

WARTIME SPACES IN ELIZABETH BOWEN'S "SUNDAY AFTERNOON"

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Abstract: *This article examines the treatment of space and time in the Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen's wartime short story "Sunday Afternoon" (1941), to discuss how the use of spatiality and spatial images in the narrative discourse of the story enables her to convey the social and physical reality of the Second World War, and the psychological, interior states and anxieties of her characters, revealing their sense of dislocation and disorientation caused by wartime conditions. My argument is inspired mainly by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" and Gaston Bachelard's definition of the house as "psychic space." The protagonist of the story is an Anglo-Irish man who is on a visit to his old friends in Ireland from London, where his home has been destroyed by the Blitz. He is soon to return to his Ministry job in blitzed London and to an uncertain and frightening future. I argue that the setting of the story, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy big house and its environs in neutral Ireland, becomes a Bakhtinian chronotope where, as Bakhtin puts it, "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84), and the house portrayed as a familiar and well-remembered space that takes the protagonist back to his past functions as an image that, in Bachelard's words, "bespeaks intimacy"(72). Thus, the depiction of wartime spaces in "Sunday Afternoon" gains historical and personal significance that merges the past, present and future, and serves to emphasize the convergence of public and private moments of crisis.*

Keywords: *Elizabeth Bowen, "Sunday Afternoon," Second World War, spatiality, temporality, the Anglo-Irish big house, chronotope*