

The life and works of elizabeth bowen

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The Life and Works of Elizabeth Bowen “ We are minor in everything but our passions. ” (Think Exist. com) Passion, meaning a strong feeling or emotion combined with the totality of all the experiences we've lived through, to some may be a more complex concept to pursue. The gift of passion enables us to overcome obstacles (real or imagined) and to see the world as a place of infinite potential. Irish born British novelist and short story writer (Answers. com), Elizabeth Bowen, makes the meaning behind the word “ Passion” evident, not only in her daily life, but in the works she has produced. Elizabeth Bowen was among the most well known and accomplished British women novelists of her generation (Critical Survey of Short Fiction, 300). She believed all writers have their own peculiar “ terrain”, or inner “ climate” which can be recognized from book to book beneath apparent shifts in subject or style (Bowen 1). No Irish writer was clearer than Bowen about the tensions between the English and Irish imagination (Boland ?). Throughout her long journey in life, Elizabeth Bowen created powerful works that captured the minds others. Elizabeth Dorthea Cole Bowen (Critical Survey of Short Fiction 300) was born in Dublin, Ireland on June 7, 1899 (Book Rags. com). The Bowen family was of the Anglo-Irish gentry (WashingtonPost. com). Bowen was the only child of Henry, an Irish lawyer and land owner (Fantasticfiction. com), and Florence Bowen (WashingtonPost. com). Her father had a mental illness that forced him into an institution (WashingtonPost. com). After her father’s mental breakdown, Bowen and her mother moved to London in 1905 (Boland ?). Shortly after, in 1912, her mother died of cancer, the same year her father recovered; Bowen was only 13 (WashingtonPost. com). Bowen stated, “ Good-byes breed a sort

of distaste for whomever you say good-bye to; this hurts, you feel, this must not happen again" (ThinkExist. com). Bowen spent most of her youth growing up at Bowen's court, a family mansion in the Irish countryside (WashingtonPost. com). She received her formal education at Downe House in Kent and the London County Council School of Art (Critical Survey of Short Fiction 300). Bowen received honorary degrees from Trinity College, Dublin in 1949 and from Oxford University in 1956 (Fantasticfiction. com). During her early adult hood, Bowen worked in a hospital for WWI veterans when her education completed, and moved back to Dublin in 1916 (Bookrags. com). Bowen moved back to England and enrolled in the London County Council School of Art (Bookrags. com). Bowen stated, " Thereafter, England affected me more in a scenic way than in any other-and still does. It was the lie of the land, with that cool, clear light falling upon it, which was extraordinary, " (Boland 94). Elizabeth Bowen also worked as an air raid warden during World War II. It was during this time when she wrote for the Ministry of Information (Bookrags. com). In 1923, Bowen married Alan Charles Cameron (Bookrags. com), who was an educator and broadcaster with the BBC (Boland ?). Her marriage was happy and mutually fulfilling, but apparently passionless (Washingtonpost). She lived with him in Northhampton and Old Headington, Oxford (Critical Survey of Short Fiction). While in Oxford, Bowen became friends with many literary intellectuals; among them were Isaiah Berlin and Lord David Cecil (Bookrags. com). In 1935, she and her husband moved to Regent's Park, London, where Bowen became a member of the Bloomsbury group (Critical Survey of Short Fiction 300). Bowen and Cameron did not have any children (narrativemagazine. com). In 1952, Alan Charles Cameron

died. Bowen returned to Ireland after his death (Bookrags. com). After a final trip to Ireland, Elizabeth Bowen died of lung cancer, from being a heavy smoker (Washingtonpost. com), in London on February 22, 1973 (Fantasticfiction. com). She is buried with her husband close to the gates of the Bowen family land (Narrativemagazine. com). Elizabeth Bowen's career is distinguished by achievements on two separate, though related, fronts. On the one hand, she was among the most well known and accomplished British women novelists of her generation. This generation, in the period between the wars, did much to consolidate the distinctive existence of women's fiction (Critical Survey of Short Fiction). Bowen was greatly interested in the innocence of orderly life and in the eventual, irrepressible forces that transform experience. She examined betrayal and secrets that lie beneath the veneer of respectability. The style of her works is highly "wrought" and owes much too literary modernism (Answers. com). Bowen started her writing career at the age of twenty (Washingtonpost. com). She wrote both fiction and nonfiction (Answers. com). Bowen was greatly influenced by the aesthetic currents of modernism and her own powerful sense of place (Litencyc. com). Most of her stories are set in the first half of the 20th century, with action taking place against a background of war (Critical Survey of Short Fiction). This provides a chronicle of the social, political, and psychic life of England (Critical Survey of Short Fiction). In 1923, at the age of twenty five, she published her first collection of short stories called "Encounters" (Washingtonpost). While in Oxford, she wrote her first four novels: *The Hotel* (1927), *The Last September* (1929), *Friends and Relations* (1931), and *To the North* (1932). (Bookrags. com). In 1935 Bowen and her

husband returned to London, where her friends included Cyril Connolly, Virginia Woolf, and many of the Bloomsbury group. She began a friendship and association with Bloomsbury writers, such as Rose Macaulay (Boland ?). In that same year she published her fifth novel in 1935 (Bookrags. com), *The House in Paris*. Again the theme is the destructiveness of romantic excess (Answers. com). Elizabeth Bowen presents numerous amounts of themes in her works. Some include innocence inevitably must confront and be vanquished by experience, and physical objects, provide stability, continuity amid the uncertainties and disruptions of life (Washingtonpost. com), loss of innocence, decline of fortune, impoverishment of the will (Critical Survey of Short Fiction), failure erotic disappointment, childhood hurt (Boland ?), and destructiveness of romantic excess (Bookrags. com). In 1938 Bowen published her best-known and perhaps finest novel, *The Death of the Heart* (Bookrags. com). Bowen wrote this novel from the sense of being orphaned after her mother's death (Washingtonpost. com). She turned painful childhood experience into one of the greatest novels (Washingtonpost. com). This well written novel is regarded as her masterpiece and will be found on almost any required reading list of 20th century fiction (Washingtonpost. com). Besides spending most of her time writing, she made numerous trips to the U. S. as a lecturer (Bookrags. com). Bowen also was a generous letter writer, a frequent broadcaster, and a regular visitor to writing classes at American Universities (Bowen 1). Bowen worked as a reporter for the British Ministry of Information during WWII (Narrativemagazine. com). She also produced books of history, travel, literary essays, personal impressions, a play, and a children's book (Critical Survey of Short Fiction). In 1965, she

wrote her first and only children's book, *The Good Tiger* (*Critical Survey of Short Fiction* 300). *Eva Trout*, published in 1968, was Bowen's last complete novel (*Fantasticfiction.com*). Bowen's novels and stories are full of desolate self-conscious children whose secret imaginative lives are always under pressure from the socialized expectations of the adult world (Bowen 11). With her passion and drive, Bowen was able to produce thirteen novels, over thirty short stories, and nineteen nonfiction works, all during her lifetime.