CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

ELIZABETH BOWEN IN CONTEXT

This book provides innovative, up-to-date essays about Elizabeth Bowen's fiction. It integrates the latest thinking about her engagement, stances, and knowledge of twentieth-century literary movements. Elizabeth Bowen often remarked that she grew up with the twentieth century. Indeed, her writings are coterminous with the technological, social, and cultural developments of modernity. Her novels and short stories, like her essays, register changes in architecture, visual art, soundscapes, the aesthetics and technique of fiction, attitudes towards sex and greater social freedom for women, and the long repercussions of warfare across the twentieth century. Bowen's writing reflects a deep engagement with other authors, whether they were her antecedents – Jane Austen, Marcel Proust, and D. H. Lawrence, among others – or her contemporaries, such as Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh, and Eudora Welty. Her fiction and essays are a barometer of the literary, political, social, and cultural contexts in which she lived and wrote.

ALLAN HEPBURN is the author of many books and articles on twentieth-century British, Irish, and American novels. An authority on the novelist Elizabeth Bowen, he has published four books of her uncollected works: *The Bazaar and Other Stories*; *People, Places, Things*; *Listening In*; and *The Weight of a World of Feeling*. These books have catalysed interest in Bowen's literary production, and they have appeared alongside collections of her essays and an escalating number of critical studies devoted to her fiction. Hepburn holds the James McGill Chair in Twentieth-Century Literature at McGill University and is a member of the editorial board of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

ELIZABETH BOWEN IN CONTEXT

EDITED BY
ALLAN HEPBURN
McGill University, Montréal

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009536004

DOI: 10.1017/9781009535991

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2026

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009535991

First published 2026

Cover image: Elizabeth Bowen. Photo: Chronicle / Alamy Stock Photo

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-53600-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For EU product safety concerns, contact us at Calle de José Abascal, 56, 1°, 28003 Madrid, Spain, or email eugpsr@cambridge.org

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

In memory of Eibhear Walshe
1962–2024

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Contents

Notes on Contributors *page* x
Preface xix
Chronology xxiv
List of Abbreviations xxvii

PART I GENRES

1 Short Stories 3
Paul Delaney

2 Theatre 13
Brad Kent

3 The Novel 24
Claire Seiler

4 Criticism 34
Danielle N. Gilman

5 Life-Writing 43
Emily C. Bloom

PART II AESTHETICS

6 Style 55
Heather Corbally Bryant

7 Time 64
Beryl Pong

8 Modernism 74
Doug Battersby

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

9 Visuality
Michael Waldron 84

10 Architecture
Maud Ellmann 94

11 Comedy
Bryan Radley 104

PART III ENGAGEMENTS

12 Jane Austen
Deidre Lynch 117

13 Flaubert, Maupassant, Proust
Victoria Baena 127

14 D. H. Lawrence
Eve Patten 137

15 Virginia Woolf
Jay Dickson 147

16 Eudora Welty
Anna Teekell 158

PART IV LOCATIONS

17 Bowen in Italy
Nicola Darwood 171

18 Hotels
Emma Short 181

19 London
Matthew Brown 190

20 Bowen's Ireland
John Greaney 200

PART V STANCES

21 Technology
James Purdon 213

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

22 War 223
Keelan Harkin

23 Sexuality 232
Michael G. Cronin

24 Sound 243
Olivia Colpitts

25 Crime and Punishment 253
Carolyn Ownbey

26 Cold War 263
Adam Piette

PART VI IDENTITIES

27 Girls 275
Kelly Sullivan

28 Women 285
Clara Jones

29 Lovers 295
Geneviève Brassard

30 Ghosts 305
Paula Derdiger

31 Servants 315
Ann Rea

32 Writers 325
Joseph Elkanah Rosenberg

PART VII REPUTATION

33 Adaptations 337
Shannon Wells-Lassagne

34 Legacies 347
Allan Hepburn

Further Reading 358
Index 364

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Contributors

VICTORIA BAENA is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Virginia, where she is currently completing her first academic monograph, *Provinces of the Mind: The Modern Novel on Provincial Time.* Her scholarly writing has appeared in *ELH*, *Victorian Literature & Culture*, *Diacritics*, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, and elsewhere. Her essays and translations have been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Paris Review*, the *Boston Review*, and *The Yale Review*.

DOUG BATTERSBY is a lecturer in modern literature at the University of Leicester. His research explores how novelists' techniques for representing thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations have evolved over the history of the form, from the eighteenth century to the present. He is the author of *Troubling Late Modernism: Ethics, Feeling, and the Novel Form* (2022) and a dozen essays and book chapters on modern and contemporary writers, from Thomas Hardy to Kazuo Ishiguro.

EMILY C. BLOOM is an assistant professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence College. Her debut memoir, *I Cannot Control Everything Forever: A Memoir of Motherhood, Science, and Art*, was listed by *The New Yorker* and *Time* magazine as a best book of 2024. Her first book, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (2016), was awarded the Modernist Studies Association First Book Prize. She has published articles in *Modernism/Modernity*, *Eire-Ireland*, and *Public Books*, as well as chapters in edited collections on H. G. Wells and George Orwell.

GENEVIÈVE BRASSARD is Professor of English at the University of Portland, Oregon, where she teaches courses in British, Irish, and women's literatures. Her publications include articles and chapters on the works of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, Elizabeth

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Bowen, Janet Flanner, Rose Macaulay, Marghanita Laski, and Elizabeth Taylor. She is a long-time member of the Space Between Society and the Modernist Studies Association.

MATTHEW BROWN is Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where he has taught since 2005. He has published essays and reviews about Irish literature and film in publications such as the *Irish Review*, the *New Hibernia Review*, and *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism*.

OLIVIA COLPITTS is a PhD student in the Department of English at McGill University. Her research focuses on mid-century British literature and postwar representations of home, housing, and design. She examines how novels engage with and challenge the narratives presented by historical home and design exhibitions and other related cultural media.

HEATHER CORBALLY BRYANT (formerly Heather Bryant Jordan), a senior lecturer in the writing programme at Wellesley College, is the author of the prize-winning book *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War* (1992), several scholarly articles on twentieth-century literary figures, and eleven books of poetry. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the Massachusetts Book Award, and it has received Honorable Mention in the Open Book Prize of Finishing Line Press.

MICHAEL G. CRONIN is Lecturer in English at Maynooth University, Ireland. He is the author of *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2012), *Revolutionary Bodies: Homoeroticism and the Political Imagination in Irish Writing* (2022), and *Sexual/Liberation* (2022). He has published essays on twentieth-century and contemporary Irish fiction; an essay on sexuality is forthcoming in *The Cambridge History of the Irish Novel*.

NICOLA DARWOOD is the Director of the Research Institute for Media, Arts and Performance at the University of Bedfordshire. Her monograph *The Loss of Innocence: The Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen* was published in 2012. She is the co-editor of *'Have Women a Sense of Humour?': Interwar Women's Comic Fiction*; *Fiction and 'The Woman Question' from 1850 to 1930*; and *Retelling Cinderella: Cultural and Creative Transformations*. She is co-founder and co-chair of the Elizabeth Bowen Society and co-editor of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

PAUL DELANEY is Associate Professor in the School of English and a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin. He is the author of *Anthologisation and Irish Short Fiction: Magnitudes of Telling* (2025) and *Seán O'Faoláin: Literature, Inheritance and the 1930s* (2014). His other books include the edited collections *David Marcus: Editing Ireland*, with Deirdre Madden (2024), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English* (2019), with Adrian Hunter, *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013), with Michael Parker, and *Reading Colm Tóibín* (2008). He also co-edited the short story anthology *Dublin Tales* (2023), with Eve Patten.

PAULA DERDIGER is Associate Professor of English at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she teaches modern British and Anglophone literature as well as film studies. In addition to her monograph *Reconstruction Fiction: Housing and Realist Literature in Postwar Britain* (2020), she has published on modern and mid-century figures, including Bowen, Colin MacInnes, Mollie Panter-Downes, and Billy Wilder. Her current book project considers border crossings pertaining to form, media, geography, and identity in the transnational literature and culture of the Second World War.

JAY DICKSON is Professor of English and Humanities at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where he teaches courses on twentieth-century British and Irish fiction. He is the author of many essays on modernist culture, including, most recently, publications in the *James Joyce Quarterly*, *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, and *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Katherine Mansfield*. His essay 'Charles Ryder's Sentimental Education: The Lessons of Friendship in *Brideshead Revisited*' appeared in *Friendship and the Novel* (2024).

MAUD ELLMANN is the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Distinguished Service Professor of English Emerita at the University of Chicago. She has written widely on modernism and psychoanalysis: her books include *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (1987), *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (1993), *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow across the Page* (2003), *The Nets of Modernism: James, Woolf, Joyce, and Freud* (2010), and *The Vacuum Cleaner: A Cultural Investigation* (2024). She has also edited a Longman Critical Reader entitled *Psychoanalytic Literature Criticism* and co-edited *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism*.

DANIELLE N. GILMAN is an assistant professor in residence in the Department of English at the University of Connecticut, where she

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

also coordinates the first-year writing programme on its Stamford campus. Her research interests include modernist women writers, twentieth-century literary criticism, and archival studies. Her work has been published in *Woolf Studies Annual*, the *Journal of Modern Literature*, and the *South Atlantic Review*.

JOHN GREANEY is a Research Ireland Pathway Fellow at University College Dublin. He is the author of *The Distance of Irish Modernism* (2021), and co-editor of *Flann O'Brien and the Nonhuman* (2024) and *Irish Modernisms: Gaps, Conjectures, Possibilities* (2021). His work has been published in *Textual Practice*, the *Journal of Modern Literature*, the *Irish Studies Review*, and *Derrida Today*, among other venues.

KEELAN HARKIN is Assistant Professor of Irish Literature at Concordia University in Montréal. He has published articles on Anne Enright, Kate O'Brien, Mary Manning, and William Trevor in journals such as *Textual Practice*, the *Irish University Review*, and the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*. His research deals with the intersection of citizenship and statehood in Irish literature written in English. His forthcoming book *Citizenship and the Irish Novel: Imagined Constitutions* demonstrates how Irish writers have reimagined good citizenship in their novels since the establishment of the Constitution of Ireland in 1937.

ALLAN HEPBURN is James McGill Professor of Twentieth-Century Literature at McGill University. He is the author of four monographs and approximately fifty articles and chapters. He has edited eight books, among which are *Around 1945: Literature, Citizenship, Rights* (2016) and *Friendship and the Novel* (2024). He co-edits the Oxford Mid-Century Series at Oxford University Press, as well as the MacLennan Poetry Series at McGill-Queen's University Press.

CLARA JONES is Senior Lecturer in Modern Literature at King's College London. She is the author of *Virginia Woolf: Ambivalent Activist* (2016) and *British Interwar Women Writers: Class, Gender, Genre* (2026), and the editor of *Virginia Woolf and Capitalism* (2024). Her current research project, 'Committee Woman', is a literary history of women's administrative labour in twentieth-century cultural and political organisations.

BRAD KENT is Professor of British and Irish Literatures at Université Laval. His publications include *George Bernard Shaw in Context* (2015), *The Selected Essays of Sean O'Faolain* (2016), and, as general editor, the Oxford George Bernard Shaw, an eight-volume series of Shaw's writings

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

published by Oxford University Press in 2021. He is also the author of *Censorship and the Irish Writer* (2026) and co-editor, with David Kornhaber, of *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Theatre* (2025).

DEIDRE LYNCH is Ernest Bernbaum Professor of English Literature at Harvard University. Her recent books include *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (2015) and, co-edited with Alexandra Gillespie, *The Unfinished Book* (2021). Her publications treating the novels and the afterlives of Jane Austen include her influential edited collection *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (2000). Lynch has also prepared editions of Austen's *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* for Oxford University Press and Harvard University Press respectively.

CAROLYN OWNBEY is a scholar of anti-coloniality, citizenship, and human rights in literature and other media since the mid-twentieth century. She is an assistant professor at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, where she previously served as Chair of English, Communications, and Literature. She has published essays in *Law & Literature*, *Textual Practice*, *Critique*, and *Safundi*, among other venues. She co-edited the inaugural Book Forum for *Global South Studies*, and she is co-editor of *Pandemic Play: Community in Performance, Gaming, and the Arts* (2024).

EVE PATTEN is Professor of English at Trinity College Dublin, where she lectures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish and British literature and cultural history. Her publications include *Imperial Refugee: Olivia Manning's Fictions of War* (2012) and *Ireland, Revolution, and the English Modernist Imagination* (2022). She is editor of *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940–1980* (2020), and co-editor of *Dublin Tales*, a volume of short stories set in Ireland's capital published by Oxford University Press (2023).

ADAM PIETTE is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939–1945* (1995), *Remembering the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Beckett* (1996), and *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam* (2009). He co-edited *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature* with Mark Rawlinson, and co-edits the international poetry journal *Blackbox Manifold* with Alex Houen.

BERYL PONG is a UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellow at the Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge. She

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

holds affiliated positions at Trinity College and the Faculty of English at Cambridge, and with the National University of Singapore. She is the author of *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: For the Duration* (2020) and the co-editor of *Drone Aesthetics: War, Culture, Ecology* (2024).

JAMES PURDON is a Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Modernist Informatics: Literature, Information, and the State* (2016), and editor of several volumes of literary scholarship including *British Literature in Transition, 1900–1920: A New Age?* (2021) and *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time* (2023). He is also co-editor of the open access book series Technographies.

BRYAN RADLEY is a lecturer in modern and contemporary literature at the University of York. His research and teaching focus on Irish literature, humour studies, and modern and contemporary fiction. Currently, he is working on another book in the Literature in Context series at Cambridge University Press. *John Banville in Context*, co-edited with Nick Taylor-Collins, will include his chapter on John Banville's essays and lectures.

ANN REA teaches twentieth-century British and Irish literature, Shakespeare, and Jane Austen at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Her research interests include Elizabeth Bowen, twentieth-century Ireland, middlebrow culture, and spy fiction. Most recently, she has published the edited collection *Sexuality and Gender in Fictions of Espionage: Spying Undercovers* (2023). In progress are a study of the treatment of Magdalene Laundries in contemporary Irish detective fiction, and an examination of estrangement in *Eva Trout*.

JOSEPH ELKANAH ROSENBERG is an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame, where he teaches in the liberal studies programme. He is the author of *Wastepaper Modernism: Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Ruins of Print* (2021). He is currently completing work on a new book tentatively titled *Undone: Late Modernism and the Aesthetics of Failure*.

CLAIRE SEILER is Professor of English at Dickinson College and the author of *Midcentury Suspension: Literature and Feeling in the Wake of World War II* (2020).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

EMMA SHORT is Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at Durham University. She is the author of *Mobility and the Hotel in Modern Literature: Passing Through* (2019), the first critical study of the hotel in British fiction, which considers the complex and substantial ways in which the hotel functions in early twentieth-century literature to express the shifting experiences of modernity. Her research interests span from the late nineteenth century to the present day, with a focus on the intersections of space, mobility, embodiment, and gender in literature and culture.

KELLY SULLIVAN is Clinical Associate Professor in Irish Studies at Glucksman Ireland House, New York University. Her recent and forthcoming publications include essays in *Modernist Cultures*, *Modernism/Modernity*, *Eire-Ireland*, *The Routledge Companion to Irish Art*, and *Cambridge History of Irish Poetry*, as well as interviews with nine contemporary Irish poets for a special issue of *Eire-Ireland* devoted to 'Seamus Heaney: Afterlives'. In 2020 she edited a special issue of *Eire-Ireland* on 'Ireland and the Environment'. She is currently working on a book about the novelist Molly Keane.

ANNA TEEKELL is Associate Professor of English at Christopher Newport University in Virginia, series editor of Anthem Press's Irish Studies series, and author of *Emergency Writing: Irish Literature, Neutrality, and the Second World War* (2018), along with numerous articles on twentieth-century and contemporary Irish literature. With Tina O'Toole, she co-edited the Elizabeth Bowen issue of the *Irish University Review* (2021). Her critical edition of John McGahern's *The Dark*, co-edited with Ellen Scheible, was published by Syracuse University Press (2025). Her forthcoming work includes the Modern Language Association's *Options for Teaching Modern Irish Poetry* and a monograph, *BorderLines: A Literary Map of the Irish Border*.

MICHAEL WALDRON is an art historian and literary scholar with an interdisciplinary background in Irish studies. He was awarded a PhD from University College Cork for the thesis 'Elizabeth Bowen and the Art of Visuality' (2016) and co-organised the conference 'Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions' (2009). He has published in the *Irish Arts Review*, the *Irish University Review*, *Museum Ireland*, *Paper Visual Art*, and *The Routledge Companion to Irish Art* (2025). He is Curator of Collections and Special Projects at Crawford Art Gallery, deputy chair of Sample-Studios, and a member of the editorial board for the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

SHANNON WELLS-LASSAGNE is a professor at Université Bourgogne Europe (Dijon, France). After writing a PhD on the visual in Elizabeth Bowen's novels and publishing articles on that topic in journals and book collections, she went on to focus on film and television studies. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Screen*, the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, and *Critical Studies in Television*. She is the author of a monograph, *Television and Serial Adaptation* (2017), and editor of several volumes, most recently *Adapting Margaret Atwood* (2021), *Brevity and the Short Form in Serial Television* (2024), and *Adaptation and Illustration* (2024).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Preface

Allan Hepburn

In the course of her career, Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973) published six volumes of short stories, ten novels, and three collections of essays and other non-fiction. Her first book of short stories, *Encounters*, appeared in 1923, and her last novel, *Eva Trout*, in 1968. Her writing life thus spans the turmoil of the Irish Civil War and the formation of the Republic of Ireland, the Second World War, the ages of austerity and affluence in the UK, the Cold War, the sexual revolution, and the social upheavals of the 1960s, all of which had a discernible impact on her output. When critics discuss Bowen's works, they tend to focus on specific periods or thematic concerns rather than accounting for the multiple contexts in which she wrote and published. The essays in this volume move away from interpretations of specific texts to general problems and issues in Bowen's writings, such as her handling of temporality, her thinking about women and sexuality, her role as a public lecturer and journalist, and her commentary, albeit implicit, on class and its prerogatives.

In accounts of modernism, Bowen tends to be eclipsed by such writers as Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh, all of whom were her friends, and all of whose writings she read with insight and discernment. She relished Waugh's comedic virtuosity; indeed, her fourth novel, *To the North* (1932), which focuses on cars, speed, and misplaced love, is a tragic recasting of Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1931), a novel about cars, speed, and interwar frivolity.[1] In *Why Do I Write?*, which was originally published in a forward-thinking magazine called *Contact: World of Neighbours* (1947) before being broadcast on BBC radio in July 1948, then published as a sixty-page pamphlet in November 1948, she exchanged opinions about the purpose and nature of writing fiction with Greene and V. S. Pritchett. Indeed, her comments about the mechanics and purpose of writing, as expressed in such essays as 'Notes on Writing a Novel' (1945) and 'The Technique of the Novel' (1953), are penetratingly apt and deserve to be

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

better known than they are as documents about the meaning and purposes of modernist fiction.

Bowen's relationship with her literary antecedents and contemporaries was rarely one of unalloyed influence. For this reason, it is an error of judgement to compare her style with Henry James's or Virginia Woolf's, as many critics do, almost always to Bowen's detriment. The compound negations in *The House in Paris* (1935) and the cat's-cradle syntax in *The Heat of the Day* (1949) are expressions of the central problematics of those novels – an existential negation of Leopold's having been born in the former, the contortions of thinking that lead to treachery in the latter – rather than imitations of Jamesian prose. Although she admired Woolf's lyrical prose, Bowen was much more interested in the ethical stakes of fiction than Woolf was. In an essay entitled 'English Fiction at Mid-Century', Bowen dismisses Woolf's lyrical representation of psychological interiority, which the 'wholesale destruction' of the Second World War rendered irrelevant (*PPT* 322). For Bowen, writing fiction is an act of public engagement, in addition to being an exploration of feeling and character.

Nor should Bowen be designated a belated modernist. That categorisation does not do justice to the multiple intellectual and artistic frameworks within which she wrote. In their discerning critical study of Bowen's fiction, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle recast literary genealogies to make her position in twentieth-century British and Irish literature more salient: 'Virginia Woolf is a major writer . . . She is the link that connects George Eliot with Elizabeth Bowen.'[2] Rather than being an intermediary for other writers, Bowen is a crucial link between George Eliot and the present, with Woolf assuming a supporting role to Bowen's achievement. Certainly, there has been an uptick in critical essays devoted to Bowen's writings, as well as her influence on contemporary writers. She makes a cameo appearance, for instance, in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), and a sentence from *The Heat of the Day* supplies an epigraph to Garth Greenwell's *Small Rain* (2024).

In order to capture Bowen's contribution to twentieth-century literature more accurately, *Elizabeth Bowen in Context* expands the social, national, literary, wartime, and mid-century contexts in which she wrote and which she helped to shape. These contexts often overlap and even contradict each other. Her national allegiances are a case in point. On the one hand, Bowen draws upon Irish traditions – from Somerville and Ross and Sheridan LeFanu to James Joyce and Molly Keane. On the other hand, she thinks of herself as a British writer in a lineage made up of such diverse

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

writers as Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and D. H. Lawrence. She also read widely in European literature and makes knowledgeable references to Flaubert, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Stendhal, and Proust. Many critics note that her short stories bear resemblances to Katherine Mansfield's and Guy de Maupassant's. In her fiction and critical prose, she borrowed from whatever national literature suited her purposes. As a reviewer, she kept up to date on emerging directions in fiction. A voracious reader, she reviewed everything from Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Mother and Son* and Anthony Powell's *The Acceptance World* to Françoise Sagan's *Those without Shadows* and J. G. Farrell's *Troubles*.

At various times in her life, Bowen moved through social circles in London, Cork, Oxford, Dublin, and New York. 'I'm perfectly happy in any country, any place', Bowen declared in an interview in 1959, just before she sold her country house in County Cork and moved away permanently from Ireland: 'I'm rather in a way unstuck – I mean unlocated, and I don't think that has ever troubled me' (*LI* 325). Her sensibility was as much cosmopolitan as it was Irish and English. Especially in the postwar years, Bowen travelled throughout central Europe and the USA. She held short teaching posts at American colleges and universities, and she counted many American writers among her acquaintances. In different degrees and with varying intensities, she was friendly with Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Reynolds Price, and William Maxwell. In her political, social, and literary allegiances, she crosses multiple contexts, and these contexts give a fuller account of her writing than has previously been acknowledged.

During her lifetime, critics attempted to summarise and contextualise Bowen's accomplishments, with varying degrees of success or pertinence. Elizabeth Hardwick, V. S. Pritchett, and Eddy Sackville-West weighed in on the merits and demerits of her fiction. Jocelyn Brooke published a booklet entitled 'Elizabeth Bowen' in the series Writers and Their Works for the British Council. He notes that 'her speciality is the minor yet significant *incident*, whether humorous or tragic, not the major *event*'.[3] Her choice of scale, Brooke claims, prohibits Bowen from being considered a major novelist, of the stature of either Proust or Tolstoy. This reputation of being a writer of keen sensibility, like Jane Austen, dogged Bowen's reputation for decades – unjustly.

Brooke, like other critics, does not recognise that major events, such as the War of Independence in *The Last September* and the Second World War in *The Heat of the Day*, inform Bowen's plots and determine relevance of action. Surely these conflicts count as major events, notwithstanding

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Brooke's comment about significant incidents. Moreover, Bowen quite clearly states that relevance crystallises plot and meaning through situations: 'The plot is thought of, or the plot builds out from, the situation, at first in a very simple and abstract form' (*WWF* 16). The situation, in which idea fuses with action and image, precedes the story. Plot and characters exist to serve the situation. In this regard, context for Bowen's writing is everything: it determines characters' behaviour as much as it shapes action, dialogue, and plot.

Elizabeth Bowen in Context is divided into seven parts. The first part assesses the various genres in which she worked, with attention paid to her own critical interventions and statements about the short story, novel, criticism, life-writing, and theatre. The second part, 'Aesthetics', approaches Bowen's writing from different angles, including architecture, visual culture, temporality, and modernism. The third part turns to a selection, albeit limited, of Bowen's engagements with other writers: Austen, Flaubert, Maupassant, Proust, Lawrence, Woolf, Welty. In light of Bowen's extensive reading, both for pleasure and for reviews, this part could easily expand to include Leo Tolstoy, Katherine Mansfield, François Mauriac, and many others, but a line has to be drawn somewhere. The fourth part, likewise, considers a handful of 'Locations' dear to Bowen: Italy, hotels, London, Ireland. She travelled extensively in France and the USA, and her travels to those countries are the oblique subject of related essays on Proust and Welty.

Sometimes, although not with perfect accuracy, Bowen is described as a Burkean conservative, whose politics steered a course through 'enlightened imperialism'[4] towards Ireland and an admiration of Winston Churchill during the war years.[5] Yet her disposition towards technology, sexuality, the Cold War, and other matters tells a different story about her political sensibility, if one assumes a wider definition of the political than such rubrics as 'Tory' or 'liberal'. Bowen's stances on diverse issues inform the fifth part of this volume. For example, from 1949 until 1953, Bowen served as member of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, one of only two women to do so. As a member of the commission, she heard reports from expert witnesses on matters such as the hangings at Nuremberg, the role of provocation in homicides, limited criminal responsibility, and the most and least merciful methods of execution. The debate around capital punishment, whether it should be abolished or upheld, should not be underestimated as a context for the governess's inability to shake off guilt by association in 'Reduced' or Robert's treachery in *The Heat of the Day*.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Many critics have noted the recurrence of female orphans in Bowen's fiction – Lois in *The Last September*, Pauline in *To the North*, Portia in *The Death of the Heart*, Eva in *Eva Trout* – but her characters extend to a much longer roster of identities. The sixth part thus deals with women, lovers, ghosts, servants, and other identities in Bowen's novels and short stories. In an expanded version of this book, there might be essays on cads (Markie in *To the North* and Eddie in *The Death of the Heart*), bad mothers ('Muttikins' in *The Heat of the Day* and Madame Fisher in *The House in Paris*), and siblings (the sisters in 'Happy Autumn Fields', *Friends and Relations*, and *A World of Love*, or Thomas and Portia as half-siblings in *The Death of the Heart*).

The seventh and final part of *Elizabeth Bowen in Context* examines adaptations of Bowen's works for the screen, big or small, including John Banville's screenplay for a filmic version of *The Last September* and Tom Stoppard's script for a television production of *The Heat of the Day*. Her legacies as a writer are apparent not just in obituaries that summed up her achievements upon her death in 1973, but also in critical statements about her work that have appeared in the past five decades. If anything, Bowen's relevance as a writer increases as time has passed, and the contexts in which she wrote continue to widen.

Notes

1. See A. Hepburn, 'Love and Recklessness: Speed in *To the North*', in A. Martin and C. Towsend (eds.), *Modernity Must Drive* (Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2025), pp. 161–82.
2. A. Bennett and N. Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. xv.
3. J. Brooke, *Elizabeth Bowen* (British Council/Longman's, Green, 1952), p. 30.
4. H. Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen*, rev. ed. (Vintage, 1999), p. 26.
5. V. Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Biography* (1977; Anchor, 2006), p. 208.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Chronology

1899 7 June: Elizabeth Dorothea Cole Bowen born in Dublin to Henry Charles Cole Bowen and Florence Isabella Pomeroy Colley Bowen.
1905 father has a mental breakdown.
1906 moves to England with her mother.
1912 September: Florence Bowen dies of cancer.
1912 lives with Aunt Laura Colley in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, and attends Harpenden School for two years.
1914 attends Downe House School, Kent, for three years.
1918 works in a hospital with veterans.
1919 attends London County Council art school in Southampton Row, London, for two terms.
1921 breaks off engagement to Lieutenant John Anderson while staying with her Aunt Edie in Bordighera, Italy.
1923 April: publishes first story, 'Salon des Dames', in *Weekly Westminster Gazette*.
1923 May: publishes first volume of short stories, *Encounters*.
1923 August: marries Alan Cameron, Assistant Secretary for Education for Northamptonshire.
1925 moves to Headington, near Oxford; meets in the years that follow John and Susan Buchan, David Cecil, Cyril Connolly, and Maurice Bowra, as well as other Oxford tutors, dons, and students.
1926 April: publishes *Ann Lee's and Other Stories*.
1927 becomes a client of the literary agent Spencer Curtis Brown.
1927 August: publishes first novel, *The Hotel*.
1929 January: publishes *The Last September*.
1930 inherits Bowen's Court upon the death of her father.
1931 May: publishes *Friends and Relations*.
1931 September: Evelyn Waugh stays at Bowen's Court.
1931 meets Goronwy Rees.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

1932 February: meets Virginia Woolf.
1932 October: publishes *To the North*.
1933 has an affair with Humphry House, an Oxford student who becomes a renowned Dickens scholar.
1933 October: meets Isaiah Berlin.
1933 December: travels to New York.
1935 August: publishes *The House in Paris*.
1935 September: takes lease on 2 Clarence Terrace, on Regent's Park, in London.
1937 has an affair with Seán Ó'Faoláin.
1937 July–December: writes theatre reviews for Graham Greene's magazine *Night and Day*.
1938 October: publishes *The Death of the Heart*.
1940 November: travels to Dublin to collect information about the Irish disposition towards the war and the possibility of establishing British naval bases in Irish ports, with return trips in 1942 for similar purposes.
1941 January: publishes short story collection *Look at All Those Roses*.
1941 February: meets Charles Ritchie, a Canadian diplomat.
1941 writes weekly reviews for *The Tatler* until 1950, then resumes from 1954 to 1958.
1942 June: publishes *Bowen's Court*, a history of her family and their house in County Cork.
1942 October: publishes *Seven Winters*, a short autobiographical memoir.
1945 October: publishes *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, which appears in the USA in April 1946 as *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories*.
1946 reports on the Paris Peace Conference for the *Cork Examiner*.
1948 February: stages *Castle Anna*, a play co-written with John Perry, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.
1948 June: appointed CBE.
1948 October: travels to Hungary.
1949 February: meets C. V. Wedgwood.
1949 February: publishes *The Heat of the Day*, which becomes a Book Society Choice.
1949 June: awarded honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Trinity College Dublin.
1949 appointed to the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, which presents its report in 1953.
1950 meets Eudora Welty.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

1950 publishes *Collected Impressions*, a collection of critical essays, reviews, and broadcasts.
1951 gives up lease on 2 Clarence Terrace and moves permanently to Bowen's Court.
1952 26 August: death of Alan Cameron.
1956 awarded honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Oxford University.
1959 autumn: writer in residence at the American Academy in Rome.
1959 December: sells contents of Bowen's Court and sells the house itself to a neighbour, Cornelius O'Keefe, who demolishes it the following year.
1960 winter: teaches a class on the short story at Vassar College.
1960 February: publishes *A Time in Rome* with Knopf in the USA, and in July with Longmans in the UK.
1960 lives in Oxford, near Isaiah and Aline Berlin.
1961 November: elected president of the Old Headington Women's Institute.
1962 publishes *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing*, her second critical compilation.
1964 January: publishes *The Little Girls* in the USA, and in February in the UK.
1964 sells literary papers to the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
1965 publishes an illustrated children's book, *The Good Tiger*.
1965 purchases a house in Hythe.
1968 October: publishes novel *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes* in the USA.
1969 January: publishes *Eva Trout* in the UK; wins the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and is shortlisted for the Booker Prize.
1970 teaches a creative writing course at Princeton University.
1972 serves on the Booker Prize committee alongside Cyril Connolly and George Steiner; the committee awards the prize to John Berger's *G*.
1973 22 February: dies of lung cancer in University College Hospital, London, with Charles Ritchie at her bedside during her last days.
1973 buried in St Colman's churchyard, Farahy, County Cork.
1975 January: posthumous publication of *Pictures and Conversations*, edited with a foreword by Spencer Curtis Brown.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

Abbreviations

As far as possible, references to Bowen's works have been standardised across this volume. For the most part, Anchor editions have been adopted because they are widely available, at least in North America. Some of Bowen's books have never been reprinted; in those cases, original publications are cited.

A	*Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (Longmans, Green, 1962)
B	*The Bazaar and Other Stories*, edited by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh University Press, 2008)
BC	*Bowen's Court* and *Seven Winters* (Vintage, 1999)
CI	*Collected Impressions* (Longmans Green, 1950)
CS	*Collected Stories* (Anchor, 2006)
DH	*The Death of the Heart* (Anchor, 2000)
EN	*English Novelists* (Collins, 1942)
ET	*Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes* (Anchor, 2003)
FR	*Friends and Relations* (Anchor, 2020)
H	*The Hotel*, foreword by Maud Ellmann (University of Chicago Press, 2012)
HD	*The Heat of the Day* (Anchor, 2002)
HP	*The House in Paris*, introduction by A. S. Byatt (Anchor, 2002)
LG	*The Little Girls* (Anchor, 2004)
LI	*Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews*, edited by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh University Press, 2010)
LS	*The Last September* (Anchor, 2000)
MT	*The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, edited by Hermione Lee (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986)
PC	*Pictures and Conversations*, with a foreword by Spencer Curtis Brown (Knopf, 1975)
PPT	*People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, edited by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-53600-4 — Elizabeth Bowen in Context
Edited by Allan Hepburn
Frontmatter
More Information

TR	*A Time in Rome* (Knopf, 1960)
TTN	*To the North* (Anchor, 2006)
WL	*A World of Love* (Anchor, 2003)
WWF	*The Weight of a World of Feeling*, edited with an introduction by Allan Hepburn (Northwestern University Press, 2017)

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org