

Material Cultures Paper Proposal  
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### **Elizabeth Bowen's Junk Mail**

Abstract:

The first thing we are told about Portia, the victimized, orphan-heroine of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, is that she has a messy desk – specifically, a “wretched little *escritoire*”, stuffed full, “as if it were a bin”, with junk mail. Stuffed into a desk, the advertisements and begging letters that Portia collects have, in effect, been rendered void: they are circulars that have been taken out of circulation. Straddling the line between medium and mess, junk mail, in *The Death of the Heart*, acts as a kind of material remainder, one that, this paper will argue, enacts a breaching influence. The left-behind residue of miscommunication, Portia's junk mail heralds a breakdown of relations in the novel, one that is heralded by an ever greater accumulation of paper. Bowen's junk mail presents us with an image of what happens when print media refuses to mediate, and when communication is transformed into a cluttering materiality.