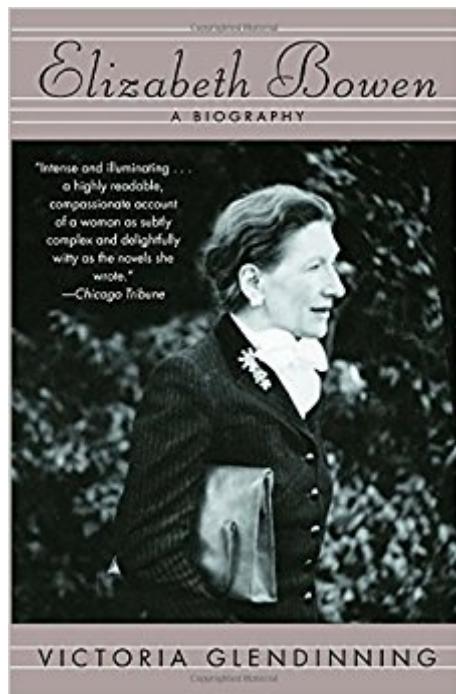


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# Elizabeth Bowen: A Biography



## Synopsis

In this richly detailed biography, Victoria Glendinning brings alive the great Anglo-Irish novelist whose literary achievements were equaled only by her unbounded gift for living. Taking us from Elizabeth Bowen's ancestral home in Ireland, Bowen's Court, to Oxford where she met Yeats and Eliot, to her service as an air-raid warden in London during World War II, this penetrating biography lifts the thin veil between Bowen's imaginative world and the complex emotional life that fired her shimmering novels. We see her at elegant parties, where such friends as Virginia Woolf, Eudora Welty, and Evelyn Waugh fell under her spell; in post-war Vienna with Graham Greene; and in war-torn London, where she fell in love with a younger man who was unprepared for life at the pitch she lived it. We see her bound through several affairs to a comfortable marriage, living "life with the lid on." The world of Elizabeth Bowen was akin to that of her novels: no one behaved shockingly, yet the passions that stirred within made her a master of the ultimate suspense of human relationships— "the life of the heart.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Anchor (December 5, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307277402

ISBN-13: 978-0307277404

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #576,159 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #148 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Irish #3366 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors #6646 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women

## Customer Reviews

"Intense and illuminating...a highly readable, compassionate account of a woman as subtly complex and delightfully witty as the novels she wrote." — "Chicago Tribune" As a complex and compelling personality, Miss Bowen comes very much to life on these pages...entirely absorbing." — "The New York Times

Victoria Glendinning was born in the north of England and read French and Spanish at Oxford. Her

first book was *A Suppressed Cry*, a family memoir about her Quaker great-aunt. She has written biographies of Edith Sitwell (which won the James Tait Black Award and the Duff Cooper Prize), Vita Sackville-West (Whitbread Prize for Biography), Rebecca West, Anthony Trollope (Whitbread Prize for Biography), Jonathan Swift, and Leonard Woolf. She co-edited *Mothers and Sons* with her son Matthew Glendinning, and has published three novels, *The Grown-Ups*, *Electricity*, and *Flight*. She reviews books for national newspapers and journals, has been a judge of the W. H. Smith Prize and other literary awards, and chair of the judges of the Booker Prize. From 2000-03 she was president of English PEN. She is an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, and was awarded a CBE in 1998.

Ms Bowen is one of my all time favorite writers and this book was certainly up to her treasured excellence.

I bought this book for my brother and he is absolutely delighted with it. A great and interesting read. He thoroughly recommends.

I have to declare an interest here, I knew Victoria Glendinning quite well at one time. One of the striking features of this biography is the way in which Victoria's own life in Ireland makes her sympathetic to the politics when Elizabeth lived there and which she portrays so vividly, particularly in *The Last September*. Elizabeth shows her readers how various classes of people, particularly the Anglo-Irish saw their environment. Victoria used her extensive research to describe many aspects of Elizabeth's life and their effects on her writing, thus making her novels both more interesting and more approachable today, when life is very different.

Well written.

Great book to accompany her fiction.

Anchor recently has been reissuing almost all of Elizabeth Bowen's novels in gorgeous new editions, and they decided to complement these with this reissue of this excellent 1977 standard life of one of the greatest twentieth-century novelists by Victoria Glendinning, herself one of the best living British biographers. The work is a model of tasteful compression, covering Bowen's very eventful life in only three hundred pages. Glendinning is intelligent in her discussion of Bowen's

novels and short fiction, and is exceptionally clear in outlining the major events of Bowen's life: her father's madness in her childhood; her mother's early death from cancer; her remaining awkward adolescence raised by "a committee of aunts"; her beginning literary career in London; her marriage to the bureaucrat Alan Cameron; her inheritance of her father's great ancestral manor house Bowen's Court in County Cork; her affairs; her spying on her native Ireland for Great Britain during World War II; the death of Cameron; her need to sell Bowen's Court in 1959 only to see it immediately torn down by the new owner; and her subsequent itinerant life as one of the last great modernist novelists. It's a very lovely book--Glendinning seems extraordinarily sympathetic to Bowen's humor, elegance, and her grande dame manner.

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