

production of truth” (Irigaray, This Sex). Now, she mimics the Society daughter. Sarah is “in anguish” (681), overcome at the horror of this loss.

Sarah seeks desperately to articulate this problem and speak a solution. The narrator says, “However rash it might be to speak at all, Sarah wished she knew how to speak more clearly. The obscurity and loneliness of her trouble was not to be borne. How could she put into words the feeling of dislocation, the formless dread [. . .]?” (681). Through her postulation of the incommensurable feminine, Grosz writes that Irigaray wishes to “enable other kinds of philosophy to be spoken” (182). Sarah struggles with this goal, and she moves back and forth as ghost in an attempt to achieve success at this articulation.

Irigaray writes, “And yet that woman-thing speaks. But not ‘like,’ not ‘the *same*,’ [. . .] Not a ‘subject’” (This Sex 111). In the unconscious the incommensurable feminine speaks with her own voice and lives on her own terms. Irigaray goes on to write, “Yet one must know how to listen otherwise than in good form(s) to hear what it says” (This Sex 111). In the previous sentence, Irigaray identifies the “it” as “that woman-thing” (111). Listening “otherwise than in good form(s)” is to listen with the “bad form” of what Freud and Lacan, two European doctors, arguably might have termed primitive people. This is not a difficult leap to make, since both men termed the unconscious a “primal” and “primitive” state. Adopting the hearing of a “primitive” unconscious will allow us to hear what it—the incommensurable feminine—says, since she speaks in a foreign language outside of the accepted masculine order.

Henrietta’s response is neither thought nor language. It is action. Before leaving the family, Eugene asks Henrietta not to let Sarah out of her sight until he returns the next day. He attempts to possess Sarah and charges Henrietta with the task of protecting his possession. Henrietta is offended. She cries: “She *is* never out of my sight. Who are you to ask me that, you

Eugene? Whatever tries to come between me and Sarah becomes nothing. Yes, come tomorrow, come sooner, come—when you like, but no one will ever be quite alone with Sarah” (683).

Later, as Travis shifts through the pictures and letters in the box, he reveals that very little survives from Eugene’s life. What he does know is that a letter from Fitzgeorge states that a friend of Fitzgeorge’s youth “was thrown from his horse and killed riding back after a visit to their home” on a fine evening in autumn. Travis explains that “Fitzgeorge wonders, and says he will always wonder, what made the horse shy in those empty fields” (685). This line is the last line in the story. Eugene’s strange death after leaving the family on this evening is the fruition of Henrietta’s prophecy that “whatever tries to come between me and Sarah becomes nothing” (680). Henrietta recognizes the break-in that Eugene represents and foresees the damage it will cause. Henrietta says to Eugene, accusingly, “It is you who is trying to make something bad happen.” (683). After playing with the possibility of “-A,” she finally revolts against it. She must kill Eugene and murder the phallic symbol to return to feminine autoerotism. Travis says, “From all negative evidence, Sarah, like Henrietta, remained unmarried” (684). And, according to Travis, she probably died young.

The story’s supernatural quality is heightened by Henrietta’s eerie prophecy and Eugene’s unusual death. I argue that when placed in the context of Celtic mythology and folklore, the death on horseback in the fields, Henrietta’s prophecy, and the rooks that are prominently featured in the first half of the story further illuminate the idea that Bowen is creating an alternate world where the female exists in terms incommensurable with the masculinist world’s given articulations. In Celtic mythology Badb is the Celtic goddess of war. She is one of the Tuatha Dé Danann or the People of the Goddess Danu. The Tuatha Dé Danann are a well-known tribe in Celtic mythology. Badb often assumes the form of a raven or carrion-

crow and is then referred to as Badb Catha, which translates as “battle raven.” Badb took part in battles and influenced their outcome by causing confusion among the warriors with her magic. The battle-field is often called “land of Badb.” In Celtic mythology, Badb often appears as part of a trio along with Morrigan (whose name translates as “Phantom Queen” and who often appears as a hooded crow) and either Macha (whose name also connotes “Crow”) or Nemain (“Frenzy”). Together they are the goddesses of battle, strife, and fertility. In the first half of THAF, the rooks (a common name for crow) are referenced three times. The three references to rooks may nod to the three battle-goddesses. Moreover, Badb’s ability to cause confusion in battles as well as influence their outcome speaks to Henrietta’s ability to cause a horse to shy in an empty field. In The Great Queens, Rosalind Clark writes that the word Badb is a generic term “signifying supernatural women, sometimes in the form of crows, who hover over the battlefield, foretelling the slaughter and later feeding of the slain” (24). Henrietta predicts that Eugene will “become nothing,” and the text creates a definite supernatural element connected to Eugene’s strange death. Tapping into her *mestiza*’s consciousness, Bowen creates an alternate reality with alternate rules and possibilities that allow for the supernatural to be commonplace. With the *mestiza* consciousness, the fields become the “land of Badb”—a land that belongs to the women, a land where men can become nothing.

In the end, Sarah is seeking a model that will maintain her autoerotic pleasure with her sister and allow her to experience pleasure with Eugene. Of Henrietta and Eugene, Sarah says, “[. . .] would they not without fail each grasp one of her hands?” (681). She desires both of them to grasp her hands. She desires to be in a world where she does not have to choose A *or* B, where she can have her male without losing her female, a world where she can have her female without

losing her male. She seeks a world beyond A and B, where she is not forced to choose as her only alternative to “be the *subject* or the *object*” (Irigaray, This Sex 78).

The story closes with a bomb that rocks Mary’s townhouse and almost kills Mary. At this moment the possession of Mary by Sarah becomes less evident. However, I argue that Sarah does not leave Mary altogether. I believe that Sarah weakens her hold on Mary and allows Mary to return to her body but forces her to occupy her body as shared space. After the bomb, the narrator says, “Remembering the box, Mary wondered if it had been buried again” (683). This is not a brand-new voice, or the voice of someone who has returned to her body completely unaware of the proceedings that have taken place over the course of the last two hours. This “Mary” still desires a proximity with Sarah’s Victorian past.

But this Mary is not fully aware of what has taken place in the past two hours. “She looked at her watch [. . .] she did not remember winding it for the last two days, but then she could not remember much” (683). I argue that this hybrid Mary is both aware of the preceding events and unaware of them because she is both Mary and Sarah. The next paragraph reads:

There being nothing left, she wished he would come to take her to the hotel. The one way back to the fields was barred by Mary’s surviving the fall of ceiling. Sarah was right in doubting that there would be tomorrow: Eugene, Henrietta were lost in time to the woman weeping there on the bed, no longer reckoning who she was. (683)

This paragraph encapsulates Mary’s newly formed dual identity. This hybrid “she” wants Travis to take her to the hotel. This she’s wish sounds like the wish of Mary, Travis’s lover. In addition to knowing Mary’s mind, we know Sarah’s as well. Sarah is blocked from the fields because Mary lived. She is trapped in Mary’s body, because Mary’s body was not destroyed. If Mary had died, Mary would have lost her subjectivity. Mary’s loss would have provided Sarah with the

gain of permanent sleep and a permanent return to Henrietta and Eugene in the fields. But Mary lives. And Sarah remains living in her. Sarah has lost Henrietta and Eugene. She has lost them to the woman weeping on the bed. Sarah has lost them because she is lost inside the woman weeping on the bed. This woman no longer reckons who she is because this woman is no longer just Mary or Sarah.

This new woman laments the cruelty of Sarah's inability to reunite with Henrietta and Eugene on that day. She says, "I have had a sister called Henrietta," and later she says, abruptly interrupting Travis, "And then there was Eugene" (684). This woman desires both the male and the female. However, her abrupt and incoherent sentences are not a logical summation of events or people; they are her attempts to grasp at the language and logic needed to put the events together coherently. She is grasping at a language and a logic that will unite male and female. She says, "What has happened is cruel: I am left with a fragment torn out of a day, a day I don't even know where or when; and now how am I to help laying that like a pattern against the poor stuff of everything else?" (684). She cannot figure out how to put these pieces together. She cannot make sense of it all. At the story's close, neither Mary nor Sarah returns to her "rightful" place. They merge together and form a new woman. This woman's economy mimics the economy that Irigaray describes:

Woman derives pleasure from what is so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either. This puts into question all prevailing economies: their calculations are irremediably stymied by woman's pleasure as it increases from its passage in and through the other. (31)

THAF begins with a case of possession, which is a form of complete and wholesale ownership and which Irigaray attributes to the male. However, the story ends as a case of nearness, not possession, which Irigaray attributes to the female. Whether Mary or Sarah will eventually derive pleasure from this shared existence is unclear. But it is clear that they are so close, sharing this same bodily space, that they cannot have their own selves or the other's self. They cannot have either. They will remain in this ceaseless exchange back and forth between the two identities, yet living as one.

In addition to inhabiting Mary's body, Sarah "warms up" to the idea of nearness with Travis as well. She says, "I have missed you" (683). Travis, shocked by this change of tone, responds, "Have you?" (683). Not being able to achieve nearness with Henrietta and Eugene, Sarah settles on nearness with Mary and Travis. Sarah hopes to have Mary and Travis, reuniting the three of them. Instead of restoring sense to the end of the story, this new woman remains nonsense.

As the story closes, a mirror appears in this Bowen story, much like the mirror in "Green Holly":

She took the mirror out of her bag to see how dirty her face was. "Travis—" she said suddenly.

"Mary?"

"Only, I—"

"That's all right. Don't let us imitate anything just at present." (684)

The mirror that defines subjectivity appears again. As the woman looks at her face she is startled "suddenly." What does she see reflected in the mirror? What about herself causes her to react suddenly? I argue that she fully realizes at this moment her shared existence. She knows that

what is reflected back in the mirror is not the solid, well-grounded subject from before the bombings. Travis's response, with Mary's name posed as a question, indicates that he, too, is not completely sure who this new woman is. Her response to Travis is an attempt to articulate a statement about herself, but she cannot. She fails in the phallic language of this world to articulate this new self—this incommensurable feminine—because the language of the masculine economy cannot describe what she is. That is exactly how it should be.

Conclusion

How do we talk about something that should be un-representable through representational terms? How can one explore the world of ghosts without co-opting it with language, which inserts ghosts into the phallic field? Winnubst writes that “The chains of linear causality, teleology, univocity, individuality, rights and contracted power seem to be losing their grip. And yet it often seems that those chains may work in the same way that a dog's choke collar works: the more we struggle, the tighter their grip” (13-14). I agree with Winnubst on this point. For example, Althusser exposes how the mechanics of ideology interpellate the subject, yet while showing how the subject is made, he announces that it cannot be escaped saying: “There is no outside with respect to ideology” (1502). Lacan explains that there is a real, but all of language exists in the realm of the symbolic. So how can anyone talk about the real? As I mentioned earlier, my goal is to show how we can see the incommensurable feminine and believe in her reality within a language that refuses to let anything be real. Otherwise, real women will never access the radical possibilities she makes possible for them. We have to exploit the incompleteness of language by embracing alternative ideas that make use of that incompleteness in order to take their shape. As an Anglo-Irish woman plagued by a family

history of insanity, Bowen was open to escaping the oppressive bounds of the subject. Those who are othered are more likely to see a way out of the world that binds them. Russo provides a Freudian example of her female grotesque. Russo says that Freud fills his case studies with horrific dismemberments, distortions, hybridities, apparitions and uncanny doubles who contrast with his “normal-looking” patients of bourgeois Vienna. (9). The apparitions, hybridities and uncanny doubles sound a lot like the females from “Green Holly” and “The Happy Autumn Fields.” These “hysterical” women of Vienna knew what these Bowen women know: that getting out of the bounds of the real world provides access to the incommensurable feminine. Neither A nor B, these women are not subjects of this world. Through the combination of a *mestiza* consciousness and the feminine difference of Irigaray, one sees with double vision, and within the chaos of a world of non-logic an apparition appears. She is the ghost—the incommensurable feminine. Saying that ghosts are, making a statement that begins “the ghost is” is a non-sensical statement. Nothing can be, and especially ghosts cannot be. So what does it mean when one says that ghosts *are*? What becomes of our world when ghosts are what cannot be? The world comes undone and the subject loses its subjectivity.

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