

An Ethics of the Emotional in Elizabeth Bowen's Writing

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Tiivistelmä

Gradussani tutkin Elizabeth Bowenin emotionaalisen etiikkaa, sitä miten emotionaalinen ja eettisyys liittyvät yhteen tai miten niiden pitäisi kulkea käsi kädessä.

Ensimmäisessä luvussa käsittelen alitajuista tuntemista. Bowenin mukaan velvollisuutemme on valita se, mikä antaa meille elämän ja hänen mielestään se on juuri alitajuinen tunteminen. Vain tässä tilanteessa meistä voi tulla eettisiä olentoja. Bowenin tunnevoimainen kirjoittaminen on hyvä esimerkki alitajuisesta tuntemisesta. Alitajuinen tunteminen on Bowenin henkilöiden tapa olla olemassa ja siksi häiriöt tällä alueella ovat kohtalokkaita. Alitajuinen tunteminen antaa meille elämän tai häiriöissä estää sen. Kommunikaatiossa on tärkeää, että säilytämme runouden. Bowen painottaa 'runollista totuutta' alitajuisessa tuntemisessä. Hämmästyks kielen kautta, runollisuus, estää meitä hukkumasta narsismiin.

Toisessa luvussa käsittelen narsismin suhdetta rakkauteen. Bowen painottaa dissoluutioita, jotka ovat joko hyviä tai pahoja. Bowenin teksteissä kaivataan anti-narsistista dissoluutiota rakkaudessa ja pelätään pahaa dissoluutiota, hajoamista. Bowenin etiikka tässä korostuu siinä, että nähdään pahan dissoluution, hajoamisen, vaarat. Erityisesti nähdään ne vaarat, mitä toisten narsismi voi aiheuttaa emotionaalisen hajoamisen. Tällainen hajoaminen tapahtuu esim. silloin, kun toiset määräävät ja dominoivat tunteitamme omalla narsistisella vaikutuksellaan. Hajoamme, mykistymme, joudumme ansaan tällaisen narsismin vaikutuspiirissä. Tällöin erityisesti alitajuinen tunteminen vaikeutuu, on vaikeaa olla runollinen tässä tilanteessa. Meidän kykymme olla eettisiä vaikeutuu narsististen taipumustemme takia, jotka häiritsevät emotionaalista kyvykkyyttämme. Tällöin kommunikaatiosta tulee epäeettistä. Emotionaalisen etiikka toteutuu ja välittyy vain rakkauden kautta. Narsistiset manipulaatiot jähmettävät meidät ja rakkauden diskurssi vaikeutuu.

Kolmannessa luvussa käsittelen 'the uncanny' (uncanny = outo, kammottava, salaperäinen, yliluonnollinen). Narsismi ja 'the uncanny' liittyvät yhteen. Narsistisessa kommunikaatiossa on häiritsevä ilmapiiri. Bowenin mukaan narsistiset dialogit ovat 'uncanny', ne sisältävät ruumiittoman, aineettoman läheisyyden. Kommunikaatiosta tulee 'uncanny', kun jokin häiritsee intiimiä läheisyyttä. Bowenin mukaan narsismissa on läsnä pelottava, outo ja häiritsevä musta tyhjiö, joka on siis myös läsnä narsistisessa kommunikaatiossa. Eli narsistisessa kommunikaatiossa on outo ja 'uncanny' dominointi tämän tyhjiön takia. Tämä 'uncanny' tunne varoittaa meitä eettisesti. Bowen haluaa painottaa intiimiä, ystävällistä, kotoista eikä suostu antamaan periksi 'uncannyille'.

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Introduction

In my pro gradu thesis I am going to study Elizabeth Bowen's ethics of the emotional. How the emotional and ethics are connected or should be. I want to concentrate on the notion of unconscious feeling, one specific way in which Bowen defines the emotional: "Whenever we unconsciously feel, we live."¹ According to her it is feeling unconsciously, when we truly live. 'Life' is here understood normatively, as true or ethical or authentic life. I would like to see her connecting unconscious feeling with ethics as a way of ethical responsibility or even ethical activism. Diane Elam argues in her *Feminism and Deconstruction Ms. en Abyme* as follows: "the ethics of feminism and deconstruction is not a moralism but an ethical activism."² Feminism and deconstruction are not moralistic discourses, they are ethical, thus involving ethical activism as a crucial part: they are actively 'practising' ethics. I also see Bowen's writings in this sense: they are not first and foremost moralistic but they involve ethical activism in their profound sense of directly questioning ideas and behaviours that are narcissistic. Thus they generate ideas of love and better humanity. They are not moralistic, or 'rigoristic', because of this emphasis on love and true humanity. They also involve deconstruction in their undermining of narcissism and in emphasizing dissolutions (that can be beneficial or harmful). Their feminism lies in the idea of dissolution of patriarchy and masculine (and feminine) narcissism.

The theme of narcissism and its critique can also explain the sense of the uncanny in Bowen's writings. I would like to see her uncanny features in the context described above: they are descriptions or manifestations of narcissism rather and worse

¹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (1938; London: Penguin, 1962) 140; henceforth referred to as *DH*.

² Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction Ms. en Abyme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 106.

humanity, something that she criticizes. She sees the uncanny world full of narcissism: it is our dialogues, our communication (“the atrocities of human communication”³), that she wants to question. Communication becomes troubled in narcissism. It becomes uncanny in its disturbing atmosphere.

So, I would like to see her ethics in unconscious feeling, opening up towards the other, questioning narcissistic behaviours. This could be seen as leading towards true dialogue, true communication between equals.

There is a serious sense of responsibility and commitment in Bowen, her ethics, which could lead us to the notion of ‘better humanity’. There is responsibility in taking up the subject matter of what really matters in our possible change towards something better, her insistence on our commitment to questioning our very dialogues (often in a humorous way).

An ethics of the emotional emphasizes emotion as something we should stick to. It puts emotion in a place that is essential to our sense of life. Otherwise we do not truly live. It is like an atmosphere around us that we live in, it is like a smell – pleasant or unpleasant depending on the specific atmosphere there is at any particular time: “When Thomas comes in he looks as though he was smelling something he thought he might not be let eat. This house makes a smell of feeling.”⁴ It is the social atmosphere that he is smelling. It is illusions in the end, something that becomes art and that necessarily involves emotion as a crucial part that makes us alive: this is also the quality of Elizabeth Bowen’s writing, writing through the emotive. “Illusions are art, for the feeling person, and it is by art that we live, if we do. It is the emotion to which we remain faithful after all.”⁵ We may be sensible creatures but we remain faithful to

³ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986) 154; henceforth referred to as *MT*.

⁴ *DH*, 111.

⁵ *ibid.*, 91.

emotion. And maybe we should. We remain faithful to art, to illusions. This brings us life anyway in the end. Bowen's art is thus lifelike: her writing reminds us of life in its very quality of the emotional. It seems that she wants to stress that quality to the extent that it becomes ethics, an ethics of the emotional: "It is the emotion to which we remain faithful after all."⁶

Elizabeth Bowen offers us a clear and optimistic picture of 'the better humanity' by delicately referring to crucial points in our behaviour and especially our dialogues through her characters' sometimes highly humorous statements, sometimes profound wisdom, sometimes simply through thoroughly accurate and apt words and phrases. The notion of "(t)he energy of words and phrases", that Ann Wordsworth mentions in her foreword to Bennett's and Royle's *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives*, is profoundly intriguing here.

The world of experience is no longer separable from a linguistic drift; nothing pins activity to any constitutive authority. The Cogito and the House of Fiction alike are transgressed. Mirages of selfhood, the re-enactments of the dead on the unwitting bodies of the living, the tensions of heat and stillness and erotic expectation are all loosened from their explanatory contexts and given a figurative energy, unreified and unconstrained. Bowen's language, only seemingly representational, becomes the generator of what moves through the novels, across and beyond the traditional space of literature.⁷

Language and experience merge: language becomes experience and vice versa.

Knowledge and fiction become something more. There is a figurative energy working, "unreified and unconstrained". A figurative energy creates an atmosphere of endless figuration. Bowen's language goes beyond the traditional space of literature. It is something more, something extra. Especially I would like to pay attention to the word

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Ann Wordsworth, foreword, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives*, by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1995) vii-viii.

“energy”, there is the “energy of words and phrases”, which makes one wonder whether we could be talking about some special kind of energy, some kind of emotional energy – or, indeed, unconscious feeling – that comes through the words and phrases because of the very unconscious feeling being ‘buried’ in them? What would be the unconscious of energy, when it comes to words and phrases in a creative context? Unconscious feeling? True feeling conveyed? True feeling that is precisely unconscious, flowing free, free from constraints of narcissistic hold giving us gifts of wisdom, glimpses of truth: the accumulations of the unconscious. The unconscious brings emotion with it, it is the realm of the emotional.

There is the emotional energy or power of her words and phrases: something extraordinary emerges in the course of her writing. Clarity only truly emerges when the unconscious is involved. Otherwise one cannot see clearly, one’s vision is blurred. There is this sense of life: her novels are close to life, they draw from life’s energy, not from death’s energy (which would be narcissistic). I would like to argue that narcissistic energy is blurred and inaccurate: it is death working in it and undermining its authority. Her novels do not only create a life of their own, but they also generate life: unconscious feeling. Thus they are very giving.

I would like to argue that ‘unconscious feeling’ is different from purely physical or ‘conscious feeling’. ‘Unconscious feeling’, our ‘emotional body’, is in touch with the physical body: there is a bridge. There is a bridge between mind and body, one is not overpowering the other. I would like to argue, that it is this delicate and powerful ‘at the same time’ –bridge, the connection, the ‘unconscious feeling’, that Bowen’s novels are, among other things, concerned with. And that it is this very ‘unconsciously feeling’ level that we should be concerned with as human beings, to become better human beings. Biological or essentialist thinking is undermined. Body is there only when

unconscious feeling is involved. There is only body when there is emotion and it comes through. Hélène Cixous writes: “My working material is what was once called the ‘passions’; or, the ‘humours’ and what they engendered, that is to say the phenomena that appear first in our body, coming from the innumerable turbulences of the soul.”⁸

Furthermore, “[w]here does this thought come to us from: from the body. It is the place that writes.”⁹ Body is essential in our emotions, in our unconscious feeling, in writing.

This is Bowen’s contribution and ethics, indeed. In her novels she has described different sides to this idea and passion. In *The Death of the Heart* Anna says about Portia: “Everything she does to me is unconscious: if it were conscious it would not hurt.”¹⁰ Anna finds the unconscious threatening, it is the realm that she cannot control.

She cannot control and overpower enough when the unconscious is involved.

Unconscious is something that reaches the truth, the truth of our feelings, the very life in us. Thus it becomes ethics, ethics of the emotional in unconscious feeling.

Narcissism, according to Sigmund Freud, is described as follows: “The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism.”¹¹ In narcissism “(a) strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.”¹² We need our egoism in order not to fall ill but at some point we must let go of it to some extent and begin to love in order not to fall ill. In Bowen dissolution in love is offered as a better alternative instead of dissolution in narcissism, our own or others’.

⁸ Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 1997) 11; henceforth referred to as Cixous & Calle-Gruber.

⁹ *ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰ *DH*, 245.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction” in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 67; henceforth referred to as Freud, “On Narcissism”.

¹² *ibid.*, 78.

There is this certain Lady Latterly in *A World of Love*, who “had a way of worsting one” and who “had more even of breath than she could do with”; “nothing beat her.”¹³ She has a way of making Jane a puppet: Jane was “somehow already partly won.”¹⁴ She was with Lady Latterly “in Siamese closeness”:

An indecisive engagement between two pairs of eyes took place, and took up enough time to make Jane, held like a ventriloquist’s doll, wonder whether she could indeed be expected to be a mouthpiece(...)¹⁵

Here Jane is becoming something else than a person/personality in her own right, she is almost only a piece of something, of somebody else: a ventriloquist’s doll, a mouthpiece. There are plenty of similar descriptions in Bowen’s novels, where somebody’s narcissism overpowers the other:

The embrace, though intended chiefly to strike a note, was at first startling: the girl, inside the tightening arm, found herself pivoted this way, that way, while the hostess waved round the company with her other hand.¹⁶

There is violence depicted in this particular dialogue (“the girl, inside the tightening arm, found herself pivoted this way, that way”). This is narcissistic violence that is typical in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. I would like to argue that there is no true dialogue, thus, in narcissism. Dialogue becomes distorted, a travesty of communication. “And she beat a tattoo upon Jane’s ribs, more to keep the girl silent than to make her speak.”¹⁷ Jane is silenced. It is typical of a narcissistic exchange that the other is silenced because anything that is different to a narcissist threatens them. A narcissist only sees his or her

¹³ Elizabeth Bowen, *A World of Love* (1955; London: Penguin, 1983) 57; henceforth referred to as *WL*.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 60.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 59.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 59-60.

own image reflected around. These are typical images, that occur between an older and younger woman in Bowen's novels. Also in *The Death of the Heart* there is a similar situation between Matchett and Portia, when Matchett "took Portia's hands and chafed them, her big bones grinding on Portia's painfully."¹⁸ There is this certain kind of violence represented here: the very narcissistic hold over the innocent young. A narcissist overpowers the other thus making him or her a mouthpiece, something that is not a person in their own right. It is precisely the unconscious feeling that is disturbed in them in order to reach equal communication. Their 'emotional core', their unconscious feeling is disturbed.

"Their eyes met. They no sooner looked but they loved."¹⁹ Love goes beyond looking, what is seen as an object, what is physical. What goes beyond physical love ('looked') must be emotional ('loved'). Physical love would be on the more conscious level, which would include narcissistic manipulation, but emotional love would reach out to the level where we feel unconsciously. Thus we do not use such devices as narcissistic manipulation and overpowering at all: things would happen on their own course when we reach this level of emotional love. It would be the area of letting the other touch you, letting the other come in, but having one's own emotional 'roots' at the same time. The ego's selfish boundaries would melt away. This would be a good dissolution in love. Love would obviously mean less narcissism thus leading to a more equal dialogue between the two. Less narcissism means more inclusion instead of exclusion. Instead of egoistic narcissism Bowen is after more meaningful dialogue between the two, which is love. This is the very emphasis in the quoted extracts above. Dialogue is important because it is the very exchange in our human lives, it becomes crucial in the very texture of life.

¹⁸ *DH*, 24.

¹⁹ *WL*, 149.

Dialogues become uncanny when something disturbs the intimate closeness. There is a strange atmosphere in narcissistic ‘dialogues’, there is something disturbing, something uncanny. According to Bowen there is a frightening, strange and disturbing ‘black vacuum’, a void present in narcissism and, thus, also in narcissistic ‘dialogues’. There is strange uncanny overpowering. The uncanny is defined by Sigmund Freud in his “The ‘Uncanny’” as follows: “(T)he uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”²⁰ “In Arabic and Hebrew ‘uncanny’ means the same as ‘daemonic’, ‘gruesome’.”²¹ Furthermore he points out that “everything is “*unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light”.”²² Here is the ethical bad in uncanny feelings. There is something ethical in feelings against the whole tradition of saying morality has to do with duty or pure thinking and from which all feelings are a distraction. Nevertheless, feelings can be uncanny, for example, and, thus, they tell us a different story ethically but still it is ethics that is involved in giving us this uncanny information, the very fact that there is something uncanny. The feeling of uncanny warns us.

Narcissism becomes the very uncanny feature in Bowen’s novels. There is a sense of disembodiment in the description of Matchett: “Matchett’s hand in the cuff darted out like an angry bird, knocked once against the pleated shade of the bed lamp, then got the light switched on.”²³ It seems as if the hand here had a life of its own: Matchett (the housekeeper) struggles to make it switch on the light. Even Matchett is subject to the workings of something more powerful than herself, perhaps, even if not a narcissistic hold from some other person, the workings of another in general, something that is heterogeneous to us, whatever it might be in this case: it seems that there is often

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” in *Art and Literature, Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 340; henceforth referred to as Freud, “The Uncanny”.

²¹ *ibid.*, 342.

²² *ibid.*, 345.

²³ *DH*, 85.

this threat imposed by other people, otherness somehow present in Bowen. There is this juxtaposing of what is familiar (Heimlich) and what is unfamiliar (Unheimlich) in Bowen. Narcissism becomes that unfamiliar, disturbing otherness in its lack of intimacy, lack of familiar, but, at the same time, strangely familiar in our communication. Narcissism has this threatening and disturbing tone to it creating an uncanny feeling in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. In a narcissistic ‘dialogue’ there is something disturbing, something like a void “that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light”. There is a sense of uncanny uncertainty to every narcissistic ‘dialogue’. One is threatened with a narcissist.

Also this adds to the sense of the unconscious feeling being there all the time, even if in more threatening ways. This is partly the anatomy of the emotional in Bowen, the anatomy of the unconscious feeling in a more disturbing, uncanny, sense. This can be seen when Jane is “putting out what seemed no longer to be exactly her own hand...”²⁴ Is this a dissolution of identity, loss of the connection between mind and body, a taking over by something other, by forces that we are not in control of? These images add also to the sense of narcissistic takeover in the novels in general, there being these ‘forces’ outside and inside of us that disturb us. It is the very uncanny world and its effects on us.

Bowen is interesting in my opinion especially because she is concerned with emotions. She puts emotions in a place that does not prefer thoughts necessarily. She reverses the dichotomy of thoughts/emotions and makes them mingle, too. She shows us the power of emotions both in their disturbing and ethical senses. She introduces us to an ethics of the emotional, as I would like to call it, not forgetting the more disturbing possibilities of emotions. I would like to study in my pro gradu thesis how Bowen

²⁴ *WL*, 69.

makes this happen, how she makes what concerns emotions tell us the stories of narcissism vs. love, unconscious feeling, the uncanny. In short how the emotional in her writing emerges as an ethics. So, my aim is to show how an ethics of the emotional emerges from Bowen's writing.

An ethics of the emotional is an ethical stance that emphasizes emotions as a crucial part in ethics. Emotions can do the ethical job for us in case they are undisturbed. Disturbed emotional capacities, emotions that are blocked by our narcissisms, harm our possibility to ethical activism. It is not moralism that is emphasized but ethical activism that contains undisturbed emotional capacities. Moralism has not so much to do with emotions. My idea of an ethics of the emotional comes from reading Bowen's novels. Later on I came across the following texts that talk about similar things. Chris Lucas argues in his "Ethics as Emotions – An Evolutionary Approach" as follows: "I wish to argue that ethics, as practiced, are emotions and not thoughts and are in fact prior to ethical thought processes."²⁵ In my opinion, this comes close to what Bowen writes about and to what I have had in mind. He continues: "My initial premise is that in any ethical situation we act first and think later."²⁶ He emphasizes "emotional 'understanding'" and notes: "Our ethical reaction to the same situation tomorrow may now be very different and is based on our new emotional 'understanding'!"²⁷ Here emotions and ethics are connected closely. Walter Lesch says in his "Cultivating Emotions: Some Ethical Perspectives" as follows: "[T]he

²⁵ Chris Lucas, "Ethics as Emotions – An Evolutionary Approach", CALResCO, Complexity & Artificial Life Research, Manchester U.K., Page Version 4.83 January 2004 (Paper V1.2 August 1997, original published IFF 14 May/June 1996) 1; <<http://www.calresco.org/ethics.htm>

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*, 3.

fact that emotions intervene permanently in moral practice is undeniable(...)"²⁸ He continues:

We sometimes seem to be completely dominated by strong passionate feelings which do not leave us any possibility of free decisions. In such a moment the moral criteria of behaviour tend to get out of control. On the other hand emotions can be canalised in order to do the right thing in situations where reason alone is no sufficient motivation for the appropriate choice. Emotional life is not automatically an enemy of morality. On the contrary it can be an indispensable part of moral practice.²⁹

Here emotions are seen vital in our "moral practice". Emotions can make the right choice here. The idea of the importance of the undisturbed emotional capacities is not emphasized here. The idea of narcissistic disturbances does not come up the way I have wanted to emphasize them in an ethics of the emotional. He continues as follows:

What is most important: the emotional attitude is not just a background noise which could be filtered out in order to get the pure sound of impartial reasoning; it is a driving force behind the personal ideal of a good life and justification of political commitment (Walzer, 1999).³⁰

Here emotions are emphasized as "a driving force behind the personal ideal of a good life" and not just "background noise". This comes close to my idea of an ethics of the emotional in Bowen.

Bowen's moralism is emphasized by some critics. John Coates puts it in his "Moral Choice in Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North*" as follows: "Perhaps the moral scheme of the novel lies in the contrast between innocent openness and worldly

²⁸ Walter Lesch, "Cultivating Emotions: Some Ethical Perspectives" in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4, 2001, pp. 105-8, quotation from page 105.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*, 106.

egocentricity and sophistication.”³¹ I would like to argue that Bowen is not moralistic but much more subtle in her ethical activism. I would also like to argue that Bowen goes deeper than just describing “innocence” and “worldly egocentricity and sophistication” from a moralistic point of view. I think that Bowen’s writing involves ethical activism in questioning this kind of dichotomy. She sees narcissism in everyone (in some to a greater extent) and “worldly egocentricity and sophistication” can be seen in a much more dangerous light as disturbing to our sense of life. She is not being moralistic, rather she is questioning our grounds of beliefs in a more radical way. “Egocentricity and sophistication” seem to me an odd pair. It is as if we should become egocentric to be sophisticated. I do not think that Bowen is stressing this kind of thinking. According to Coates, “Bowen’s ghost stories offer some of the most concentrated examples of her moral vision.”³² He goes on as follows: “The loss of order and rootedness, of agreed codes of manners and behaviour, is a central concern in her novels.”³³ I would like to argue that “agreed codes of manners and behaviour” are rather questioned by Bowen. Coates continues: “Lack of the secure basis, of the ease accepted moral or social codes bring, produces a malaise whose various symptoms Bowen’s novels chart.”³⁴ Coates emphasizes “accepted moral or social codes” as a way out of “a malaise”. I think that Bowen actually questions moral and social codes as something that is an easy way out. Bowen’s vision is more complex than this, I think. Bowen questions our moral and social codes as insufficient now to our (post) modern lives. I would like to argue that she is after new ways of dialogues that would bring about more equal dialogues –

³¹ John Coates, “Moral Choice in Elizabeth Bowen’s *To the North*” in *Renascence*, summer 1991, vol. 43, issue 4, 241.

³² John Coates, “The Moral Argument of Elizabeth Bowen’s Ghost Stories” in *Renascence*, summer 2000, vol. 52, issue 4, 293.

³³ *ibid.*, 294.

³⁴ *ibid.*

dialogues that would go beyond any moral or social codes we have been used to accept before. Here she emphasizes emotion and ethics.

I think that in Bowen criticism sometimes there is too much emphasis on the dichotomy too innocent and loving/a worldly (egocentric) success. A similar kind of juxtaposition comes up in Hermione Lee's *Elizabeth Bowen*, when she writes about *The Death of the Heart*: "it is more painfully about the confrontation between innocence and experience than any other of the novels".³⁵ Again, there is innocence and, this time, experience. Experience sounds like something to achieve here. I would like to argue that Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* is much more disturbing than this. "Experience" is rather something that is questioned, especially if it happens to be disturbed narcissism. Lee continues as follows: "Portia, like Leopold is a problem to herself and others because she has no real idea of what social behaviour ought to be, no standard assumptions. Her innocence isn't only to do with age and sex. It is also a social innocence."³⁶ Again, I would like to argue that Bowen rather questions "what social behaviour ought to be". And it is disturbing things that she seems to see especially in our social codes. Lee continues as follows: "Portia's 'heart' is sacrificed to the world, and there is a suggestion that the sacrifice may be redemptive."³⁷ One gets the feeling that *The Death of the Heart* is a Bildungsroman according to Lee. I would like to argue that it is the possible sacrifice "to the world" that might be questioned here actually. It is not at all sure that Portia's sacrifice of the heart is redemptive, quite the opposite I would like to argue.

Bernard Williams argues in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* as follows:

³⁵ Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (1981; London: Vintage, 1999) 104.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*, 122.

Many philosophical mistakes are woven into morality. It misunderstands obligations, not seeing how they form just one type of ethical consideration. It misunderstands practical necessity, thinking it peculiar to the ethical. It misunderstands ethical practical necessity, thinking it peculiar to obligations. Beyond all this, morality makes people think that, without its very special obligation, there is only inclination; without its utter voluntariness, there is only force; without its ultimately pure justice, there is no justice. Its philosophical errors are only the most abstract expressions of a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life.³⁸

Morality is criticized here as having a misconception of life and thus being misleading in its relation to ethics. I would like to argue that similar mistakes are woven into reading Bowen and Bowen's morality. There are misconceptions of life and thus, ethical activism and emotional understanding would be more appropriate way of reading Bowen's texts than referring to them as moralistic. The understanding of life in Bowen succeeds in avoiding misconceptions more than before, perhaps. Bowen's texts involve "practical necessity", ethical activism. They involve ethical obligations, voluntariness, justice. Morality carries too many philosophical mistakes with it to avoid "deeply rooted" misconception of life thus not reaching Bowen's ethics of the emotional.

I am using Luce Irigaray's theories on sexual difference, wonder and love. They are appropriate here because she talks about an ethics of sexual difference, which involves the dialogues between women and (narcissistic) men and thus the dialogues are emphasized in general. This is an important point in my pro gradu thesis, I talk about the importance of dialogues, especially the emotional side of them. The idea of wonder is also important in dialogues, in communication. Her ideas of love involve the idea of poetic, which is also important in ethical communication. I am also using Hélène Cixous' theories on love. They involve ideas of ethical communication in love. Sigmund Freud's theory on narcissism is useful in my dealings with narcissism in

³⁸ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985; London: Routledge, 2006) 196.

general. In this context I also use Marcus West's ideas on narcissism and emotions, which is helpful in looking at narcissistic 'dialogues', communication that can have disturbed emotions. I also use Nicholas Royle's theoretical thinking on meaning and the uncanny. The idea of meaning is appropriate here because it is the ground in meaningfulness which, I think, is important, again, in communication, in meaningful dialogues. Freud's and Royle's theories on the uncanny are helpful in thinking about the disturbances in narcissistic communication. I see the uncanny here in a close connection with narcissism. Rei Terada's theories on emotion are helpful in seeing the importance of emotions in communication. So, my aim is to study unconscious feeling, narcissism vs. love and the uncanny in order to understand an ethics of the emotional. I want to see if unconscious feeling is a crucial part in ethical behaviour. I also want to see what kind of disturbances of behaviour narcissism would involve emotionally when connected with ethics. The uncanny is interesting as I see it in its involvement with narcissism and thus emotions and ethics. What is important in my gradu is to concentrate on communication and to see its importance in our emotional life.

1. Unconscious Feeling

Rome is a continuity,
called 'eternal'.
What has accumulated
in this place acts on
everyone, day and night,
like an extra climate.³⁹

What Rome is, according to Elizabeth Bowen, applies to feeling as well. It is something eternally continuing, accumulating; acting on everyone – like an extra climate. It is something more, something added. “Emotion demands virtual self-difference – an extra “you”.”⁴⁰

There is specifically, feeling unconsciously. According to Elizabeth Bowen, this is the extra climate we live in, or perhaps the very climate we live in: “Whenever we unconsciously feel, we live.”⁴¹ It is feeling unconsciously that leads to the multiplicity of our unconscious, the strength and wisdom that have accumulated there, acting on us day and night – like an extra climate of our personal lives. This gives us truer sense of living instead of egotistic – and sometimes brutalizing – existence: “Living is brutalizing: just look at everybody!”⁴²

Feeling unconsciously is something eternal, perhaps, establishing something more, something extra, admitting the unadmitted, thus making whole what has been broken, missing, lost. Reviving, revivifying, unifying: admitting the unadmitted:

Even by day, though, the unlike likeness disturbs one more than it should: *what* is it unlike? Or is it unlike at all – is it the face discovered? The portrait, however feeble, transfixes something passive that stays behind

³⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *A Time in Rome* (London: Longmans, 1960).

⁴⁰ Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2001) 31; henceforth referred to as Terada.

⁴¹ *DH*, 140.

⁴² Elizabeth Bowen, *Eva Trout* (1968; New York: Avon, 1978) 241; henceforth referred to as *ET*.

the knowing and living look. No drawing from life just fails: it establishes something more; it admits the unadmitted.⁴³

It is an absolute heart that is a prerequisite to the unconscious feeling ethically. An ethics of the emotional requires absolutes that only exist in feeling: “Her [Portia’s] ‘right thing’ is an absolute of some sort, and absolutes only exist in feeling.”⁴⁴ Unconscious feeling is something that we have to reach to reach the heart, to reach an ethics of the emotional. Unconscious feeling is a question of ethics ultimately: to become better human beings we need our levels of unconscious feeling. To do the right thing is an absolute choice of the emotional. And according to Elizabeth Bowen, it would be unconscious. Hélène Cixous writes as follows: “I know that it’s by being unknown to myself, that I live.”⁴⁵ It is precisely feeling unconsciously when I am unknown to myself. This is the state we should reach to live, to feel life to the full.

“The galante revival was signalized by a lifting of glasses almost as though to drink a toast; and though one by one these were put down again, there remained the sensation that there had been a moment.”⁴⁶ There are these reviving moments in life (“The galante revival”, “there had been a moment”). Almost drinking a toast to this moment that gives us life is almost drinking a toast to unconscious feeling. We are glad there was an unconscious moment to make us alive again. We are also glad that we chose the ethically right thing. We drink to an ethics of the emotional.

An ethics of the emotional is feeling unconsciously. It is our ethical duty to choose life, to choose precisely that which gives us life. To emphasize this is Elizabeth Bowen’s ethical activism, her contribution, her ethics of the emotional.

⁴³ *DH*, 207.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁵ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 8.

⁴⁶ *WL*, 68.

Emotive writing is also crucial here. She herself said: “I am sure that in nine out of ten cases the original wish to write is the wish to make oneself felt...the non-essential writer never gets past that wish’.”⁴⁷ According to Victoria Glendinning “[s]he combines an emotional intensity second to none with a humour that ranges from the subtlest social comedy to Dickensian burlesque. She entertains in her books because she herself found life entertaining.”⁴⁸ It is especially Bowen’s humour that involves unconscious feeling; she makes herself felt through the emotional intensity ‘buried’ in her emotive writing. But even her humour involves ethical activism. Anna has read Portia’s diary and says: “As I read I thought, either this girl or I are mad. And I don’t think I am, do you?”⁴⁹ Is she, it is the humour here that makes one wonder. Maybe Anna is mad in her possible narcissism, not Portia. Bowen combines “an emotional intensity” “with a humour”. Humour is a crucial part of Bowen’s writing and a crucial part in what makes her writing emotive. I would like to argue that humour is linked with unconscious feeling but it would be interesting to study whether humour has something to do with narcissism, love and the uncanny. One might say that narcissism and the uncanny put humour off to some extent. Even though sometimes people laugh at narcissism and the uncanny. Love could be seen as involving laughter. Or are these things mixed, perhaps, in humour? It is possible. Are there narcissistic and uncanny processes involved in producing humour? One could suggest that humour involves an outburst that is specifically an emotional liberation from narcissism and the uncanny. Thus humour would be the kind of unconscious feeling that involves love. One could say, thus, that Bowen’s texts are an attempt to liberate oneself from narcissism and the uncanny. There

⁴⁷ Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 41-42; henceforth referred to as Glendinning.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹ *DH*, 10.

is an ethical sense to humour in Bowen's writings. Humour becomes a process of ethical liberation from disturbing forces like narcissism and the uncanny.⁵⁰

According to Luce Irigaray, for communication it is important that language lives, that it is poetic: "In this world otherwise lived and illuminated, the language of communication is different, and necessarily poetic: a language that creates, that safeguards its sensible qualities so as to address the body and the soul, a language that lives."⁵¹ It is important that language of communication addresses both the body and the soul, that it creates. It is important that we live and that our language lives to reach another through communication. "[L]anguage of communication" is "poetic".

According to Elizabeth Bowen, "[u]nwritten poetry twists the hearts of people in their thirties."⁵² Nicholas Royle writes in his *After Derrida* as follows:

History happens in no time. I would like to suggest that, more than any other kind of writing perhaps, poetry promotes an apprehension of that surprise or astonishment about which Derrida writes in relation to language as the origin of history, viz. 'astonishment by language as the origin of history' (FS, 4) and surprise as the condition of possibility of any rigorous historiography.⁵³

So, one could suggest that it is this very astonishment by language that is the origin of history, that is the origin of personal history as well: the above mentioned "people in their thirties" should reach this point, to reach poetry of life, of their own lives. Through the astonishment by language to be reborn as human beings, as better human beings, to be able to reach the origin of their own history, to be able to start life anew or at last.

The beginning of personal history also means the possibility of love and

⁵⁰ More could be said about humour in this connection but I am not going into it further now.

⁵¹ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love* (London, New York: continuum, 2002) 12; henceforth referred to as Irigaray, *The Way of Love*.

⁵² *DH*, 123.

⁵³ Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) 17; henceforth referred to as Royle, *After Derrida*.

communication. The astonishment by language is a prerequisite for anti-narcissism, for love and true dialogues. Poetry, “naked life”, is a prerequisite for love and communication. It is only through “naked life” that one really launches one’s own history, through the experience of this surprise historiography, because, according to Hélène Cixous, “[w]hat is most true is poetic. What is most true is naked life.”⁵⁴

One could also suggest that it is the quality of true life, naked life, ultimately the truth that people yearn for in poetry – in literature or elsewhere. And “unwritten poetry” of life, of their own life (i.e. language, unwritten language or non-existent writing, which is the basis for spoken word) is twisting their hearts because there is no other origin for life than poetry. So, there really is no other starting point for life, presence than poetry, language, ‘writing’. “And while looking very very closely, I copy. The world written nude is poetic.”⁵⁵ This is specifically ‘anti-narcissistic’ writing. It is writing that is about poetic truth. According to Elizabeth Bowen, the Novel is the “non-poetic statement of a poetic truth”.⁵⁶ Poetic truth is important in feeling unconsciously: it is the quality of feeling unconsciously. It is important for communication, for a true dialogue in ethical terms: poetic truth is an ethics of the emotional, something that cannot be reached unless we feel unconsciously. Astonishment is required in order not to be drowned in narcissism’s hold on us. “For there to be an exchange, it is essential that the other touch us, particularly through words.”⁵⁷ The other can touch us through words that touch us, words that involve unconscious feeling: without unconscious feeling one does not particularly touch. They have to be specific words, emotive writing, with the emotional quality ‘buried’ in them that touch us.

⁵⁴ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 3.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *MT*, 6.

⁵⁷ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 18.

Rei Terada notes as follows: “Rousseau rejects the idea that language is utilitarian, arguing that needs – exemplarily food and water – disperse populations, while the passions bring them together in language.”⁵⁸ Passions, emotion, and language go hand in hand. Furthermore it is unconscious feeling that counts: “If one presumes in the first place that only subjects feel, then poststructuralist emotion looks like a symptomatic irruption, an unconscious contradiction.”⁵⁹ She goes on to argue as follows: “Yet if emotional effects are so terribly pervasive in poststructuralist theory – ‘*always* ...smuggle[d] in’ – it is time to consider the possibility that poststructuralism is *directly* concerned with emotion. In order for this to be so, emotion would have to be nonsubjective.”⁶⁰ Emotion is flowing free, unconscious, nonsubjective.

Poststructuralism is an ‘anti-narcissistic’ discourse in its emphasis on emotion. Thus poststructuralism is concerned with an ethics of the emotional. And Bowen’s writing is poststructuralist in turn. It is “an unconscious contradiction” to writings that do not reach an ethics of the emotional. To say that Bowen is a poststructuralist writer is to refer to the idea of postmodern: “(...) [P]aradox of the time of the postmodern also points to the fact that, strictly speaking, postmodernism should not be thought as a term of periodization: postmodernism challenges us to see the present in the past, the future in the present, the present in a kind of no-time.”⁶¹

According to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle “[r]anging between the tragic and the comic, between the poignant and scrupulously prosaic, Bowen’s novels present dissolutions at the level of personal identity, patriarchy, social conventions and

⁵⁸ Terada, 36.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (Hemel Hemstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995) 178; henceforth referred to as Bennett & Royle, *An Introduction*.

language itself – up to and including the language of fiction and criticism.”⁶²

Dissolutions in Bowen are either good or bad: there is longing for a good anti-narcissistic dissolution in love and, at the same time, a fear of a bad narcissistic dissolution, dissociation. Patriarchy dissolves in a hilarious way. There is the example of Thomas in *The Death of the Heart*: “He dreaded (to be exact, he dreaded at that time) to be loved with any great gush of the heart. There was some nerve in his feeling he did not want touched: he protected it without knowing where it was.”⁶³ It is Bowen’s humour (“(to be exact, he dreaded at that time)”, “he protected it without knowing where it was”) that makes patriarchy dissolve here. There is a dissolution of language in the following: “[T]here followed one of those pauses in which animals, face to face, appear to communicate.”⁶⁴ There is an animallike pause where language dissolves. “People uncannily *become* words and sentences...”⁶⁵ Bennett and Royle go on as follows: “We argue that the notion of character (that is, people, real or fictional) is fundamentally transformed in Bowen’s writing: her novels derange the very grounds of ‘character’, what it is to ‘be’ a person, to ‘have’ an identity, to be real or fictional.”⁶⁶ In Bowen’s novels people on the one hand feel unconsciously and on the other hand they dissolve as a result of narcissism, their own or others’. The same applies to real people in the real world. Fiction and real is mixed. Bowen’s ethics here would be to see the danger of this: to see what it does to people when they dissolve or when they become subjected to dissolution by others’ narcissism. To feel unconsciously would be a better alternative, better nonsubjectiveness: “The ideology of emotion tells a supplementary

⁶² Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (London: Mac Millan, 1995) xix; henceforth referred to as Bennett & Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen*.

⁶³ *DH*, 39.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁵ Bennett & Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen*, xvii.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

story in which emotion fills in the difference it registers.”⁶⁷ It is precisely this extra climate, this supplementary story that is unconscious feeling. “The discourse of emotion from Descartes to the present day describes emotion as nonsubjective experience in the form of self-difference within cognition.”⁶⁸

Bowen’s novels are full of images that show some kind of dissolution, for example in *The House in Paris* Henrietta is experiencing the dissolution of thoughts: “[S]he could not hear the clock without seeing the pendulum, with that bright hypnotic disc at its tip, which set the beat of her thoughts till they were not thoughts.”⁶⁹ Often the dissolution happens because of narcissism around or in oneself. This I will concentrate on more in the following chapter.

According to Bowen, “[t]he essence of a poetic truth is that no statement of it can be final.”⁷⁰ A poetic truth is flowing free, unconsciously taking up new forms and directions infinitely. According to Irigaray, “[s]exual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date (...) For loving partners this would be a fecundity of birth and regeneration, but also the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new *poetics*.”⁷¹ The same idea comes up in *The Death of the Heart*: “The impetus under which he seemed to move made life fall, round him and her, into a *new poetic order* at once.”⁷² It is vital that our emotional dialogues remain poetic, that they go beyond narcissism. This is possible when we are open to new things, when we remain feeling unconsciously. “Human mystery must be safeguarded and cultivated thanks to a poetic way of dwelling. And the same goes for the preservation of the mystery of the other, whose attraction lives on if

⁶⁷ Terada, 3.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1935) 22; henceforth referred to as *HP*.

⁷⁰ *MT*, 36.

⁷¹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984; London: The Athlone Press, 1993) 5; henceforth referred to as Irigaray, *An Ethics*.

⁷² *DH*, 105, my emphasis.

this other continues to surprise without being reduced to some familiar evaluation at our disposal.”⁷³ “A poetic way of dwelling” protects us, it helps us to keep our mystery and that of the others: the other must be let surprise us time after time, infinitely. The other one should never be “at our [narcissistic] disposal”.

Theory becomes emotion and emotion becomes theory in Bowen. The result is often poetry. Unconscious feeling becomes poetic life experience. There is life to be yearned for, at least, if nonexistent for the moment. And it is lurking around. Unconscious feeling is a hint, if nothing more yet. Bowen’s writing is enough and, at the same time, wants more of unconscious feeling. There is yearning for unconscious feeling.

Bowen’s texts are theory and poetry, among other things. One of their theories is about unconscious feeling and it is connected with the idea of poetry. Poetry, first and foremost, involves unconscious feeling. Bowen’s texts promise that there are better ways for us in life, we can go about life in a different way. We can let our unconscious feeling emerge as a promise for a better life. Our feelings are important and should be taken more seriously, as a mode of guidance, too.

Bowen’s writing is both theory and practise of unconscious feeling. “Whenever we unconsciously feel, we live.”⁷⁴ is the theory part, for example. And how it shows in the text is the way the writing is emotive, for example in humorous parts. Comic writing brings us closer to emotion: as readers we are immersed in emotion. And it is very much unconscious feeling that is involved. Bowen makes us dive deeper and further in our emotional world. Bowen’s texts are to be felt. And it is the feelings that bring about thoughts in Bowen. It is an extraordinary mix of thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings merge. There are no real thoughts in Bowen without feeling. To be sensible

⁷³ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 152.

⁷⁴ *DH*, 140.

means to be sensuous, too, at the same time. Characters have their disturbed or undisturbed levels of unconscious feeling. But it is unconscious feeling we come across, either way. And Bowen shows us through the characters' unconsciously feeling lives whether there is something we should take into consideration, something to rethink. This is where the ethics emerges. And she has some good points to emphasize through her strategy of theory and practise of the emotional. There is a certain kind of poetry to her practise of the emotional. The sense of poetry is there, for example in *The Death of the Heart* when describing the house:

In this airy vivacious house,
all mirrors and polish,
there was no place where shadows lodged,
no point where feeling could thicken.
The rooms were set for strangers' intimacy,
or else for exhausted solitary retreat.⁷⁵

It is like a poem we read. It is also theory in a poetic form. There is “no point where feeling could thicken”. This is for strangers, maybe narcissists, “[t]he rooms were set for strangers' intimacy”. Or “for exhausted solitary retreat”. There is no place for true intimacy, unfortunately. The house is mainly for strangers with each other. There is only “solitary retreat”, loneliness in this house. There is something that disturbs the unconscious feeling. Poetic form, for its part, is very much involved with unconscious feeling though. The way Bowen writes these pieces of poetry gives us a representation of emotional approach. Her poems can be felt, first and foremost. It is emotive writing. Also Portia is described in a poetic form:

She began to weep,
shedding tears humbly,
without protest

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 42, rearrangement of the lines into verse.

without at all full feeling,
 like a child actress
 mesmerized for the part.⁷⁶

This is a strange representation of unconscious feeling: there is no “full feeling”.

Weeping happens as an acting part: “like a child actress mesmerized for the part”. There is a part to act but to bring this about someone has to be “mezmerized for the part”.

There is unconscious feeling that is, perhaps, blocked in some ways. It is true that our unconscious feeling can be hypnotized, mesmerized. And this is one point that comes up in Bowen’s writing. It is often narcissists that do that, willingly manipulating or unconsciously affecting us as though we were hypnotized, mesmerized. There are examples of commandingness and immobilization in Bowen that could be seen as hypnotic and mezmeric. Unconscious feeling involves ‘things’ that have not been taken into consideration in our thinking so much so far. In our theoretical thinking we should remember that there are unconscious ‘things’ that happen to us or because of us that need to be taken into consideration when we contemplate our emotional beings. Part of Elizabeth Bowen’s theories is precisely this: the importance of looking at unconscious feeling in ourselves. Bowen’s poetry continues:

She might have been miming sorrow
 in fact, this immediate, this obedient
 prostration of her whole being
 was meant to hold off the worst,
 the full of grief,
 that might sweep her away.⁷⁷

Here is depicted the danger of feeling fully: “the full of grief (...) might sweep her away”. She has to mime sorrow only, not feel it fully. The “obedient prostration of her

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 79, rearrangement of the lines into verse.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, rearrangement of the lines into verse.

whole being” holds off the feeling. There is inhibition or disturbance in feeling here. This could be one result of narcissism where unconscious feeling cannot come through. Thus Bowen emphasizes unconscious feeling time after time. Unconscious feeling is in practise, though, in Bowen’s poetic way of expressing things. It is as if the problematics is shown there very vividly in her writing that talks about the lack of unconscious feeling but, at the same time, herself expresses it. This is the problematics she sees in our modern (or postmodern) lives. We live but, at the same time, do we live fully at all? Do we really feel unconsciously or are we holding off our feelings in “prostration” of our whole beings? Are we capable of feeling fully, on the other hand, or do we always come across the very problematics of it? Is it something that we all feel maybe, the very disturbances in our emotional cores? Is it possible to feel different or are we condemned to our shortcomings, our defects in our emotional lives? Bowen would agree that there are problems. But, at the same time, she seems to offer us a model of a better alternative. That would be unconscious feeling that we can stick to. And even if we have our problematics we might as well recognize it and think about the consequences. And that is precisely what Bowen is doing. Maybe this kind of rethinking would bring about changes for the better. This is Bowen’s ethical point here.

Unconscious feeling is a master theme in Bowen. It is something that everything else surrounds. It is the character’s feeling and the reader’s and maybe the author’s feeling. It is something that is very much literature, too. It is poetry. It is the core of literature and, perhaps, language that we are concerned with when we are concerned with unconscious feeling. It is often the very feature of literature, of poetry. It is something that draws us to read books, I would like to suggest. It is the quality that takes us in and holds our attention. And in Bowen it is powerful. In Bowen there is also a theory of unconscious feeling. She goes further in trying to make her writing life-like.

And when it is life-like it becomes the epitome of literature in general, too. Life and literature go hand in hand, in the best cases. There is life in literature, and literature in life. And it is difficult sometimes, in Bowen's case for example, to tell them apart. Thus Bowen achieves something that ultimately postpones death as far as possible, even if acknowledging its existence. Bowen's texts are celebrations of life first and foremost. Unconscious feeling is the crux of our intimate lives. It is there bringing us life or, in disturbances, putting life off. Bowen's writing is poetic and about poetic truth:

Then, love only remains
 as a widened susceptibility:
 it is felt at the price of feeling
 all human dangers and pains.
 The lover becomes the sentient figurehead
 of the whole human ship,
 thrust forward by the weight of the race behind him
 through pitiless elements.
 Pity the selfishness of lovers:
 it is brief, a forlorn hope;
 it is impossible.⁷⁸

Love involves the whole range of human feelings, also the "dangers and pains". Love is, maybe sometimes, hopeless, "impossible" in the middle of it all. It is important to note that "love only remains as a widened susceptibility". We have to remain open, also unconsciously. Unconscious feeling is, again, emphasized here. We have to remain "sentient" even if going through "pitiless elements". We have to have courage enough to remain unconsciously feeling even if we come across pitiless people, for example, those 'walls' that try to stop our loving attempts, those "pitiless elements". Poetic truth is what we have to stick to to reach our unconscious feeling. Time after time Bowen emphasizes poetic truth.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 170, rearrangement of the lines into verse.

There is the idea of keeping it all up, being buoyant to reach life: “In spirit, the two of them rose to the top of life like bubbles.”⁷⁹ Unconscious feeling is emphasized here again. We have to be able to trust the undercurrents to be able to rise “to the top of life like bubbles”. We are bubbles in the currents of life but hopefully happy ones, knowing that it is our job to be so. Unconscious feeling is referred to as “underground passion” in the following: “[H]e [Eddie] had shown himself (...) as one of those natures in which underground passion is, at a crisis, stronger than policy.”⁸⁰ “Underground passion” can be dangerous, too, when it is overpowering, when it is “stronger than policy”. This is why we need to be able to keep it up “like bubbles”. What would be the opposite of this would be, for example, when “Lilia came bobbing back again like a thing on water.”⁸¹ She is “on water” all right but there are no attachments to the undercurrents: she has lost the connection. She is outside of unconscious feeling. There is also an emphasis on life when unconscious feeling is involved: “‘What egotists the dead seem to be,’ she [Antonia] said.”⁸² Egotism is connected with death here.

Unconscious feeling is a current in Bowen people’s lives. It is something that is felt. “He [Fred] was to be felt gone.”⁸³ Fred is felt unconsciously to be gone. People are there when they are felt. This is the mode of existence in Bowen’s people: feeling and felt. Otherwise there is no life in the world of Bowen’s characters. Feeling is to exist. Sometimes hostile things get felt unconsciously: “Animosity itself had become a bond, whose deep-down tightening suddenly made itself felt today.”⁸⁴ There are unconsciously felt gestures, too: “She [Jane] only smiled and swept back her gold hair, as though by showing more of her face to show how little she had to fear from anyone –

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 217.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 62.

⁸¹ *WL*, 15.

⁸² *ibid.*, 24.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 41.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 51.

but the gesture, as answer, was unconscious.”⁸⁵ Unconscious gestures inhabit the Bowen world. An unconscious world is Bowen’s world to a great extent. Emotional undercurrents, “underground passions”, design the world in Bowen and elsewhere.

In Bowen people are in a trance. In other words they are only half conscious, half asleep. For example in *A World of Love* Lilia is in a trance: “Lilia, in a peach bib, half her hair on the floor, sat in a trance opposite her own reflection; which had become depersonalized by being so long regarded.”⁸⁶ Lilia’s unconscious feeling becomes disturbed, “depersonalized”, by having looked at her own reflection so long. She is like narcissus. A trance can be dangerous, too: one can lose one’s self by overdoing it. Lilia here is a typical example of Bowen people’s problematics that always concerns their unconscious feeling. Half conscious, half asleep you might trip over some obstacles in your unconsciously feeling levels thus ending up “depersonalized”. Also Fred is in a trance: “His protruding dark eyes, showing their whites, moved; in a trance he stood there all but hearing the music.”⁸⁷ Fred is immersed in this half conscious, half asleep unconscious level of his emotional being. He is not susceptible to music, he is elsewhere experiencing the immobility of his mind.

There is usually something unconscious going on between Bowen’s characters. They have telepathic relationships: Jane was “telepathically awed, at bay for no reason that she knew...” with Antonia.⁸⁸ Awe was raised on Jane’s levels of unconscious feeling telepathically. She was “at bay” knowing no reason for it: there is something going on unconsciously between the two. Unconscious feeling is charged.

There is the prospect of the waking hour in Bowen, trancelike existence is something that Bowen people are in awe and in apprehension of to wake from: “Today

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 129.

seemed not yet to be reality: one had so far no more than passed or been sent on out of one deep dream into another – more oppressive, more lucid, more near perhaps to the waking hour.”⁸⁹ It is not quite reality where Bowen’s people live. It is a mixture of unreality and reality rather. It is a “deep dream” that changes into another, slightly different deep dream. But dreamlike existence is on the verge of the “waking hour”, something that is “more oppressive, more lucid”. It is unconscious feeling where Bowen’s people find their dwelling. “Waking hour”, consciousness is rather dreaded than awaited. “Waking hour” is the horror of total consciousness.

Feelings, or rather the absence of feelings, sometimes have their “iron side” in Bowen: “Mme Fisher’s detachment, Henrietta could see, had its iron side: she no longer felt, so why should anyone else?”⁹⁰ There is “detachment” that lacks the softness of unconscious feeling, it has its “iron side”. Feeling is questioned here: “she no longer felt, so why should anyone else?” Mme Fisher has lost the ability to feel, or so she feels at least. Feelings are precarious in Bowen, they are not self-evident. Unconscious feeling is something to work for, not to be taken for granted, perhaps.

Unconscious feeling is strong as a tree, as wood: “She [Henrietta] found herself for the first time no more asking for notice than if she had stood beside an unconscious strong little tree: moving her elbow his way she felt his arm as unknowing as wood.”⁹¹ Unconscious feeling is growing like a tree, firm and solid, having its roots underground. Firm ‘emotional roots’ bring about feelings that are, “as unknowing as wood”, strong and lively material. Unconscious feeling becomes self-evident when things work on the emotional level, when emotional ‘roots’ are there.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 132.

⁹⁰ *HP*, 59.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 71.

Visuality and unconscious feeling are interlinked, they go together: “What you saw, you felt.”⁹² Seeing is feeling. Feeling is connected with sight. Things looked at get felt. Feeling is in the core of vision. It is in its unconscious routes that vision gets strength and its manifestation ultimately.

There is certain serenity in unconscious feeling. Unconscious feeling is “deep-down life” that stops emotions from “clashing together”: “She was mapping out for herself a deep-down life in which emotions ceased their clashing together and friends appeared only as painted along the edge of one’s quietness.”⁹³ There is “quietness” that makes things look smooth. Friends appear “only as painted”.

Something is wrong with communication in Bowen. There is yearning for communication that would involve more unconscious feeling:

Though she [Emmeline] might love him, she must dread at all times to hear him speak of their love: it was not in words he was writing himself across her. She might be said to be drawn, with a force she was hardly aware, by what existed in Markie in spite of himself. ‘We should be dumb,’ she thought, ‘there should be other means of communication.’⁹⁴

This is an epitome of Bowen communication: communication that wants to go beyond words. There is a wish to be “dumb” to reach this susceptibility that exists in unconscious feeling. There is awareness of there being “other means of communication”, the kind of communication that would touch the feeling parts of one more. Unconscious feeling is stressed here as that other means of communication that would reach out further, go beyond words.

The power (and danger sometimes) of the unconscious feeling is manifested in the following: “Something escaped the senses, something broke through the hard

⁹² *ibid.*, 178.

⁹³ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Hotel* (1927; London: Jonathan Cape, 1950) 91; henceforth referred to as *H*.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, *To the North* (1932; London: Penguin, 1987) 71; henceforth referred to as *TN*.

intellectual frame of his idea of her: her unconsciousness still had him wholly at its command.”⁹⁵ There is the commandingness of the unconscious feeling, especially in narcissism.

There is a fear of dissolution where unconscious feeling is lacking “inside” one’s “life”: “She dreaded dissolution inside his life, dissolution never to be repaired.”⁹⁶

Dissolution in Bowen is partly something that puts off the very life in us, our unconscious feeling. It is unconscious feeling that only matters ultimately. Thus, “she remembered only what she had felt.”⁹⁷ Unconscious feeling matters. When it is undisturbed it means the possibility of good dissolution in love. When disturbed it can become problematic in its narcissistic commanding of others, for example. Dissolution is defined in *Chambers* as follows: “the breaking up of an assembly: loosening: melting: break-up: death: dissoluteness or dissolute behaviour (arch.)”.⁹⁸

In *Eva Trout* Eva is “submerged”, she is in “deep water”. Her unconscious feeling is overpowering: Miss Smith says to Eva: “‘Are you coming nearer the surface, I wonder?’ her voice asked. ‘I want you to.’ ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘Yet there are sometimes times when I think you would rather go on being submerged. Sometimes you cling to being in deep water. What are you afraid of?’”⁹⁹ Eva does not want to face the ‘reality’, she “cling[s] to being in deep water”. Eva questions ‘life’ above ‘deep water’, outside unconscious feeling. She wants to stick to, maybe, what is even more ‘real’, more truthful. Eva says to Miss Smith:” – You are dragging me up from the bottom of a lake, Miss Smith?” ‘Nobody’s ‘dragging’ you, come up of your own accord, or stay where

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 182.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (1948; London: Penguin, 1962) 49; henceforth referred to as *HD*.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁸ *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, New Edition, ed. E. M. Kirkpatrick (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1983) 363.

⁹⁹ *ET*, 58-59.

you were.”¹⁰⁰ Eva is deep down in her unconscious, in her emotions maybe. She is bound to be felt, then: “From the moment of moving in she made herself felt – yet how?”¹⁰¹ She makes herself felt through unconscious feeling. Later Eva’s son Jeremy, who is deaf and dumb, is also to be felt: “Jeremy’s presence, since they had sat down to table, was never not to be felt.”¹⁰² There is yearning for something emotional that is beyond words. Maybe not coincidentally Eva has a son who is deaf and dumb, whose ‘other capacities’ have developed further. He represents unconscious feeling purely and clearly in the novel. But also the danger of it maybe at the end of the novel when Jeremy accidentally shoots Eva dead. Unconscious feeling is something positive, something that is yearned for to reach a more emotional bond with another person but, at the same time, it can be dangerous, too, when overdone. Jeremy has something exceptional, something that Eva used to be prone to, too: “The boy, handicapped, one was at pains to remember, imposed on others a sense that *they* were, that it was *they* who were lacking in some faculty.”¹⁰³ His unconscious feeling is so powerful that others seem to lack in their emotions something invaluable. It is other people who are lacking, not Jeremy.

Portia is a protagonist of unconscious feeling in *The Death of the Heart*.

Towards the end of the novel she feels betrayed by Anna and Eddie. She flees to Karachi hotel to see Major Brutt with whom she feels similar. She is waiting there for Anna and Thomas to do the right thing. What will happen is a mystery. It is suggested that there will be grief because of her unconsciousness: “(...)her unconsciousness made her a picture of premature grief.”¹⁰⁴ Portia’s diary seems to have changed things. Portia feels betrayed because Anna has read it. Anna says about the diary: “I don’t say it has

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 158-159.

¹⁰⁴ *DH*, 294.

changed the course of my life, but it has given me a rather more disagreeable feeling about being alive – or, at least, about being me.”¹⁰⁵ It seems that Portia has changed things at least for the moment. St Quentin says: “This evening the pure in heart have simply got us on toast. And look at the fun she has – she lives in a world of heroes. Who are we to be sure they’re as phony as we all think? If the world’s really a stage, there must be some big parts. All she asks is to walk on at the same time.”¹⁰⁶ Even though Portia has changed things ‘this evening’ it is suggested on the other hand that things will remain as they are. Anna says: “You said, if I were Portia. Naturally, that’s impossible: she and I are hardly the same sex. Though she and I may wish to make a new start, we hardly shall, I’m afraid; I shall always insult her; she will always persecute me (...)”¹⁰⁷ Matchett, the housekeeper, is sent to fetch Portia away in a taxi. The novel ends with Matchett on the door of Karachi hotel: “Ignoring the bell, because this place was public, she pushed on the brass knob with an air of authority.”¹⁰⁸ The novel ends with Matchett’s authority, some kind of overpowering. Have Anna and Thomas done the right thing? It is difficult to say. One gets the feeling that nothing much has changed. Overpowering will continue, Portia’s unconsciousness will be threatened. There might be some change in Portia though. At least her statement has been made, she has started to rebel against the wrongdoing. She has made her point: unconscious feeling should be protected and cultivated. Unconscious feeling is the kind of feeling that is unknown to us. It is something that we hardly notice: it is like a flow. The experience of the flow is satisfactory. Unconscious feeling is important in an ethics of the emotional, it is the prerequisite for it.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 304.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 310.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 312-313.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 318.

2. Narcissism vs. Love

“Emotion not only colors the world (...) but designs it.”¹⁰⁹

Narcissistic overpowering can become a powerful “command of emotion” that traps and dumbfounds others:

Having spent hours unwillingly silent with Mrs. Arbuthnot and Caroline and their friends, Henrietta had noted their charm, their astuteness, their command of emotion in others, and could no longer doubt she lived in a world where it was fatal never to make one’s mark. Neither Mrs. Arbuthnot nor Caroline stopped at anything: possibly only Henrietta knew how far they would both go.¹¹⁰

Henrietta has spent hours “unwillingly silent” with Mrs. Arbuthnot and her sister Caroline and their friends and noted “their command of emotion in others”. One can be easily trapped, encaged, immobilized, dumbfounded, imprisoned by this “command of emotion”. It is disturbing to one’s emotional life, unconscious feeling, living, to be ‘stopped dead’ like this. We are told that “[n]either Mrs. Arbuthnot nor Caroline stopped at anything: possibly only Henrietta knew how far they would both go.” These people are threatening, violent, overwhelming; they can disturb one’s unconscious feeling and thus take away one’s sense of life, killing the other. There are plenty of similar examples in Bowen, where one is immobilized by another: “Portia had unconsciously pushed while she spoke, at the knee under Matchett’s apron, as though she were trying to push away a wall. Nothing, in fact, moved.”¹¹¹ Portia is immobilized by Matchett.

¹⁰⁹ Terada, 55.

¹¹⁰ *HP*, 30.

¹¹¹ *DH*, 79.

In Bowen's writings unconscious feeling, "unconscious serenity", ultimately love, is juxtaposed with "angry" overpowering narcissism: "That unconscious serenity behind their living and letting live was what Karen's hungry or angry friends could not tolerate."¹¹² (Negative feelings, like anger, are often more conscious. Unconscious feeling, a flow, is more likely to remind us of the dissolution in love.) It is a question of connecting ethics with the emotional here. Rei Terada argues as follows: "Because the voice of moral feeling responsible for judgment no longer sounds clearly 'good or evil', we must throw ourselves upon – our feelings: 'ethical indecisiveness' has 'engendered' an 'affective space'."¹¹³ We must call upon our emotions when we want to know what is good and what is evil nowadays because our 'morals' can no longer judge clearly. Thus it is emotions that are needed to do the ethical job for us now. It is the emotional that has become important in questions of ethics: an ethics of the emotional is required. It is an "affective space" that must be looked at to reach the right thing, to become better human beings. Daniel Goleman puts it in his *Emotional Intelligence* as follows: "There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capacities."¹¹⁴ Our "emotional capacities" have become an "affective space" that must be looked at to reach ethics, the judgement of what is good and what is evil. Thus it has become more troubled 'to be ethical' in this world – and not least because of our narcissistic tendencies which trouble our very "emotional capacities". We no longer know clearly our 'morals', our "ethical stances". Bowen sees this problematic. Bowen's writings are up-to-date thinking in emphasizing an ethics of the emotional. The above mentioned "living and letting live" through "unconscious serenity" is Bowen's ethics of the emotional. This is something that disturbs an "angry" narcissistic type whose emotional capacities are troubled – there is

¹¹² *HP*, 86.

¹¹³ Terada, 75-76.

¹¹⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996) xii.

no “unconscious serenity” in them. Anger is usually too strong, too conscious, an emotion to do the ethical judgement. I think that we should bypass anger to reach a more loving and unconscious attitude to reach an ethical judgement.

Thus narcissism means the end of communication, the end of emotionally ethical dialogue. Communication has become unethical. In *The House in Paris* Karen’s narcissism has reached this point:

Her character was in her look (she had learnt before she was twelve). She looked at people at once vaguely and boldly; for years she had learnt from other eyes what hers did. This makes any lover or friend a narcissus pool; you do not want anyone else once you have learnt what you are; there is no more to learn.¹¹⁵

To be reduced to “a narcissus pool” is not the place to be. It is no place at all because it lacks (emotional) dialogue: there is no space for the other. “The narcissist loves only insofar as his object reflects back to him, as in the original Narcissus myth, his own image.”¹¹⁶ There is a lack in emotional reciprocity in narcissism. You will be drowned in this “narcissus pool”. In *The Death of the Heart* Eddie talks to Portia as follows:

‘I don’t know how you feel,’ he said, ‘I daren’t ask myself; I’ve never wanted to know. Don’t look at me like that! And don’t tremble like that – it’s more than I can bear. Something awful will happen. I cannot feel what you feel: I’m shut up in myself. All I know is, you’ve been so sweet. It’s no use holding on to me, I shall only drown you’.¹¹⁷

Eddie is “shut up” in himself, in his narcissism. He is not interested in Portia’s feelings specifically (“I don’t know how you feel (...) I’ve never wanted to know”). He knows

¹¹⁵ *HP*, 89.

¹¹⁶ Josh Cohen, *How to Read Freud* (London: Granta Books, 2005) 93; henceforth referred to as Cohen.

¹¹⁷ *DH*, 214.

he is a danger to Portia emotionally (“I cannot feel what you feel”), he will “drown” her because of his emotional enclosedness (“I’m shut up in myself”).

There is this “horrible power”, according to Eddie, that works against the other “however much we may love”. Eddie says to Portia: “Life is so much more impossible than you think. Don’t you see we’re all full of horrible power, working against each other however much we may love?”¹¹⁸ This “horrible power” could be seen as the dangerous and powerful side of narcissism: it is, indeed, “horrible” and it is a “power” that works “against each other” sometimes having most dreadful consequences. And it may be there “however much we may love” sometimes: “Certainly, the most casual experience and examination of self and others can’t fail to yield evidence of a strong narcissistic strain in every one of us.”¹¹⁹ We are all narcissists to some extent, but some are more than others. This is the very situation that Bowen puts forward in her writings. According to Bowen, to pay attention to narcissistic features and the effects of them in others and in us may be beneficial to us all.

Eddie says to Portia: “In that full sense you want me I don’t exist.”¹²⁰ Eddie lacks something, he cannot be in a relationship fully, and his emotional lacunae make him deprived of full existence. According to Luce Irigaray a man’s narcissism is a problem: “Because he is almost always in a state of narcissistic insecurity in sexual relations, man projects insecurity onto others, like a master who loads his problems onto the shoulders of his slave or his ‘thing’.”¹²¹ Even though Eddie’s relationship with Portia is probably not fully sexual, it has the characteristics of a typically narcissistic “master” with “his slave or his ‘thing’.”

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Cohen, 93.

¹²⁰ *DH*, 214.

¹²¹ Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 63.

Marcus West argues in his article “Identity, Narcissism and the Emotional Core” as follows: “[An] emotional core is essential, central, and embodies our affective relation to reality. It is the source of vitality and spontaneity, *and*, when inadequately mediated, is the prime source of pathological (narcissistic) relations.”¹²² This “emotional core” is what Bowen’s ethics of the emotional is concerned with. It can be positive unconscious feeling but it can be disturbed, too, when narcissism occurs. In Bowen it is a core that has movement in itself. It is a core that is not stable and fixed but has a flow in it, unconscious feeling. It can be “a pleasant dissolution of the ‘restricting’ ego”.¹²³ But it can also be precisely that “restricting ego” in narcissism. Furthermore “[t]he affective non-ego core to the personality is that which responds most directly to the world around us and it is therefore, in some ways, ‘correct’ that the experience is ‘truer’ as it is less filtered by the ego.”¹²⁴ It is this “non-ego core” that is involved in unconscious feeling, and, thus, it would be a better alternative because “experience is ‘truer’”. Thus experience is closer to ‘poetic truth’, which Bowen emphasizes. It is closer to ‘naked life’.

“For both Jung and Freud (...) the core of the individual is affective in nature.”¹²⁵ This is why any disturbances in our ‘affective world’ have their profound meanings to us all. When it comes to unconscious feeling it can be said that “the unconscious (...) is made up of affective/instinctual elements that have not been processed and integrated with the ego.”¹²⁶ Thus undisturbed unconscious feeling becomes vital. There is no disturbed ego involved in the best cases. He goes on to argue that “experiences of oneness, numinosity, certainty etc. occur when consciousness has

¹²² Marcus West, “Identity, Narcissism and the Emotional Core” in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*; sep 2004, vol. 49, issue 4, pp. 521-551, quotation from pp. 524-525; henceforth referred to as West.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 538.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 541.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

lowered, the individual is immersed in affect and the experience itself, and is out of touch with the ego.”¹²⁷ This kind of experience is what Bowen’s writings are after, they emphasize the importance of “oneness”, that would not be disturbed by our narcissisms. An early infantile oneness should be given up to some extent to reach a more mature oneness, oneness that consists of clearly two entities.

The ultimate sense of an ethics of the emotional is experienced in and conveyed through love. According to West “[a]ffect can be experienced as ‘infinite,’ (global/universal) when, for example, someone feels themselves to be ‘dissolved in love,’ in union with the beloved other – they are immersed in affect so that subjectively it feels as if there is nothing else, no sense of ‘I’ to limit or restrict their experience of love.”¹²⁸

This kind of dissolution is described in Bowen through the image of the Heart. The Heart, and its different states and conditions, is one of the most provocative images in Elizabeth Bowen’s novel *The Death of the Heart*. Major Brutt and Portia experience the following: “[H]e felt her knocking through him like another heart outside his own ribs.”¹²⁹ There is something more, something almost heterogeneous to us, “another heart”. But there is also another heart in an extremely positive sense as an ethics of two hearts, an ethics of a dialogue between the two: taking into consideration another, another’s heart – “[H]e felt her (...) like an other heart(...).” This means taking in the outside of one’s own ribs – not leaving it outside. This means hearing the knockings of the other, another person: being open to them. There is a similar image in *The House in Paris* when Henrietta leans her body against Leopold’s “pressing her ribs to his elbow so that his sobs began to go through her too.”¹³⁰ There are degrees of closeness,

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 543.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 544.

¹²⁹ *DH*, 295.

¹³⁰ *HP*, 261.

intimacy that suggest the desire for more true closeness, unconscious feeling, dissolution in love. There is yearning for less egotism, less narcissism.

After narcissism it is time for less of narcissism. When Hélène Cixous discusses love with Mireille Calle-Gruber in *rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, she “simply want[s] to express a certain truth: it’s easy to love...*once you love!* You have to get there first.”¹³¹ She continues as follows:

To get there, one needs strength, the real strength of abnegation which is renouncement: before all the other renouncements that will follow, in particular the renouncement of the affirmation of an identity. One must open oneself, one must make room for the other. Accept an entirely amazing change in economy that is produced: *less self*. A reduced resistance of the ego. It is also to no longer be the first character of one’s life, but the second. Even if the second can become the first in the ‘tornament’ of love. Even so, one needs an immense narcissistic force to begin, and afterward, one is rewarded!¹³²

“[T]he affirmation of an identity” would be too much of narcissism, sort of being tangled up in narcissism. Openness is needed. Thus, there should be “less self” and a “reduced resistance of the ego”. Even though “an immense narcissistic force” to begin with, less narcissism, less self afterwards. Why would we need narcissism to begin, though? Freud writes as follows: “A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.”¹³³ So, we need our egoism, but we must start loving at some point “in order not to fall ill”. Ego must be developed first. He goes on to argue: “We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects – himself and the woman who nurses him – and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating

¹³¹ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 110.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ Freud, “On Narcissism”, 78.

fashion in his object-choice”¹³⁴ So, there is a “primary narcissism in everyone” and it is needed first but it must be given up to some extent: “A person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved.”¹³⁵ Furthermore: “Loving in itself, in so far as it involves longing and deprivation, lowers self-regard; whereas being loved, having one’s love returned, and possessing the loved object, raises it once more”¹³⁶ So, being loved is just as important, love must be returned so that “the second can become the first in the ‘tornament’ of love”. And finally: “Being in love consists in a flowing-over of ego-libido on to the object.”¹³⁷ We begin with narcissism, but we must move on “to the object”, we must begin to love in the end. Maybe now, according to Elizabeth Bowen, it is time for the afterwards, for the ‘afterwords’ of narcissism more than before: less self, a reduced resistance of the ego: “All two of them”:

A bench. On the bench Tatiana. Enter Onegin. He does not sit down. Everything is already broken off. It’s she who gets up. Reparation? They remain standing, the two of them. Separation? All two of them.¹³⁸

As Jacques Derrida puts it in his piece of writing in *rootprints* referring to the extract above:

Thus: *tous les deux* can always be heard as *all the ‘twos’*, all the couples, the duals, the duos, the differences, all the dyads in the world: each time there’s two in the world. The singular name of this plural which nonetheless regroups couples and dual unities, ‘*tous les deux*’ thus becomes the subject or the origin of a fable, history and morality included.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 81-82.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, 93.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, 94.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 95.

¹³⁸ Cixous, *Jours de l’an*, pp. 190-1 in Cixous & Calle-Gruber.

The fable says everything that can happen *to* sexual difference or *from* sexual difference.¹³⁹

When it comes to sexual difference, Cixous seems to offer an indisputable view: “The heart is the human sex (...) [W]hat the sexes have in common is the heart. There is a common speech, there is a common discourse, *there is a universe of emotion that is totally interchangeable and that goes through the organ of the heart*. The heart, the most mysterious organ there is, indeed because it is the same for the two sexes. As if the heart were the sex common to the two sexes. The human sex.”¹⁴⁰ This is the ethics in sexual difference, this “universe of emotion”. The heart involves “all the couples, the duals, the duos, the differences”. Maybe Elizabeth Bowen is referring to the same idea in her ethics of two hearts: after narcissism, less narcissism. Bowen’s ethics is inextricably bound up with the images, metaphors. The image of the Heart above refers to the idea of decreasing narcissism and increasing unconscious feeling in a positive sense, dissolution in love. One needs an ethics of two hearts which ultimately becomes “a universe of emotion”, an ethics of the emotional in unconscious feeling. One needs a dissolution in a good sense.

At the same time, there is a disturbing sense in dissolution in Bowen usually. There is the uncanny dimension to dissolution as well as a dissolution of personal identity, for example. One is aware of the positive and negative senses existing at the same time. There is also danger in every dissolution. Bowen’s ethics of the emotional, thus, involves both the positive and negative dimensions of unconscious feeling. This is the very core of the emotional in Bowen.

Partly because of this dissolution or dissociation Bowen’s texts have their uncanny features. Their paradoxical quality could be seen partly as a deconstructive

¹³⁹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Fourmis’, Lectures de la Différence Sexuelle in Cixous & Calle-Gruber.

¹⁴⁰ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 31, my emphasis.

force in the novels, that makes the texts float somewhere in between, having no adherent hold, being dissociated.

In spite of this troubling sense there remains a clear tendency towards an ethics, an ethics of the emotional. Or it is precisely because of this dissociation that the ethical points of view emerge as a powerful ethics of the emotional. It is this very juxtaposing that adds to the sense of an ethics in her writings. The Uncanny becomes a part of her ethics of the emotional: the dangerous part involving narcissism. This I will talk about more in chapter three.

On the one hand there are “the atrocities of human communication”¹⁴¹ as she puts it herself and on the other hand an ethics of two hearts that ultimately becomes an ethics of the emotional in a more positive sense. Bowen’s novels seem to emphasize our responsibility for the dialogues and their profound meanings to our human life as a whole, our communication – verbal or nonverbal: “Portia had unconsciously pushed, while she spoke, at the knee under Matchett’s apron, as though she were trying to push away a wall. Nothing, in fact, moved.”¹⁴² Here is depicted another violent ‘dialogue’ in Bowen. The narcissistic “wall” doesn’t move between the two: Matchett overpowers the unconsciously feeling Portia. There is nonverbal communication that involves narcissistic disturbance making the other ‘dead’. This is no true communication involving both as equal partners: one is overpowering the other.

Clearly narcissistic Eddie likes despising more than loving:

‘But why can’t we alter everything?’
 ‘There are too few of us.’
 ‘No, you don’t really want to. You’ve always only been playing.’
 ‘Do you think I have fun?’
 ‘You have some sort of dreadful fun. You don’t want me to interfere. You like despising more than you like loving’.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ *MT*, 154.

¹⁴² *DH*, 79.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, 275.

“The narcissist, according to his [Freud’s] model, cannot direct love outwards.”¹⁴⁴ It is important to return love. Otherwise the other one is ‘killed’, there is no mature oneness. Portia thinks that Eddie doesn’t want to alter anything in this narcissistic economy of exchange. She accuses Eddie of having “some sort of dreadful fun” all by himself where she is not allowed to interfere. In this kind of situation communication becomes impossible; there is no communication when one prevents the other interfering, when one likes despising more than loving. It is a dead-end.

In *The House in Paris* “[e]gotism and panic (...) died in Ray” with Leopold, the child: “the child commanded tonight.”¹⁴⁵ There is an ethics of two hearts here, love. “The child” here could be seen as a metaphor of unconscious feeling. Bowen’s ethics of the emotional involves egotism that must die in order to reach love. The emphasis is on moving beyond egotism to reach the situation where one loves and is being loved.

To change the world, do we only need to change our dialogues, the very human communication, indeed? How are we supposed to transcribe the ideas of responsibility, response; our communication and, indeed, let our hearts revive after our 20th Century narcissistic freeze-up? Cixous sees things as follows: “When I say ‘more human’, I mean: progressing. I ought to say: better human. This means, while being human, not depriving oneself of the rest of the universe. It is to be able to echo – a complex but magnificent labour – with what constitutes the universe.”¹⁴⁶ We need to involve the whole universe and not exclude parts of it by our narcissistic ‘dialogues’. Better human: obviously Bowen is capable of echoing the very modern, or perhaps postmodern, needs of our hearts, the need to revive, the need to live side by side with less narcissism, one not overpowering the other emotionally. “To be *better* human is also: not to be closed in

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, 94.

¹⁴⁵ *HP*, 317.

¹⁴⁶ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 32.

one's small duration, in one's small house, in one's small car, in one's small sex, but to know one is part of a whole that is worth the trip, the displacing of all our ideas."¹⁴⁷ One needs to be expansive, learn more about the other, other kind of a person. Differences are needed, it is the multiplicity of the entire world that must be included, and not excluded by our narcissistic tendencies. There is a

narcissistic tendency to prefer similarity and avoid difference. This tendency is understood to inhere in an emotional core of the individual which, in turn, is understood to provide a core sense of being – one element of a more complex sense of self and identity. *This emotional core connects us intimately with others* and can function as an organ of perception.¹⁴⁸

There is this “emotional core” that is disturbed in narcissism but that is crucial in intimacy. And because it “can function as an organ of perception”, too, it is vital that it does not disturb our perception of the other. There is always a danger of a crooked perception in narcissism. Thus our dialogues with the other can become crooked too. Love is ultimately the better alternative to the “atrocities of human communication”¹⁴⁹, to narcissism:

In the face of love we disarm ourselves, and indeed we keep the vulnerability. It does not disappear, but is offered to the other. With the person we love, we have a relationship of absolute vulnerability. Why? First of all because we think they will do no harm to us at the same time that we think and we have the experience that they are the only person who can do all the harm in the world to us. Through death: either by dying, or by killing us, that is to say abandoning us. But also, and this is the childlike and magical side of love, we think that the person who can kill us is the person who, because he or she loves us, will not kill us. And at the same time, we (do not) believe it. In love we know we are at the greatest risk and at the least great risk, *at the same time*. What the person

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ West, 545, my emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ *MT*, 154.

we love gives us is first of all mortality. It is the first ‘thing’ they give us. With the person we do not love we are much less mortal.¹⁵⁰

[I]n love – if not, there is no love – you give yourself, you trust, you entrust yourself to the other. And, contrary to what one might think, this is not at all abstract. It is true that one deposits oneself. *There is a deposit*, and one is deposited in the other person. And if the other goes off with the deposit, one truly cannot recuperate the deposit. What was given can never be taken back. Even if we do not know it at the moment we give; even if we do not imagine that what we have given cannot be taken back – while most things one gives can be taken back. So in reality, virtually, when we love we are already half dead. We have already deposited our life in the hands that hold our death: and this is what is worth the trouble of love. *This is when we feel our life, otherwise we do not feel it.* It is an extraordinary round: what you give, that is to say yourself, your life, what you deposit in the other, is returned to you immediately by the other. The other constitutes a source. You are not your own source in this case. And as a result, you receive your life, which you do not receive from yourself.¹⁵¹

We are vulnerable, if we love. Narcissistic killing the other would damage us thus. But if we love we do not kill the other, we do not damage the other’s vulnerability. In love we must be able to trust the other one. We must be able to give and be safe through love. The emotional in love comes through “deposit[ing] our life in the hands that hold our death”. So, “[t]his is when we feel our life, otherwise we do not feel it”. An ethics of the emotional is in the fact that you receive your life, your emotions from the other when you love. What would this kind of love, true love, mean to us human beings? In a greater respect this would mean less of narcissism, the end of merely taking, leading to a more equal dialogue between the two, i.e. leading to more giving – thus more enjoyable – dialogues. It would also lead to more fruitful self-love and true love of the other, other kind, other kind of a person. “Our resemblance does without semblances:

¹⁵⁰ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 35-36.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 36-37, my emphasis.

for in our bodies, we are already the same. Touch yourself, touch me, you'll 'see'."¹⁵² And in Bowen: "Jane herself rose, stood, the better to enjoy the spectacle of the flight, the glissade of the shadowshow, the enforced retreat from here to nowhere – but herself was caught in the mist of their thinning semblances."¹⁵³ We are the same, the weakness of our resistance ("the mist of their thinning semblances") gives us more fruitful dialogues. There is a shared insight ("Touch yourself, touch me, you'll see").

Luce Irigaray is partly talking about narcissism in her book called *This Sex which is not One*: "[T]heir [men's] 'truth' immobilizes us, turns us into statues, if we can't loose its hold on us."¹⁵⁴ Here it is (narcissistic) men but it could be (narcissistic) women, too, that turn us into statues. There are statues in Bowen, too. *In The House in Paris* Max and Karen are described as follows: "He and she sat side by side like two wax people..."¹⁵⁵ This image of wax people increases the idea of statuelike immobility in Bowen. People are not only waxworks in Bowen, they go further: they are "mummified:" "Had the agitation she [Anna] felt throughout her body sent an aura with a quivering edge, Portia's eyes might be said to explore this line of quiver, round and along Anna's reclining form, Anna felt bound up with her fear, with her secret, by that enwrapping look of Portia's: she felt mummified."¹⁵⁶ There are plenty of examples of immobility in Bowen. For example, we are told that "Portia lay in a sort of coffin of silence(...)"¹⁵⁷ We are also told that "[s]he [Karen] either felt nothing or felt, wherever she was, the same something approaching, like steps in the distance making you stand still."¹⁵⁸ The idea of immobility here increases the sense of narcissistic immobilizing in the novels. There are rigid statuelike people in Bowen as a result of narcissism around

¹⁵² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One* (1977; Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996) 216; henceforth referred to as Irigaray, *This Sex*.

¹⁵³ *WL*, 65.

¹⁵⁴ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 214.

¹⁵⁵ *HP*, 83.

¹⁵⁶ *DH*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 85.

¹⁵⁸ *HP*, 96.

or in themselves. Immobility prevents unconscious feeling from flowing free. There is something threatening “making you stand still”.

Too much narcissism imprisons the other, thus taking away the other’s very right to existence and time and growth as a personality who has the right to his/her own life thus inhibiting the movement of life for one. This is truly killing the other. Immobile statues are not able to develop and move forward, their unconscious feeling has been blocked. Irigaray continues as follows:

Our strength lies in the very weakness of our resistance [cf. “the mist of their thinning semblances” above]. For a long time now they have appreciated what our suppleness is worth for their own embraces and impressions. Why not enjoy it ourselves? Rather than letting ourselves be subjected to their branding. Rather than being fixed, stabilized, immobilized, separated.¹⁵⁹

It is our strength in fact to be able to be weak in our resistance, to be able to remain mobile. “[O]ur suppleness” is valuable, so valuable that we should not let the others take advantage of it. Narcissistic men or women brand us, they make us statues if we let them do it. They exclude us. Less narcissism means more inclusion instead of exclusion. More room to be taken in, more room to take in. It would mean true respect, true responsibility, true response, trust, thus giving us meaningful dialogue, thus meaning, thus life. Without meaning, meaningfulness, we are lost, dumbfounded, dead.

When it comes to meaning there is a reference to writing as Nicholas Royle puts it in his *After Derrida*:

In *Of Grammatology*, as elsewhere, Derrida views history as unavoidably a metaphysical concept to the extent that it is always ‘determined in the last analysis as the history of meaning’ (P,49) and in so far as it is ‘not only linked to linearity, but to an entire system of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a

¹⁵⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 214.

certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc.)' (P, 57). *Of Grammatology* is concerned to show, however, that a certain notion of *writing* is the condition of possibility of history – 'writing opens the field of history' (27), as Derrida puts it – and thus to explore the ways in which it is possible to glimpse the *closure* of that 'historico-metaphysical epoch' which he calls 'logocentrism' (OG, 4).¹⁶⁰

But 'writing' and 'text,' as he elaborates these terms, are not restricted to their conventional senses. Rather, he wishes to show how these terms are necessarily subject to what he elsewhere calls 'unbounded generalization' (TTP, 40). To say that history is radically determined by writing, then, is to say that it is constituted by a general or unbounded logic of traces and remains – general and unbounded because these traces and remains, this work of remainders and remnants, are themselves neither presences nor origins: rather, they too are constituted by traces and remains in turn. Such a formulation of 'writing' may seem at variance with the immediacy of speech and 'the subject's self-presence within *consciousness* or *feeling*,' for that immediacy seems indeed constantly to be effacing itself. Derrida's argument, however, is that speech and the experience of self-presence are themselves only possible on the basis of a logic of writing, that is of repetition and difference, of traces and remains. 'Writing' then is not simply (as Rousseau phrases it) a 'supplement to the spoken word' (cited OG, 7): as mark, trace, spacing, it inhabits speech (and the very experience of self-presence) as its condition of possibility, while at the same time being nowhere either present or absent.¹⁶¹

History is "the history of meaning", hopefully. And it depends on certain things, such as linearity, teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth etc. Thus our narcissistic behaviours become involved in all these things and they become part of that history. Furthermore, it is 'writing' that counts, it is 'writing' that makes that history happen. Thus 'logocentrism' becomes important in history's writing and that should be explored. '[L]ogocentrism' makes narcissism possible, it supports it. Whatever happens in this kind of 'history's writing' should be explored also in order to get rid of narcissistically centered 'meaning'. Meaning is no meaning if it is not flowing free from

¹⁶⁰ Royle, *After Derrida*, 18.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, 19-20.

‘logocentric’ constraints as it has been so often so far. To feel life to the full we need meaning; to create a meaningful life for us we need meaning that does not become rigid in ‘logocentrism’. Writing and text are subject to ‘unbounded generalization’. Thus they involve, perhaps, narcissism’s rigidity as part of generalization. So, history’s writing involves “logic of traces and remains”, which are “neither presences or origins”. They too are “constituted by traces and remains in turn”. This kind of writing clashes with “the immediacy of speech” and “the subject’s self-presence within *consciousness* or *feeling*” because “that immediacy seems indeed constantly to be effacing itself”. But according to Derrida “speech and the experience of self-presence” are “only possible on the basis of a logic of writing”, which means repetition and difference, traces and remains. Thus writing “inhabits speech (and the very experience of self-presence)”. At the same time it is not present or absent. So, our emotional self-presence is infected by writing or by its logic. How we ‘write’, how we interpret becomes crucial here: in the long run it affects our emotional life, our self-presence within feeling. Traces and remains can be influenced by our narcissisms: this makes narcissisms a powerful ‘weapon’ in discourses, in how they emerge through ‘writing’. On the other hand narcissism can also block traces and remains, so that a crooked picture emerges. But in general ‘writing’ is a strong point in the battle for less narcissism, indeed. ‘Writing’ is the space of multiplicity, thus giving room for differences, different voices, opening up the dialogue between present and absent, all time... - at least in the best cases, if our interpretation is not blocked by logocentrisms. So, we must get rid of narcissistically centered meaning. There is actually no meaning if it is not flowing free from ‘logocentric’ constraints. It is ‘writing’ that counts. Our emotional self-presence is infected by ‘writing’ or by its logic. How we write, how we interpret becomes crucial: in the long run it affects our emotional life.

Also, maybe there are other things that affect us, like fate. It is something that is outside of ‘writing’, maybe. Or its ‘writing’ is completely different. It is ‘written’ for us in a sense but surely we can affect it. In *A World of Love* Antonia says to Maud: “I should have considered it, more, Fate.” Maud, for her part, says to Antonia: “She [Maud’s mother Lilia] says you always fall back on fate sooner than face what you have done.” Antonia says: “‘Good God, Maud.’” And continues:

‘I mean to say, what next? – We’re the instruments of each others’ destinies right enough, but absolutely I won’t agree that I caused you. Perfectly evidently you had to be – what the world had done to deserve you, one can’t say. What has the world done to deserve most things?

‘Sinned.’ Maud said, not without satisfaction.¹⁶²

“[W]hat next”, next millennium, in the future? After all, we are “the instruments of each others’ destinies” also through our dialogues, through our narcissistic behaviours – through our sins, indeed. But maybe there is something more as well: fate. With hilarious humour Elizabeth Bowen highlights this point: “Reopening her eyes, Antonia found herself in the course of being regarded by Maud strangely; from, as it were, some new cosmic standpoint.”¹⁶³ “Some new cosmic standpoint” is perhaps what we need instead of our cosmic egotism. Maybe *A World of Love* is truly what we need. According to Cixous, “[o]nce you have passed the threshold and you find yourself in *the world of love*, then everything becomes easy. It is the passage that can appear to be difficult.”¹⁶⁴ “Reopening” our eyes is necessary because “[i]n any case, to love well, to belove, is relentless work.”¹⁶⁵ That work a narcissist refuses to do.

¹⁶² *WL*, 113.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, 112.

¹⁶⁴ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 111, my emphasis.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

“(It is only in the act of love that we are present).”¹⁶⁶ Otherwise we may feel that the other one is not there at all with us. It is as if we were alone, by ourselves, even in the most intimate situations. There is no one with us, if the other one is not present “in the act of love” but, perhaps, only waiting for his/her chance to overpower. There is no equality, no love. There is only a false attempt at something. A couple, any couple, any twos cannot expect to rest on one’s feelings: it takes two to feel in love, “in the act of love”.

The sound had gone out on to knowing air: had not the moment suffered as such, with a shock, it took the charge of immanence and fatality?... And now? She must hope never in all her life again to be so aware of him, or indeed of anyone – for this was becoming so much too much for Jane, so giddy, as to be within an iota of being nothing. The annihilation-point of sensation came into view, as something she was beginning to long to reach.¹⁶⁷

Here one is within an I, me, that is nothing, that parallels a void (“to be within an iota of being nothing”). There is (narcissistic) annihilation. It is dangerous to be aware of another person (in this case it is a dead person Guy) too much. To be aware can be more dangerous than to be unaware, unconscious. One is hoping NOT to feel (“[t]he annihilation-point of sensation came into view, as something she was beginning to long to reach”). It is important to find the balance in intimacy, in closeness. It is important to remain buoyant in a way, keeping it up. Otherwise the ‘dialogue’ can be dangerous.

The idea of immobility never leaves us in Bowen. There is also the idea of immobility in a house in Bowen:

From what you see, there is to be no escape. Untrodden rocky canyons or virgin forests cannot be more entrapping than the inside of a house, which shows you what life is. To come in is *as alarming as to be born conscious*

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 112.

¹⁶⁷ *WL*, 69.

*would be, knowing you are to feel; to look round is like being, still conscious, dead: you see a world without yourself (...)*¹⁶⁸

The inside of a house can be “entrapping”, to be too conscious is again dangerous – “knowing you are to feel”. To feel is safe if you are unconscious. Otherwise “you see a world without yourself”, an iota of being nothing, annihilation. It is like being dead. There is a strong sense of immobilizing, entrapping consciousness. Unconscious feeling would be a mobilizing alternative.

When there is less narcissism, there is less madness, too. It is probably the very human narcissism that brings the biggest sufferings to the world. There would be no killing the other without it. There is a need for the reduced ego, less taking and more giving. More of naked life. More poetry to reach the meaning, meaningfulness, and ultimately true ethics, an ethics of the two existing side by side at the same time, one not overpowering the other emotionally. True equality in dialogues. True ethics of the emotional.

So, after narcissism, more unconscious feeling? No complete madness but less narcissism and more emotional dialogue, more heart, thus better human beings. There is the battle going on: killing must happen for a narcissist (“she could not suffer dyingness to usurp”). Narcissists need to let out some breath once in a while, to remain “withheld” from feeling (“[t]hat done she was withheld again”) would be too hard otherwise:

A moth sheered the candles and fell scorched on to Mamie’s rose – at which Terence’s eyes consulted Jane’s: unostentatiously putting a hand out he pinched the moth to death. Talk, which zigzagged up to a pitch, stopped: everyone was aware of the old assassin wiping his fingers off on the sheeny napkin. The girl’s odd bridal ascendancy over the dinner table, which had begun to be sensed since they sat down, declared itself – *she* was the authority for the slaying. Tolerating the tribute of the rose, she

¹⁶⁸ *HP*, 95, my emphasis.

could not suffer dyingness to usurp: she let out a breath as the moth was brushed from the cloth. That done, she was withheld again.¹⁶⁹

Her dilated oblique glances, her preoccupation less with eating and drinking than with glasses and forks gave her the look of someone always abstaining from looking across too speakingly at a lover – not a soul failed to feel the electric connection between Jane’s paleness and the dark of the chair in which so far no one visibly sat. Between them, the two dominated the party. Or, so they acted on barbarian nerves. In this particular company, by this time of the evening, even counterfeit notions of reality had begun to wobble.¹⁷⁰

[A]s it was the current made circuit through them. Something more peremptory, more unfettered than imagination did now command them – there *had* been an entrance, though they could not say when.¹⁷¹

There is the ghost of Guy, perhaps, commanding now or some other presence (“not a soul failed to feel the electric connection between Jane’s paleness and the dark of the chair in which so far no one visibly sat. Between them, the two dominated the party.” “Something more peremptory, more unfettered than imagination did now command them – there *had* been an entrance...”). It could be seen also as a metaphor of unconscious narcissistic manipulation. One is commanded by others, often in ways we do not even realise. There are narcissistic manipulations that we are not in control of. Who knows what ‘other’ forces are in command of us sometimes? There is something uncanny in the air: “[E]ven counterfeit notions of reality” may begin “to wobble”. There is this feeling of a threatening presence ([s]omething more peremptory, more unfettered than imagination”).

After narcissism, there is the dissolution of narcissism:

¹⁶⁹ *WL*, 67.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, 67-68.

[B]eing back again on the mettle appeared on faces, making them less acquiescent and less opaque; it now was possible looking around, to distinguish each man from the others by the revivification of some unequivocal quality he and he only had had when young. At the same time, while these men helped to compose Guy, they remained tributary to him and less real to Jane – that is as embodiments – than was she.¹⁷²

This is a moment of less narcissism (“being back again on the mettle”). There are more subjects (“it now was possible (...) to distinguish each man from the others”). Things are more buoyant, even though ‘ethereal’ becomes more real when Guy (the dead person in the picture) becomes more real to Jane. “[T]here remained the sensation that there had been a moment.”¹⁷³ There is unconscious feeling, this reviving moment in life that gives us life. There is a moment of life, of feeling, of emotion.

Bowen seems to be talking about matters of interest to today. To read her fiction carefully enough amazes one in its profoundly up-to-date issues, issues of emotional dialogues between people, what is truly going on in those ‘happenings’ and how we probably have not taken into consideration many things in our communication with other people. And how important and relevant these become after all in the course of our life. This is surely one thing that Bowen seems to have discovered in her writing.

Had she [Louie] borne in on him, in her moron way, the absurdities to which thinking in public could expose one, the absurdity with which one exposed oneself? She had given him, the watcher, the enormity of the sense of having been watched. New, only he knew how new, to *emotional thought*, he now saw, at this first of his lapses, the whole of its danger – it made you *act* the thinker. He could, now, do no better than travesty, repeat in order to judge exactly how much it showed, his originally unconscious trick of the hands; he recalled this trick in his father, not before in himself – but it must have been waiting for him. Yes, he had had recourse to it, fallen to it, this evening out of some unprecedented need for emphasis in the body. Yes, he had been forced to it by the course of what in the strict sense had not *been* thought at all. The futility of the heated inner speed, the alternate racing to nowhere and coming to dead stops, made him guy himself. Never yet had he not got *somewhere*. By casting about – but then

¹⁷² *WL*, 68.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 67.

hitherto this had always been done calmly – he had never yet not come on a policy which both satisfied him and in the end worked. There never had yet not been a way through, a way round or, in default of all else, a way out.¹⁷⁴

My argument here is that “emotional thought” would be the opposite of highly narcissistic ways of thinking: “act[ing] the thinker” in narcissism would be the opposite of feeling unconsciously. There has to be “emphasis in the body.” Narcissism (“the heated inner speed, the alternate racing to nowhere and coming to dead stops”) makes one guy oneself. Acting the thinker, there is this idea of deathly narcissism, deadly non-thinking, “travesty”, “the futility of the heated inner speed”, “the alternate racing to nowhere and coming to dead stops”. On the other hand there is the idea of life in the notion of “emotional thought”, unconscious feeling, “emphasis in the body”. There is always a policy that satisfies and works out, always a way out back to life. This is the alternation of death and life, immobility and mobility, narcissistic hold and flowing free: feeling unconsciously. This is the very problematics of our modern or postmodern life. Perhaps more than ever before we are interested in the idea of life, truly living, whatever that should mean. Maybe the kind of alternation of death and life Bowen puts forward in her novels is the very texture of our lives – but there might also be this slight hint of something better, better humanity... Maybe, in narcissism, there is too much unfruitful thinking, no real thoughts, no “emotional thought”.

From here, from where it was being played at the base of this muffled hollow, the music could not travel far through the park – but hints of it that did escape were disturbing: from the mound, from the rose gardens, from the walks round the lakes people were being slowly drawn to the theatre by the sensation that they were missing something. Many of them paused in the gateways doubtfully – all they had left behind was in sunshine,

¹⁷⁴ *HD*, 14, my emphasis.

while this hollow which was the source of music was found to be also the source of dusk.¹⁷⁵

There is this idea of being drawn towards something that is enjoyable and appealing but frightening and dangerous at the same time. Of course this could be seen as a metaphor of losing one's innocence, entering the evil, narcissistic world ("Many of them paused in the gateways doubtfully – all they had left behind was in sunshine, while this hollow which was the source of music was found to be also the source of dusk").

His tenancy of her perhaps accounted for the restless mannishness in the woman she was – and yet, no: for all her accesses of womanishness one could make a guess at the man she would have been, and it would have been a different man, not Guy. This was a question of close likeness (with everything psychic, *emotional*, perhaps fatal which such likeness could comprehend) not, for an instant of identity. That the likeness should be a matter of look not looks, that it less declared than betrayed itself, like a secret history, made a deep-down factor of it – not least for Jane. The effect on her was to create a fresh significance for Antonia. Torment caused the girl to look straight across. He was gone.¹⁷⁶

"[A] matter of look" is "emotional" here: this is the place where the ego's (artificial) boundaries are moved away, i.e. this is the place of closeness. The true change in the world happens here. If we change like this, would not this mean the end of wars – both physical and mental or spiritual, and indeed emotional – between people and inside an individual as well. What would happen if there was not that unnecessary burden of a battle? Would we, perhaps, be able to have a true dialogue amongst ourselves and in the very recesses of our minds? This would make us all become one, in a way ("[t]his was a question of close likeness (with everything psychic, emotional, perhaps fatal which such likeness could comprehend)"). But it does not mean that we should not protect each others' secrets, each others' very own and individual personalities ("not, for an

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷⁶ *WL*, 70, my emphasis.

instant of identity”). On the contrary, I think, this would happen automatically. There would be awesome intimacy (“close likeness (with everything psychic, emotional, perhaps fatal which such likeness could comprehend)”: “[A] matter of look” which “less declared than betrayed itself, like a secret history”. This is “a deep-down factor”. It is “psychic”, “emotional”, and “fatal”. It is baring your soul. The ego’s softening or melting away would mean less resistance, less immobility, more feeling (unconsciously). More room for everyone.

Their eyes met.
They no sooner looked but they loved.¹⁷⁷

These are the very last phrases in *A World of Love*. Love goes beyond looking, what is seen as an object. According to Irigaray,

[s]ometimes a space for wonder is left to works of art. But it is never found to reside in this locus: between man and woman. Into this place came attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that wonder which beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free.¹⁷⁸

Wonder is a prerequisite for a true dialogue. It means “never taking hold of the other as its object.” Thus there is no possession, reducing the object. The object remains “subjective, still free.” What goes beyond physical love (“looked”) must be emotional (“loved”). Physical love would be on the more conscious level which would include narcissistic manipulation but emotional love would reach out to the level where we feel unconsciously and thus do not use such devices as narcissistic manipulation at all: things would happen on their own course when we reach this level of the emotional,

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 149.

¹⁷⁸ Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 13.

emotional love. It would be the area of letting the other come in, letting the other touch you. This is where union is approached:

Must one have a certain taste? One that does not exist or inhere in any nourishment. A taste for the affective with and for the other. This taste that ought not to remain in an obscure nostalgia but rather ought to attend to that which always forgets itself. As impossible to gratify? Which does not exclude the enjoyment of whoever feels without wanting to absorb or resolve. Between the body and the subtlety of the flesh – bridge or place of a possible encounter, unusual landscape where union is approached?¹⁷⁹

One must have a “taste for the affective with and for the other” to reach union. The emotional is the prerequisite to reach another. Ultimately this would lead to one’s possibility to exist as a subject and object at the same time. Where eyes meet this area is reached soon: “Their eyes met. They no sooner looked but they loved.” This is the area of true closeness, true intimacy, true love. Bowen’s ethics of the emotional is inextricably bound up with the idea of love that goes beyond narcissism.

At the end of narcissism thoughts are to be had: in the deepest recesses of narcissism there is only body, only physical love, and also, paradoxically, no body because of the lack of the connection with the free-flowing unconscious feeling. Once the thoughts are born or reborn the more right-minded approach emerges. So, the end of narcissism would be highly beneficial to the world, to our societies in more than several ways. To remain in body, to remain physical in a good sense, feeling unconsciously, would entail the revival of the heart embracing love, good unconscious feeling, true caring. When we are too physical we are full of negative energy, when we let go we find true, creative energy that involves true love, true intimacy, true commitment, true responsibility. When there is too much of body in a wrong way (thus no body at all) there is too much of selfishness, too much of manipulative force immobilizing,

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 216.

imprisoning the others. There is too much of everything, or, as Bowen puts it: “[T]oo much had been going on for too long”.¹⁸⁰ The better alternative would be to share, to share something of oneself, of one’s personality instead of keeping it all to oneself in a greedy hold. Equality, equal dialogues, between people in any sense will never be reached otherwise. And – one would like to add: there is a close resemblance between the words Narcissism and Nazism at least in form: maybe one is formative of the other. And, according to Hannah Arendt, the evil in the period of Nazism was a result of just very common people acting in their normal everyday way. The ‘Nazisms’ of today are probably no less the result of our everyday fascisms – the little evils that we do and accept in us and around us. Bowen puts it as follows: “Look what’s got to happen to us if we do live, look at the results! Living is brutalizing: just look at everybody!”¹⁸¹ This would be the worst kind of living, obviously.

In Bowen there is insistency on the notion of unique personality that nobody else can totally uncover: “Obediently clambering out in her long skirts, Jane declared: ‘I still am not what you think’”.¹⁸² After all, what was ever really given to the other in this world is something personal or something emotional. So, to really be able to give, to love one needs to sustain one’s very own personality, or soul maybe, the heart.

It is impossible in a way to describe who I am, who the other is – an energy makes it so that a subject, still living, is ungraspable and, moreover, changes all the time. If it is possible to contemplate a subject, it is not possible to represent (to oneself) who this subject is – the subject has already escaped from this fixed form, from this sort of naming of what it is. Unless the subject accepts being taken, imprisoned, annihilated there.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ *WL*, 34.

¹⁸¹ *ET*, 241.

¹⁸² *WL*, 74.

¹⁸³ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 84.

To stop becoming “imprisoned, annihilated” one must be allowed to remain “ungraspable” and “chang[ing] all the time”. The subject should always be able to escape the “fixed form”. This is important in the battle for less narcissism. Irigaray talks about wonder in a relationship between man and woman. The same applies to all our relations with other people:

This passion has no opposite or contradiction and exists always as though for the first time. Thus man and woman, woman and man are always meeting as though for the first time because they cannot be substituted one for the other, I will never be in a man’s place, never will a man be in mine. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other – they are irreducible on to the other.¹⁸⁴

In narcissism one easily fosters prejudices, thus there is no wonder, there is no “meeting as though for the first time”. This is a real danger in any communication. Dialogues become twisted and false. One needs to remain flowing free from constraints unconsciously. It is our unconscious feeling that is more likely to remain in a state where “one will never exactly occupy the place of the other”. In case it is not disturbed but flowing free. Also Cixous talks about “an environment” that is “personalized, personal”:

But I think that we are not without an environment, one that is human, personalized, personal; and terrestrial, urban, etc. (‘political’ comes afterwards for me). We are all haunted by the question of our mortality. And thus haunted by the question of what it is to be human, this thing that speaks, that thinks, that loves, that desires and that one day is extinguished.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 12-13.

¹⁸⁵ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 32.

According to Bowen, love is unreal: “In the chaos that suddenly thrusts in, nothing remains unreal, except possibly love.”¹⁸⁶ Love feels unreal when everything else does not. It is the demanding nature of love, even “in the chaos” when everything else seems chaotically real, love remains unreal but so true in its unreality. We need to believe in it in spite of everything else, we need to rely on its existence, unreal though it may seem to us. Love in Bowen remains unreal when horrors of narcissism become very real, indeed:

But then she [Antonia] tripped over a tent peg, jarred the lens in her brain: in the instant revulsion set in, as it now did always. Like a bullet-hit pane, the whole scene shivered, splintered outward in horror from that small black vacuum in its core. She could not wait to get out – where was Fred? Where was the Ford?¹⁸⁷

Where is another person, where is a dialogue (“Where was Fred?”). And where is a car, mobility, movement to mobilize oneself, to get away (“Where was the Ford?”). After all, “that small black vacuum” horrifies one. It is “a bullet-hit pane” that shocks one. This core of something terrifying, something that could suck you into its “black vacuum.” Thus we need the dialogue, we need an other person to stop us from being sucked into whatever dangerous “black vacuum[s]” in our emotional beings, in our narcissistic recesses. Jane is described as follows: “What *was* this that grew like a danger in her? What had she been tempted up to the very brink of? Was she lost for ever? Was there a path back?”¹⁸⁸ There is a danger implied in the very recesses of our emotional life, narcissism’s hold on us. We can be drowned by it. “Was there a path back” one cannot know always. It is “like a danger” in us. We can be “tempted up to the very brink of” narcissism. Are we lost forever? Who knows. There is a threat of being

¹⁸⁶ *DH*, 170.

¹⁸⁷ *WL*, 29.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 54.

within “an iota of being nothing”, a void, “that black vacuum” in Bowen. In *The House in Paris* Henrietta complains: “I don’t feel as if I was anywhere’.”¹⁸⁹ Later on she says to Leopold: “Well, I have got to be *somewhere*. I can’t just melt.”¹⁹⁰ There is the danger of dissolution in a bad sense implied in above extracts, being trapped in a void.

It is the emotional quality that is needed. Mme Fisher says to Leopold: “Wherever I am now, I do not feel and am not felt.”¹⁹¹ Later on Bowen writes: “Sense of space is emotional.”¹⁹² To feel and to be felt is the essence of Bowen’s ethics of the emotional. We live in an emotional space first and foremost.

In *The Hotel* Bowen writes as follows:

She [Sydney] had never seen what she still called to herself a ‘grown-up passion’ so visibly ravaged by emotion. The emotional range of her elders seemed to Sydney narrow and stereotyped; they reacted without variation to stimuli from without. But Miss Pym gave an impression, somehow, of having been attacked from within.¹⁹³

It is important to have the emotional quality “within”, to have the core that is emotional. Otherwise our “emotional range” is “narrow and stereotyped”. To reach an emotional dialogue, we need to be emotional in our deepest recesses ourselves first. This is part of Bowen’s ethics of the emotional. But it can be dangerous, too: We can be “attacked from within”.

In *To the North* Bowen writes: “In the holy war reason plays no part: in Julian feeling was shredded by cold good sense.”¹⁹⁴ Feeling was in pieces, “shredded”. There is probably no emotional core that is intact but to have feeling that is “shredded by cold good sense” is a frightening option.

¹⁸⁹ *HP*, 25.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, 268.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 311.

¹⁹³ *H*, 36.

¹⁹⁴ *TN*, 191.

There is the fear of dissolution:

A little smoke from their fire dissolved in the clear evening; the downs in their circle lay colourless under the sky. Some childish idea of kind arms deserting her mind, Emmeline said: 'How alone we shall be tonight.' Like a presence, this cold stillness touched the idea of their love: would they dissolve like the smoke here, having no bounds?¹⁹⁵

“[K]ind arms” disappear in Emmeline’s mind. There is “cold stillness” mixing with “the idea of their love”. Dissolving is seen as threatening in this particular situation. Instead of “cold stillness” there should be warm movement, mobility in love.

According to Rei Terada, “lovers believe that their emotion leads them from outer traits to inner states and back. Love, then, is not merely an inner content but a would-be means of access to others’ feelings: one’s own emotion, an “inner” quality, throws a line through the external world to someone else’s emotion.”¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, “one’s own emotion comes to be known in the first place only through connection with and confirmation from others.”¹⁹⁷ Through love we reach another’s emotions, love is not only an “inner quality”. But we need our “inner content”, our own emotions to reach another. Also we ‘are born’ emotionally (in love) only “through connection and confirmation from others” emotionally. So, we need emotion, not putting on acts. Stella and Harrison talk in *The Heat of the Day* as follows:

‘You imagine everyone puts on acts?’
 ‘You think *I* put acts on?’
 ‘I haven’t even thought. I do not care what you do.’
 ‘Neither do I,’ said Harrison promptly, pleased. ‘I don’t care what I do. That’s where it comes in – no vanity!’
 ‘I should have said, no feeling,’ she abstractedly said.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁹⁶ Terada, 50.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *HD*, 30.

There is “no feeling” when one is narcissistically putting on acts. It is an empty dialogue thus. It is only our feelings that bring about communication, a proper dialogue.

What is love then, more specifically, according to Elizabeth Bowen? “[L]ove dreads being isolated, being left to speak in a void – at the beginning it would often rather listen than speak.”¹⁹⁹ There is a strong sense implied against narcissism (“isolated, being left to speak in a void”). Furthermore, “[w]ar at present worked as a thinning of the membrane between the this and the that, it was a becoming apparent – but then what else is love?”²⁰⁰ Love is dissolution in a good sense, merging, and “a becoming apparent”, becoming evident, clearly seen. Furthermore, there is a poetry to every love (“[e]very love has a poetic relevance of its own”):

Then their doubled awareness, their *interlocking feeling* acted on, intensified what was round them – nothing they saw, knew, or told one another remained trifling; everything came to be woven into the continuous narrative of love; which, just as much, kept gaining substance, shadow, consistency from the imperfectly known and the not said. For naturally they did not tell one another everything. *Every love has a poetic relevance of its own*; each love brings to light only what is to it relevant. Outside lives the junk-yard of what does not matter.²⁰¹

There is unconstrained unconscious feeling (“their interlocking feeling”). And first and foremost, in love, “[o]utside lives the junk-yard of what does not matter”. And last but not least: “To have turned away from everything to one face is to find oneself face to face with everything.”²⁰²

According to Cixous, “[t]he most incredible is to notice (...) [t]o what extent we are sorts of corks without poetry, tossing about on oceans... Yet I am convinced that we all desire not to be corks tossing on an ocean; we desire to be poetic bodies, capable of

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 55.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 195.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, 99, my emphasis.

²⁰² *ibid.*, 195.

having a point of view on our own destiny; on ...humanity.”²⁰³ It is true, that we may be narcissistic “corks tossing on an ocean” sometimes but we want to be more, we do not want to be “corks without poetry, tossing about on oceans”. We want to have our emotional ‘roots’ deep down, our unconscious feeling, working in order to have poetry, in order to have “a point of view on our destiny; on...humanity.”

Narcissism vs. love is the very situation that is juxtaposed in Bowen. There is narcissism and there is love and yearning for love. Love is seen as a desirable option that is not always easy to reach because of narcissistic disturbances. Eyes meeting is longed for. The obstacles for this situation are often dealt with in a humorous way, as our defecencies. What is poetic is preferred. Life is seen as a positive power against the immobilities of death. Bowen is very much pro-life. The disturbances are acknowledged and understood to some extent. Even though there is a search for better alternatives in our emotional exchanges. There is a yearning to feel specifically. Unconscious feeling is emphasized.

There is something disturbing in the air often though, an “overcharged room”:
 “Like someone bidden to enter an already overcrowded and overcharged room, she [Jane] paused for as long as possible on the threshold, waiting for something to subside, for the floor to empty or the air to clear.”²⁰⁴ There is something disturbing in the air, one has to wait for “the air to clear”. Narcissism makes rooms “overcrowded and overcharged”. There are too many disturbed emotional beings maybe. “She did what she could by adding no further heat.”²⁰⁵ One has to be wary of not adding more disturbances, of “adding no further heat”. This is the kind of situation where one cannot lay back and let one’s unconscious feeling or love revive. It inhibits the revival. It is blocked by “extreme situations” and “frantic statements”: “She [Jane] had grown up

²⁰³ Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 11.

²⁰⁴ *WL*, 34.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

amid extreme situations and frantic statements; and, out of her feeling for equilibrium, contrived to ignore them as far as possible.”²⁰⁶ One has to “ignore” things to reach a better situation for oneself. “Altogether the world was in a crying state of exasperation, but that was hardly her fault: too much had been going on for too long.”²⁰⁷ There is this narcissistic heat going on everywhere, there is an excess of something (“too much had been going on for too long”). “The passions and politics of her family so much resembled those of the outside world that she made little distinction between the two. It was her hope that this might all die down(…)”²⁰⁸ There is yearning for something better outside this narcissistic heat that inhibits one and stops the poetic world from functioning. “The passions and politics (...) of the outside world” are narcissistic so often.

But in Bowen there is often also a dissolution of narcissism:

This was not so much a solution as a dissolution, a thinning away of the accumulated hardness of many seasons, estrangement, dulledness, shame at the waste and loss. A little redemption, even only a little of loss was felt. The alteration in feeling, during the minutes in which the two had been here, was an event, though followed by a deep vagueness as to what they should in consequence do or say.²⁰⁹

As a result of dissolution of narcissism there is an “alteration in feeling” which “was an event”. This is an important event in Bowen, it is something crucial when one overcomes “the accumulated hardness (...), estrangement, dulledness”. There is “shame at the waste and loss”. A dissolution of narcissism is a prerequisite for love. In Bowen dissolution is sometimes threatening, other times a relief.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 104.

There are a lot of violent images in Bowen. Sometimes it is people's own violence towards themselves, other times inflicted on by others: "She [Portia] ground the back of her hand into her mouth – the abandoned movement was cautious, checked by awe at some monstrous approach. She began to weep, shedding tears humbly, without protest, without at all full feeling, like a child actress mesmerized for a part."²¹⁰ Portia hurts herself when waiting for "some monstrous approach". Violence here ("she ground the back of her hand into her mouth") represents innocence. There is something frightening around, maybe narcissistic cruelty. There is "unadmitted cruelty" around: "A hand on her [Portia's] shoulder-blade, he [Thomas] pushed her ahead of him with colourless, unadmitted cruelty."²¹¹ Cruelty is in the air around Portia. Her innocence is haunted by violence all around. Narcissistic cruelty is like an animal who smells the blood of the wounded. Portia's innocence is threatening to others, her "seclusion of its own" is an emergency situation: "The very sudden, anaesthetic white light (...) created a sense of sick-room emergency. As though she lay in a sick-room, her spirit retreated to a seclusion of its own."²¹² Portia is silenced and in a silence. She is "in a sick-room" with "anaesthetic white light" on. She is almost autistic, "her spirit retreated to a seclusion of its own". Her own violence and the violence around her is emphasized as representing the problematics of an innocent person in an evil, narcissistic world. You are on your own if you do not take part in the narcissistic world. The situation thus is threatening. Communication becomes violent. There are also "violent friendships". In a humorous way Bowen describes this as follows: "Tessa continued: 'Sydney is very affectionate.' 'She is very much...absorbed, isn't she, by Mrs. Kerr? 'I have known *other* cases,' said somebody else, looking about vaguely for her scissors, 'of these very

²¹⁰ *DH*, 79.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, 96.

²¹² *ibid.*, 85.

violent friendships. One didn't feel *those others* were quite healthy.”²¹³ Humour, again, is involved in describing something serious. There are real dangers in narcissistic dialogues. It is a mixture of violence and humour that creates an intriguing tone in Bowen. There is something important to be said that concerns ethics. The way things are said is enjoyable for the reader. The tone is not moralistic but something else, it concerns ethics in an empathetic way. The picture that emerges is powerful.

There is always the fear of dissolution in narcissism: “She dreaded dissolution inside his life, dissolution never to be repaired.”²¹⁴ Dissolution in narcissism inhibits love. There is the fear of driving away poetry: “Wariness had driven away poetry: from hesitating to feel came the moment when you no longer could.”²¹⁵ If you cannot feel any longer you cannot reach the poetry or love, for that matter. In Bowen there is the fear of losing poetry and love and, first and foremost, the prerequisite for them, the feeling. It is the feeling that drives away narcissistic overtones, it is the feeling that liberates one.

There is also a reference to the Nazis in Bowen: “Mrs Rodney is free not to eat cake if she doesn't want to: that is just what I mean by the difference between England and Germany.’ Peter, wriggling inside his jersey, said: ‘The Nazis would *force* her to eat cake.”²¹⁶ Maybe it is not coincidental that Bowen mentions Nazis in her text. It is something that ‘Germany’ represents that is threatening ‘England’. It is something that we should be wary of. And it reminds us of narcissism. Nazis are the epitome of narcissism. There is this forcing to eat cake, something that Bowen's ethics of the emotional would battle against. And it is in ‘small’ things, too, that this can emerge, like in forcing to eat cake. It is in our everyday behaviour that Nazisms occur and we should notify them in order to get rid of anything that is forceful, for example. It is our

²¹³ *H*, 84.

²¹⁴ *HD*, 49.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, 55.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, 113.

communication that becomes important. In our communication we can still foster narcissistic forcefulness. Bowen's prose is a reaction against any kind of Nazism.

3. The Uncanny

Some years ago I wrote in *The Bowen Newsletter* the following:

What is fascinating in Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Death of the Heart* is, among other things, its insistence on the notion of doubleness. One example would be the phrase 'at the same time' in the text, which creates an atmosphere of schizophrenic doubling, two divergent things going on at the same time: '... each movement had a touch of exaggeration, as though some secret power kept springing out. At the same time she looked cautious, aware of the world in which she had to live' (29). There is certainly a shattering of what is traditionally seen as logical here: this is tearing the logical in (at least) two. What is also at stake in the extract above is the idea of irrationality ('a touch of exaggeration') mixing with rationality ('cautious'), unreality ('some secret power') mixing with reality ('the world'), even madness ('some secret power kept springing out') mixing with reason ('aware of the world'). The conventional way of considering rationality, reality and reason as something that is one and whole and somehow 'intact' is radically shaken here. 'She was disturbed, and at the same time exhilarated...' (105). This kind of dissociation as a textual strategy produces a strange and disturbing tone that sets one adrift. One is cast loose in an ocean or space of multiplicity without any final clarity or certainty. The time of *The Death of the Heart* is this 'at the same time'.²¹⁷

This is one example of the uncanny in Bowen. There is this strange and disturbing tone created by two divergent things going on, especially when logic, rationality, reality and reason are concerned. They are not 'intact' in Bowen but mixed with their opposites: illogical, irrationality, unreality and madness are involved. There is uncanny uncertainty in the air. According to Bennett and Royle, "[t]he uncanny has to do with making things *uncertain*: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they might appear, that they may challenge all rationality and logic."²¹⁸ It has to do with defamiliarization.

"Literature, for the Russian formalists, has to do with *defamiliarization* (ostranenie): it

²¹⁷ Leena Lehto, "The Death of the Heart" in *The Bowen Newsletter*, vol. 1, number 1, winter 1992, ed. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (Tampere: Department of English, 1992).

²¹⁸ Bennett & Royle, *An Introduction*, 34.

makes the familiar strange, it challenges our beliefs and assumptions about the world and about the nature of ‘reality’.”²¹⁹ In Bowen unreality is mixed with reality. Our beliefs and assumptions about the world and reality are challenged in Bowen.

“The uncanny is not something present like an object in a painting. It is, rather, an effect. In this respect it has to do with how we read or interpret (...)”²²⁰ Also narcissism creates an uncanny “effect” in Bowen. It is something disturbing in the atmosphere of a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. According to Bowen narcissistic ‘dialogues’ are uncanny, they contain “disembodied closeness”: “It was disarming, this disembodied closeness.”²²¹ Dialogues become uncanny when something disturbs the intimate closeness. According to Bowen there is a frightening, strange and disturbing ‘black vacuum’, a void present in narcissism and, thus, also in narcissistic ‘dialogues’. There is strange uncanny overpowering. The feeling of uncanny warns us ethically. One can be drawn by this narcissistic uncanny vacuum: “Connie less spotted the vacuum in her friend than was drawn to it.”²²² This is an uncanny, threatening ‘dialogue’ in narcissism. Apart from ‘disembodied closeness’ in a dialogue there are also disembodied limbs in Bowen: the results of narcissistic dissolutions, maybe. For example, we are told in *A World of Love* that “[h]is [barman’s] experienced wrist went back to work.”²²³ Here a barman’s wrist is disembodied, it has a life of its own. Also we are told the following: “Lady Latterly moaned as she stood up; dissolution flowed through the chiffon and her limbs as she linked what was left of an arm through dissolving Mamie’s.”²²⁴ Dissolution goes through her limbs and “what was left of an arm” represents disembodiment or dismemberment of a body part. Also Jane is “putting out what seemed no longer to be

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ *ibid.*, 39.

²²¹ *HP*, 103.

²²² *HD*, 149.

²²³ *WL*, 60.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, 65.

exactly her own hand(...)"²²⁵ There is a dissolution of something here, a taking over by something other, by forces that we are not in control of. There is also a sense of disembodiment in the description of Matchett: "Matchett's hand in the cuff darted out like an angry bird, knocked once against the pleated shade of the bed lamp, then got the light switched on."²²⁶ It seems as if the hand here had a life of its own. There is a sense of disembodiment in the extracts above that remind us of Freud's idea of dismemberment: "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, (...), feet which dance by themselves, (...) – all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition."²²⁷ Even though these extracts are first and foremost highly humorous in Bowen, they can also be seen to generate an uncanny feeling when put in connection with ethics. Thus they can be seen as manifestations of dissolutions that narcissism brings about. There are people with disembodied or dismembered limbs in Bowen because there are people who have lost the connection between mind and body, their 'emotional cores' are disturbed. There are 'forces' outside and inside of us, (not least narcissistic forces), that disturb us and create an uncanny world for us thus. Dissolutions generate laughter in the reader but when put in the connection with narcissism their uncanny tone emerges, too. And thus an ethics of the emotional emerges.

There is this juxtaposing of what is familiar (Heimlich) and what is unfamiliar (Unheimlich) in Bowen. It is precisely narcissism that becomes that unfamiliar, disturbing otherness in its lack of intimacy but, at the same time, strangely familiar – something we come across in our communication all the time.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 69.

²²⁶ *DH*, 85.

²²⁷ Freud, "The Uncanny", 366.

In a narcissistic ‘dialogue’ there is a void that ought to have remained secret but has come to light. That ‘black vacuum’, in us or others, haunts us; it spoils our relationships with each other if we cannot escape its uncanny hold on us. I would like to argue that because Bowen’s ethics of the emotional emerges as a strong point in her writings, these extracts above also – after the laughter – create an uncanny feeling brought about by narcissism in the first place. In Bowen we find hilarious humour time after time but also, not less, we come across the ethical emphasis that brings light on different points of view. The emphasis on the importance of the emotional in general gives us a different standpoint. Juxtaposing humour and the uncanny makes her stories profound in their ethics: there are divergent things going on at the same time thus making an ethical view of point emerge more clearly.

So, unconscious feeling can be there also in a threatening way – in dissolutions that we experience, that dissolve us. This is the uncanny sense in the emotional in Bowen. The images above add to the sense of narcissistic takeover in the novels, there being these (narcissistic) ‘forces’ outside and inside of us. The world is uncanny according to Bowen. And this is part of her ethics of the emotional. There is a threat imposed by other people, otherness in Bowen. One is threatened especially with a narcissist. In Bowen there is dismemberment not only in the body but also, and first and foremost, in the spirit because of the annihilating narcissism.

So, in Bowen there is something that disturbs the intimate closeness. There is something that disturbs the Heimlich: “Heimlich (...) belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, *intimate*, friendly, etc.”²²⁸ There is the idea of immobility in Bowen, which is Unheimlich: “‘*Unheimlich* and motionless like a stone image’.”²²⁹ But apart from the idea of dissolution in narcissism there is also the idea of dissolution *of*

²²⁸ *ibid.*, 342, my emphasis.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 345.

narcissism in Bowen. There is a positive reminder, the ethics of the emotional, for example when in *A World of Love* people were “back again on the mettle”, “it now was possible looking around, to distinguish each man from the others”.²³⁰ There is a moment of less narcissism, there is a moment of unconscious feeling, the reviving moment of life and emotion. This is the Heimlich in Bowen, which is often threatened by the Unheimlich lack of intimacy in narcissism.

Bowen’s texts have a paradoxical quality that could be seen as a deconstructive force in the novels, that makes the texts float somewhere in between, having no adherent hold, being dissociated. It is only her ethics of the emotional that brings things together. In Bowen reality, rationality, reason, the logical, narcissism are all undermined. They are put into question through her emphasis on the emotional as an ethics powerful enough to question for example narcissism in our behaviours. It is an uncanny world that Bowen describes and criticizes in the end. How we are uncanny ourselves in our narcissistic tendencies and how something disturbing, something uncanny, is involved in our very emotional beings – and thus in our communication. There is something threatening in the world for Bowen, something that we should pay attention to in order to make things more intimate, more friendly for us.

Freud writes as follows:

Jentsch has taken as a very good instance ‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate’; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata.²³¹

In Bowen there are also “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive”.

According to Bennett and Royle automatism “is a term that can be used when what is

²³⁰ *WL*, 68.

²³¹ Freud, “The Uncanny”, 347.

human is perceived as merely mechanical.”²³² In *A World of Love* Lilia “drop[s] her arms like a doll’s.”²³³ There is a robotlike idea attached to the human here. Lilia is like a doll. In *The House in Paris* Max and Karen are referred to as waxworks: “He and she sat side by side like two wax people...”²³⁴ Are these people alive? There is something uncanny about Lilia being like a doll and Max and Karen being like waxworks. What is human is perceived as mechanical here. Is it dissolution in narcissism that has created this situation for them? There is an uncanny narcissism at work in Bowen’s people.

In his *The Uncanny* Royle writes as follows:

It is impossible to think about the uncanny without this involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centered, based in one’s own experience. But it is also impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self. As Adam Bresnick has put it: ‘The uncanny ... would not merely be something a given subject experiences, but the experience that momentarily undoes the factitious monological unity of the ego’. The uncanny is thus perhaps the most and least subjective experience, the most and least autobiographical ‘event’.²³⁵

So, the uncanny is something “self-centered (...) in one’s own experience”. But it is also something strange that dissolves “all assurances about the identity of a self”. So, in a way, the uncanny is something narcissistic but, at the same time, undermining that narcissism. It “undoes the (...) unity of the ego”. There is this kind of dissolution in Bowen. Something that is narcissistic is strange and disturbing and threatening in Bowen but, at the same time, it is threatened. There are dissolutions that undermine what would be more healthy emotional cores but also there are dissolutions that threaten narcissism in their yearning for a true closeness in a relationship, in communication.

²³² Bennett & Royle, *An Introduction*, 35.

²³³ *WL*, 42.

²³⁴ *HP*, 183.

²³⁵ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 16; henceforth referred to as Royle, *The Uncanny*.

Bowen's ethics of the emotional undermines narcissism as a mode of life. There is yearning for love and better humanity.

We need to emphasize, according to Bowen, the intimate, the friendly, the homely and "not simply give ourselves up or over to the uncanny". Royle puts it as follows:

If psychoanalysis and deconstruction have one thing to teach, it would be about how and why we must not simply give ourselves up or over to the uncanny. There has to be an abiding attachment to the familiar, even if it is one that requires ceaseless suspicion. There has to be a grounding in the rational in order to experience its trembling and break-up. There has to be a sense of home and homeliness within and beyond which to think the unhomely.²³⁶

We have to be wary of the uncanny in order to remain homely and familiar. But we have to keep the suspicion, too, to be able to hear the story the uncanny tells us. It is often a story that warns us, according to Bowen. It is a warning that we have to take seriously, too, in order to know where we might be in danger – particularly with narcissism's hold over us. This is the ethics of the emotional in Bowen: the feeling of uncanny tells us another story, emotionally, something that we should be careful with. So, unconscious feeling may be disturbed, disturbing in its uncanny sense. This is the point where our emotional cores must be looked at again. This is where we need to rethink our modern or postmodern lives. It is our ethical duty when it comes to our emotions. Our emotions must do the ethical job for us rather than be immersed in unethical blurriness of a narcissistic void.

Portia thinks that "something awful", something narcissistic and uncanny, perhaps, is with Eddie. Eddie says:

²³⁶ *ibid.*, 25.

‘You are so childish, darling.’
 ‘You say that because I speak the truth.
 Something awful is always with you when I’m not.’²³⁷

Portia speaks the truth but “something awful” is with Eddie. This is a typical dialogue in Bowen. There are the alternatives of what represents narcissism and what undermines it, at the same time.

In *A World of Love* Guy, or his ghost, is to Jane a dominator: “Dominator of the margin of the vision, he was all the time the creature of extra sense.”²³⁸ Guy dominates Jane’s vision. There is a “creature of extra sense”. There is perhaps something that should have remained secret but has come to light. According to Royle “the uncanny seems (at least for Freud) to involve a special emphasis on the visual, on what comes to light, on what is revealed to the eye. The uncanny is what comes out of the darkness.”²³⁹ In *A World of Love* Jane has a connection with “the dark of the chair”. There is something that “comes out of the darkness”, there is a ghost, perhaps, something that has come to light. He is to Jane something that dominates her vision, her “margin of the vision” to be specific. There is a ghostly atmosphere and “even counterfeit notions of reality had begun to wobble”.²⁴⁰ There is something uncanny in the air. There is a feeling of a threatening presence: “Something more peremptory, more unfettered than imagination did now command them (...)”²⁴¹ Representation of Guy commands them reminding us of the overpowering of a narcissist: there is a command of emotions involved like in narcissism. Thus what is uncanny in Bowen becomes the very representation of emotionally commanding narcissism. And, in turn, what is narcissistic in Bowen becomes the representation of the uncanny in its threatening and disturbing

²³⁷ *DH*, 276.

²³⁸ *WL*, 69.

²³⁹ Royle, *The Uncanny*, 108.

²⁴⁰ *WL*, 67.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, 68.

qualities to our emotional cores and dialogues. Narcissism and the uncanny are linked in Bowen.

As a result of narcissism, or the uncanny, there are crises, in Bowen's people, of "emotional idiocy":

Something speechless, tenacious, unlovable – himself – was during that instant exposed in Harrison's eyes: it was a crisis – the first this evening, not the first she had known – of his emotional idiocy, and it was as unnerving as might be a brain-storm in someone without a brain.²⁴²

There is "[s]omething speechless, tenacious, unlovable" as a result of narcissism or the uncanny. There is "emotional idiocy". In the lack of emotions it is even more unnerving. There is a threatening void, something that has come to light that should have remained hidden. "Emotional idiocy" comes to light, it cannot be kept secret and hidden, thus it is also the uncanny disturbed emotional core – the lack of feeling – that is bound to come up. It is a humorous piece, again, involving the uncanny opposite, too, typically of Bowen. Remaining humorous in these instances Bowen reminds us of her ethics of the emotional. With humour the ethical point of view emerges vividly. This is a typical textual strategy in Bowen.

There is also an uncanny clairvoyance in Bowen:

All Cousin Nettie's life it must have been impossible for her to look at the surface only, to see nothing more than she should. These were the eyes of an often-rebuked clairvoyante, wide once more with the fear of once more divining what should remain hidden – 'And yet', they seemed to be protesting, 'I cannot help it, so what am I to do?'²⁴³

And, of course, it would be the vacuum Cousin Nettie discloses: "The parlourmaid (...) raked forward a three-legged table, which she placed in exactly *the vacuum* at which

²⁴² *HD*, 42.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, 207.

Cousin Nettie had stared.”²⁴⁴ It is difficult, impossible, in Bowen “to look at the surface only”. Things cannot remain secret, hidden in Bowen. They must come up to light. Bowen reminds us of clairvoyance, and clairvoyance cannot be helped: “I cannot help it, so what am I to do?” The vacuums are stared at, they are looked at to understand more, to be warned more. There are feelings that have not been felt before, and it is even dubious who is feeling: “She felt what she had not felt before – *was* it, even, she herself who was feeling.”²⁴⁵ The emotional in Bowen is precarious and this is what it is in real life, too. This is part of Bowen’s ethics of the emotional, to draw our attention to this kind of quality in the emotional – to see the dangers, to warn us.

In Bowen not only madness has its uncanny features but also sanity has “an uncanny hint” about it: “The sidelong glitter of reason, the uncanny hint of sanity about this afternoon’s conversation at once frenzied Roderick and seduced him.”²⁴⁶ There is “the uncanny hint of sanity about (...) conversation”. Conversation in Bowen may have insanity involved but it becomes uncanny also, and especially, when sanity is involved. Sanity is just as uncanny as insanity in Bowen. There is undermining and questioning of what is seen as sanity (and insanity) in Bowen. Things are not necessarily the way we may have thought. Bowen undermines, deconstructs, real, reason, sanity, etc. In Bowen, with Bowen, we have to rethink about anything that is taken for granted. We have to revalue our concepts and beliefs – not least the ones that concern our emotional beings. This is an ethics of the emotional in Bowen.

We have to overcome dismemberment, disembodiment to reach our ‘body’. Body only starts when reached through the emotional (unconscious feeling) in an ethical sense. We have to reach ‘body’ to reach the poetic truth. This is part of Bowen’s ethics of the emotional. When ‘body’ is replaced by a void in narcissism the disturbance

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 212, my emphasis.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 247.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 215.

created has an uncanny sense about it. There is something strange or eery in the air: “[T]he uncanny’ has to do with a *troubling* of definitions, with a fundamental disturbance of what we think and feel. The uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness.”²⁴⁷ Definitions become troubled in narcissism in a strange way. We don’t know what is what any more. The familiar is disturbed with the strangely unfamiliar or strangely familiar in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. Discourse thus becomes indefinite, there is “a fundamental disturbance of what we think and feel”. Uncanny “is like a foreign body within *ourselves*”.²⁴⁸ And it is “frightening”, it “arouses dread and horror”.²⁴⁹ This uncanny foreign body within ourselves, a void, involves narcissism.

An ethics of the emotional involves the uncanny as a crucial part that arouses questions that should be explored. They are basic questions of what it means to be human, how we relate to each other. The uncanny is involved in ethics and we should listen to the story it has to tell. But, at the same time, we should take its warnings seriously. They are the warnings that involve our narcissistic behaviour. To hear the knockings of this other is important and dangerous. To be aware of this kind of other that the uncanny represents is crucial to our sense of ethics. Ethics does not exclude disturbances, it explores them and learns from them. An ethics of the emotional involves the uncanny as its other, another that should be taken into account when considering an ethics of the emotional.

Emotional body is disturbed by the uncanny. Thus the poetic truth becomes disturbed, too. It is important to notice that poetic truth is not self-evident in any way, nor is the body. They are something that need to be worked for.

²⁴⁷ Bennett & Royle, *An Introduction*, 33.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 39.

²⁴⁹ Freud, “The Uncanny”, 339.

The uncanny should not be overdone, nor should narcissism. They are there as parts of the whole but become dangerous when there is too much of them. An ethics of the emotional reduces them and their effects, it disarms them. When unconscious feeling is in its place, flowing free, as a crucial part of an ethics of the emotional the uncanny and narcissism that it involves have their reduced existence, existence that does not harm anyone.

An ethics of the emotional emphasizes the friendly, the intimate but acknowledges the existence of its opposites. Those uncanny opposites, that involve narcissism, are seen as dangerous parts of the whole when overdone. This is the problematic in Bowen. Thus the very human communication, our dialogues, are looked at in Bowen time after time. The disturbed communication is the very feature of our communication sometimes. Our communication involves violent things that might be reduced if we rethought these matters, if we paid attention to them. A better alternative is there according to Bowen's ethics of the emotional. We can work on our emotions and take them into account. They inform us often more than our rationality. An emotive approach is preferred in Bowen.

Conclusion

An ethics of the emotional is enwrapped in unconscious feeling. Our emotional capacities are important in being ethical. According to Bowen it is unconscious feeling that leads to a sense of life and it is our ethical duty to choose precisely what gives us life, a true sense of life. We live only when we feel unconsciously. And only in this situation can we truly become ethical beings. Ethical responsibility and ethical activism are emphasized in Bowen by emphasizing our undisturbed unconscious feeling. Our emotional undercurrents become an ethical fact that design life in Bowen and elsewhere. It is our emotions that tell us our ethical stances or should do so.

The emotional in us is socially like an extra climate, something more, an extra you. Unconscious feeling is the extra climate we live in. In general it is unconscious moments that make us alive again. Bowen's writing is a good example of this. It is precisely emotive writing that she puts forward, there is a specific energy of words involved. Bowen makes herself felt especially in the humorous parts.

Feeling and being felt is the mode of existence with Bowen's people or, at least, it is yearned for. Unconscious feeling is a current in the life of Bowen's people. It is something that is felt. To feel and to be felt is to truly exist in Bowen. Otherwise there is no life in the world of Bowen's characters.

Unconscious feeling in Bowen is something that everything else surrounds. It is the core of literature and, perhaps, language. Unconscious feeling is there bringing us life or, in disturbances, putting life off. There is even the extravagant wish to be 'dumb' to reach this susceptibility that exists in unconscious feeling. There is yearning for such communication that would touch one's feeling parts more.

‘Non-ego core’ is involved in unconscious feeling. It is the prerequisite for the experience of ‘poetic truth’. It is important for communication that language lives, that it is poetic. What is important especially is the astonishment by language. It is the origin of personal history. It is through the beginning of personal history that we reach the possibility of love and communication. It is anti-narcissism that makes love and true dialogues possible. It is precisely poetry that involves the astonishment by language. So, there is no other starting point for life, presence than poetry, language, ‘writing’. ‘Poetic truth’ is emphasized by Bowen: it is the quality of feeling unconsciously. ‘Poetic truth’ is flowing free, unconsciously taking up new forms and directions infinitely. Anti-narcissistic writing is about poetic truth. It is important for communication, for a true dialogue in ethical terms. ‘Poetic truth’ is precisely an ethics of the emotional, something that cannot be reached unless we feel unconsciously. And astonishment by language, poetry, is required in order not to be drowned in narcissism’s hold on us. ‘Poetic truth’ is, among other things, words that touch us, words that are emotive. Thus, emotion and language go hand in hand. Bowen’s writing is poststructuralist in that it emphasizes an ethics of the emotional. Poststructuralism is an anti-narcissistic discourse in its emphasis on emotion. ‘A poetic way of dwelling’ protects us, it helps us to keep our mystery and that of the others. Bowen’s writing is poetic and about poetic truth, among other things.

There are dissolutions in Bowen, which are either good or bad. There is specifically longing for a good anti-narcissistic dissolution in love and, at the same time, a fear of a bad dissolution, which is dissociation. Bowen’s ethics here would be to see the danger of a bad dissolution. To see what it does to people, when they dissolve or become subjected to dissolution by others’ narcissism specifically. This kind of dissolution happens for example when others command our emotions. Narcissistic

overpowering makes this happen. We become dissolved, dissociated, trapped, dumbfounded. This is particularly disastrous to our attempts to feel unconsciously, to be poetic beings. So, our emotional capacities are emphasized. Thus, it has become more troubled 'to be ethical' because of our narcissistic tendencies that trouble our very emotional capacities. Thus, our communication becomes unethical, there is no functioning emotional dialogue between people. There is no space for the other. This is particularly problematic in our modern or postmodern times, when we are supposed to call upon our emotions to be ethical. Undisturbed emotional life has become vital for us.

It is true that we begin with narcissism but we must move on 'to the object', we must begin to love in the end. The ultimate sense of an ethics of the emotional is experienced in and conveyed through love. There is no restricting 'I', there is dissolution in love instead. It is also important to return love, otherwise the other one is 'killed'.

In Bowen there is a lot of immobility. There is something threatening that kills you, that makes you stand still. It is imprisoning you. The unconscious feeling has been blocked somehow, there is no mobility. It is in fact our job to be weak in resistance, to be able to remain mobile to reach another one in communication.

We must also get rid of narcissistically centered meaning. There is no meaning if it is not flowing free from 'logocentric' constraints. It is 'writing' that counts. Our emotional self-presence is infected by 'writing' or by its logic. How we 'write', how we interpret becomes crucial: in the long run it affects our emotional life.

In Bowen there is juxtaposing narcissism with anti-narcissism. It is true that we may be commanded by others sometimes. There are narcissistic manipulations that we are not in control of. But there is also a dissolution of narcissism in Bowen. There are reviving moments that give people life. There is free-flowing unconscious feeling.

There is emphasis on something emotional like ‘a matter of look’. It is the place where the ego’s boundaries are moved away, it is the place of intimacy, closeness. It means less resistance, less immobility and more feeling. Wonder is emphasized as a prerequisite for a true dialogue.

In narcissism we come across the problematics especially when it comes to ‘body’. In a sense there is no body, this thing that makes particularly ‘writing’ possible. There is only a void in replacement. There is that small black vacuum in the deepest recesses of narcissism that horrifies one. It is something terrifying, something that could suck you in its black vacuum. Because of this particularly we need the dialogue and the undisturbed unconscious feeling. Otherwise there is a threat of being within ‘an iota of being nothing’. There is the danger of dissolution in a bad sense, being trapped in a void. In the end it is only our feelings that bring about communication, a proper dialogue. It is the undisturbed unconscious feeling that drives away narcissistic overtones, it is the feeling that liberates one. In Bowen there is specifically the fear of losing poetry and love and, first and foremost, the prerequisite for them, the feeling.

Narcissism and the uncanny are linked in Bowen. There is something disturbing in the atmosphere of a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. According to Bowen narcissistic ‘dialogues’ are uncanny, they contain ‘disembodied closeness’. Dialogues become uncanny when something disturbs the intimate closeness. According to Bowen there is a frightening, strange and disturbing black vacuum, a void, present in narcissism and, thus, also in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. There is strange uncanny overpowering in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’. There is a void in a narcissistic ‘dialogue’, a void that ought to have remained secret but has come to light. That black vacuum in us or others haunts us; it spoils our relationships with each other if we cannot escape its uncanny hold on us. It is this feeling of uncanny that warns us ethically. In Bowen the results of

narcissistic dissolutions are specifically disembodied limbs reminding us of Freud's idea of dismemberment. There is something highly humorous about disembodied limbs in Bowen but they can also be seen to generate an uncanny feeling when put in connection with ethics.

There is this juxtaposing of what is familiar and what is unfamiliar in Bowen. The Heimlich in Bowen is often threatened by the Unheimlich lack of intimacy in narcissism. There is something that disturbs the intimate closeness. There is something that disturbs the Heimlich. There is the idea of immobility in Bowen, which is Unheimlich.

The world is uncanny according to Bowen. One is threatened especially with a narcissist. In Bowen there is dismemberment not only in the body but also, and more importantly, in the spirit because of annihilating narcissism.

Bowen's texts have a paradoxical quality. It is only her ethics of the emotional that brings things together. In Bowen reality, rationality, reason, the logical and narcissism are all undermined. They are put into question through her emphasis on the emotional. It is an uncanny world that Bowen describes and criticizes in the end. How we are uncanny ourselves in our narcissistic tendencies and how something disturbing, something uncanny, is involved in our deepest emotional recesses – and thus in our communication. There is something threatening in the world for Bowen, something that we should pay attention to in order to make things more intimate, more friendly for us. According to Bowen we need to emphasize the intimate, the friendly, the homely and not simply give ourselves up or over to the uncanny. It is true that the feeling of uncanny tells us another story emotionally, something that we should be careful with. We should listen to this story, too, to know the problematics.

In the uncanny there is a command of emotions involved like in narcissism. Thus what is uncanny in Bowen becomes the representation of emotionally commanding narcissism. And, in turn, what is narcissistic in Bowen becomes the representation of the uncanny in its threatening and disturbing qualities to our emotional cores and dialogues. Thus, narcissism and the uncanny are linked in Bowen.

We have to overcome dismemberment, disembodiment to reach our 'body'. Body only starts when reached through the emotional in an ethical sense. We have to reach 'body' to reach 'poetic truth'. This is part of Bowen's ethics of the emotional. An ethics of the emotional disarms the uncanny or narcissism when overdone.

An ethics of the emotional in Bowen is mainly questioning. It asks, whether we truly feel fully and whether there is something to rethink about in our emotional beings. An ethics of the emotional is a better way of existence in its emphasis on the intimate, the friendly. It focuses on the disturbances thus showing us the problems. Bowen's ethics of the emotional is specifically an ethics of today. It is something that comes up especially in our modern or postmodern times when there is so much narcissism around.

It would be interesting to study further and contemplate more the way the emotional, the body and the meaning interlink. An ethics of the emotional combines these things in a mixture that could be called poetic truth. It is something emotional, something meaningful that poetic truth is about and it is connected with the body, particularly the 'writing' of the body. So, there could be also a more specific study of the poetic truth. It would be more specifically a study of the heart, that I have already touched also here hopefully. An ethics of the emotional is a matter of the heart, or more precisely, of the revival of the heart.

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