

## Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction

*The Elizabeth Bowen Review* is a new scholarly journal devoted to the work of one of the twentieth century's greatest writers. In this first issue, and the issues that follow every spring, you will find essays on a range of fiction, stories and other writings by Bowen, using ever new perspectives and discovering previously unconsidered themes and allusions. Bowen is an exciting writer in the twenty-first century, just as much as she was in her lifetime. *The Elizabeth Bowen Review* aims to transmit our enthusiasm to readers and scholars across the world. Our aim is to produce an inclusive journal which welcomes submissions from all those interested in Bowen scholarship, from doctoral students to established scholars.

The journal is a product of the editors' combined enthusiasm for the work of Bowen, which began at an international conference in Warsaw in June 2016 organised by the Interdisciplinary Research Foundation. Our enthusiasm then led to a second international conference at the University of Bedfordshire, and the parallel creation of the Elizabeth Bowen Society, which was officially launched at the conference. The aim of both of these ventures – a second conference is being planned – is to unite enthusiasts for Bowen's diverse work, to keep the writer 'alive'. The journal is thus part of a wider project: not just to enhance scholarship, but also to unite scholars and readers. We have been delighted to be assured that Elizabeth Bowen is being researched and read across the world. We are also delighted by the support which has been given freely by both the editorial board and the advisory board, without whom this journal would not have been possible.

Bowen's literary reputation has not, however, always been secure. In the introduction to her biography, Hermione Lee notes how there was initially a lack of interest in her project; fallow years followed Bowen's death until the mid-1990s. This can be explained in a number of ways: Bowen's apparent antipathy to feminism, which would have made her work unattractive from the 1960s onwards to some; her focus on love, allowing the novels to be seen as 'women's fiction' or even middlebrow; the enormous readerly and scholarly interest in Virginia Woolf, which may have worked against Bowen; and, even though these qualities may be found in Woolf too, Bowen's apparent snobbishness, and her self-conscious and difficult prose that may alienate readers.

Happily, people now see past these issues: the publication of Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's magisterial *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* in 1995 reinvigorated Bowen criticism. Since then interest has been sustained: an *Elizabeth Bowen Newsletter* that was published in the 1990s; a conference at the University of Sussex in 2009; and an exciting body of criticism and postgraduate dissertations focusing on themes such as trauma, displacement, memory and identity, and reading Bowen in the context of Ireland and War, and modernist studies. Students and scholars continue to discover the depths and timeliness of Bowen.

The essays in this issue are a testament to this timeliness, and to why we should continue reading and considering Bowen's work. Lorna Wilkinson's investigation into the use of the fairy tale as a narrative foundation in Bowen's art reminds us of

both of the importance of the child's point of view in Bowen's work, and of its connection with a wider cultural heritage. The second essay by Ian d'Alton places Bowen's fiction within the context of Ireland, the Anglo-Irish and the Big House, seeing her as literary interpreter of a very personal history alongside other important Anglo-Irish writers. Heather Ingman makes important links between the work of Bowen and Katherine Mansfield, adding to current scholarship on female modernists and their shared themes, reminding us that, distinctive as Bowen is, she was working with a field of experimental women's writing that has often been overlooked. Imola Nagy-Seres' essay on the phenomenology of the body in Bowen's work reminds us of the sheer intelligence at work in the fiction and its complexity, as well as taking Bowen scholarship in a new direction. The penultimate essay, by Charlotte Hallohan, places the short stories in the context of the Second World War and feminism – always a contentious issue with Bowen scholarship – and argues for the importance of the *flâneuse* in this context. Finally, Diana Hirst locates *To the North* within the context of Futurism and the modernist art technique of collage, providing a reading which argues that Bowen was influenced by techniques more usually found in an artist's studio. This volume concludes with an afterword by Paul Binding which provides a fascinating personal insight into his encounters with Elizabeth Bowen and his own engagement with her novels and short stories.

Above all, the work of the scholars in this publication attests to a passion for Bowen's writing: its lyricism and exciting strangeness; its wit and social comedy; its impressionistic view of a fractured world; its elegance and sense of place. In her novels, short stories and travel writing, Elizabeth Bowen demonstrated an originality and mysteriousness that have transcended place and time, with the result that, nearly a century later, fascinating questions remain to be solved.

We hope that this volume will be the first of many, that the issues explored in these essays will add to the body of knowledge about Elizabeth Bowen, her life and her work, and that they stimulate further research and potential contributions to the second volume of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

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