500 words (685 entry; 927 entire document)

**Bowen, Elizabeth (1899-1973)**

Born Elizabeth Dorothea Cole Bowen in Dublin, Ireland on 7 June 1899, Elizabeth Bowen was an Irish author of novels, short stories and later, historical essays and memoirs. Elizabeth grew up in Bowen's Court near Cork until 1906, when her father, Henry Charles Cole Bowen, barrister of Bowen's Court in Kildorrery, County Cork, was diagnosed with mental illness after suffering a nervous breakdown. Bowen and her mother Florence moved out, on the recommendation of doctors, and relocated to the Kent Coast. The pair then moved repeatedly around England and Ireland, living in coastal houses with a succession of relatives and friends until 1912, when Florence died of cancer. In the wake of her mother's death, Bowen was cared for by a variety of aunts and family friends when she wasn't attending boarding school. Between finishing school in 1917 and subsequently attending the London County Council School of Art, she worked in a hospital where she cared for shell-shocked veterans of the First World War. She began writing while attending the LCC.

After her year at LCC, Bowen traveled occasionally and remained at Bowen Court, eventually marrying Alan Charles Cameron in 1923. Her marriage, which was characterized by celibacy and platonic affection, was punctuated by a number of extramarital affairs; nevertheless, the pair remained married until Cameron's death in 1952. Bowen published her first short story collection – *Encounters* – in 1923 as well. Another collection, *Ann Lee's and Other Stories,* was published in 1926, which, like *Encounters,* was published by Sidgwick and Jackson, the press responsible for publishing E.M. Forster's early work. Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel*, followed a year later after, and was, like her earlier short stories and much of her later work, based in part on her own life – in this case particularly on her time in Italy.

More stories and novels followed, including her celebrated novel set during the Irish War of Independence, *The Last September* (1929). The Camerons moved to London in 1935, when Alan took a job with the BBC. Bowen travelled between London and Bowen's Court (which she inherited upon her father's death in 1930) up to and through the Second World War; the buildup to the war saw the publication of another of her most widely read novels, *The Death of The Heart* (1938). In this pre-war period, Bowen struck up a friendship and correspondence with Virginia Woolf. The pair visited one another, with Woolf staying at Bowen's Court and Bowen staying at Rodmell only months before Woolf's suicide in 1941.

During the war, Bowen worked as a spy for the British Government, helping the British War Office take the pulse of the Irish public. Bowen considered wartime in London to have been the most interesting period of her life; indeed, it produced her most widely read works in the form of the collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945)*,* which drew on both the experiences of her youth and of the blitz. She also completed, in 1942, *Bowen's Court* – a historical look at the Big House where she spent much of her youth and adult life, and which influenced her work so heavily.

Bowen continued to write fiction for the rest of her life, producing several novels of note, including *The Heat of The Day* (1949), *The Little Girls* (1964) and, notably, *Eva Trout* (1968), which won the Tait Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Her focus, however, shifted to essays and memoirs, including *The Shelbourne* (1951), an historical account of Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel, one of the key sites of the Irish War of Independence. She sold Bowen's Court to a neighbor in 1959, hoping that it would be restored, only to find it demolished within a year. Thereafter she lived in various places in England, including the Kent Coast and London. Elizabeth Bowen died in a London hospital on February 22, 1973, in the company of her onetime lover and life-long friend, Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie. She was buried in her family plot in Farahy churchyard, near the former location of Bowen's Court.

**List of Works**

Novels

*The Hotel* (1927)

*The Last September* (1929)

*Friends and Relations* (1931)

*To The North* (1932)

*The House in Paris* (1935)

*The Death of the Heart* (1938)

*The Heat of the Day* (1949)

*A World of Love* (1955)

*The Little Girls* (1964)

*Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes* (1968)

Short Story Collections

*Encounters* (1923)

*Ann Lee's and Other Stories* (1926)

*Joining Charles and Other Stories* (1929)

*The Cat Jumps and Other Stories* (1934)

*Look at All Those Roses* (1941)

*The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945)

*A Day in the Dark and Other Stories* (1965)

*The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (1986)

Memoirs

*Seven Winters: Memoirs of a Dublin Childhood* (1942)

*Why do I Write? An Exchange of Views Between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and V.S. Pritchett* (1948)

*Collected Impressions* (1950)

*Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (1962)

*Pictures and Conversations* (1975)

*The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (1986)

*'Notes on Eire': Espionage Reports to Winston Churchill, 1940-2* (1999)

Historical Work

*Bowen's Court* (1942)

*English Novelists* (1942)

*Anthony Trollope: A New Judgement* (1946)

*The Shelbourne* (1951)

*A Time in Rome* (1960)

Children's Fiction

*The Good Tiger* (1965)

**References and Further Reading**

Austin, Allan E. (1989) *Elizabeth Bowen: Revised Edition,* Boston: Twayne.

Ellman, Maud (2003) *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P.

Glendinning, Victoria (1978) *Elizabeth Bowen,* New York: Knopf.

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