

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

A Biographical Account

Elizabeth Bowen was born in 1899, the only child of Anglo-Irish parents. Her father, Henry Cole Bowen and her mother Florence lived at Bowen's Court, the old ancestral home, which was already in a state of decline. Henry Bowen was a lawyer in Dublin. The Bowen line is traced back to the Welsh apowen who came to Ireland with the English Conquests in the Seventeenth Century. Bowen's court was built in 1765 and was viewed by the family as a mark of their permanent status in Ireland. It had an isolated location in the South-eastern countryside of County Cork.

Elizabeth's mother was a vague and remote person, her father absent minded and distracted by work pressures. Yet it was her mother who was devoted to her, and remained so throughout her life. When Elizabeth was seven, her father suffered a mental breakdown, "anaemia of the brain", and became almost violent. Doctors advised Florence to leave Ireland with her daughter, so they left for the English coast - a move traumatic for Elizabeth, separating her from her father and her birthplace, thus robbing her of a sense of permanence and security. The vague, remote mother, despite good intentions, could never give her this security. Yet they were, in a sense, close and inter-dependant due to circumstances. As a child, Elizabeth thus suffered a tremendous sense of personal isolation. As Victoria

Glendinning remarks in this context:

What did happen was that she to some extent insulated herself from what was happening, and insulated herself too from her own emotions; she lived in the moment. Her 'Campaign of not noticing' was pretty successful. Because of the affectionate vagueness of the household, she had been thrown a good deal upon herself.<sup>1</sup>

Tragically, Florence died of cancer when Elizabeth was thirteen and this intensified her emotional insecurity. Her stammer, which continued through her life, became pronounced after her mother's death - and her cousin Audrey Fiennes reported that Elizabeth could never pronounce the word 'Mother' without stammering.

Thankfully her father recovered and Elizabeth once again became close to him. Her education, however, was taken care of by her Colley Aunts. She achieved academic excellence at Harpenden Hall and later went to Downe House, a girl's boarding school in Kent.

On graduating she returned to Bowen's Court, where her father and his second wife, Mary Gwynne now lived. During these years she absorbed the socio-political climate of Anglo-Ireland. Later, she went off to London to study art.

She wrote her First Stories at the age of twenty-- a mixture of Comedy of Manners, the uncanny and acutely

portrayed emotional instances. From these stories emerged themes which were to recur in later works and thus set the tone of her writing career. For example, the child who suffers anxiety at an absent and then absent-minded mother is given full play in 'Coming Home' while in 'Mrs. Winderemere' the relationship between older and younger women is a theme explored in later works also.

In 1923 she married Alan Cameron of the BBC, an Assistant Secretary of Education, a talented administrator. He was devoted to Elizabeth and provided her with a much needed emotional anchor. They had fun together, loved driving in the countryside for long stretches, but had no children. Although they provided each other with deep concern and love, it appears to have been without sexual intensity.

In the first two years of their marriage, Elizabeth wrote another collection of short stories- ANN LEE's and her first novel, THE HOTEL.

The Camerons moved to Old Headington, near Oxford, when Alan became Secretary for Education for the city of Oxford. For 10 years they lived in a stone-converted Coach-House, Waldencote. It was here that Elizabeth formed personal and professional relationships that were to last a lifetime. Their circle included John and Susan Buchan, Virginia Woolf, Rosamund Lehmann, David Cecil, Maurice Bowra and Humphrey House (with whom she felt in love in her

thirties), Iris Murdoch and Cyril Connolly. Elizabeth was a social success - her tough mindedness, vitality, individual morality and her no-nonsense attitude was communicated in a style that people were greatly attracted to and to which they responded with affection and respect. She was not pretty in a conventional way, but had a great sense of personal style. Her looks were a part of her attractiveness. She was tall and large-boned and when photographed always presented her profile. She portrayed a 'chiffon and pearl' image in the Bloomsbury Circle. It was her husband who gave her confidence to grow into a woman fearless of emotional risk.

The year after Elizabeth published 'The Last September' and 'Joining Charles' her father became ill, and died in 1930. He was buried in the Farahy Churchyard - a part of the original demense of Bowen's Court. Thus, Bowen's Court became Elizabeth's and she had to decide how to manage it. It was not so elaborate as other Anglo-Irish estates. It did not have many rooms; its plumbing dated from Robert Cole Bowen's time. However, its attractiveness stemmed from an austerly balanced architecture set against beautiful terrain.

Elizabeth enhanced the old world charm of the house by her warm hospitability. She entertained constantly when she was there. The practical side of the management was left to the ever-faithful Alan.

In her thirties Elizabeth fell in love with Humphrey House, a Fellow and lecturer in English Literature at Wadham College, Oxford. Despite his engagement to another and Elizabeth's marriage, they indulged in an affair of almost overpowering sexual intensity. Yet what was remarkable was that she managed to indulge her passions and keep her marriage intact - Alan never found out about this affair. Despite several short-lived affairs later, Elizabeth managed commitment and love for Alan. She was not a hypocrite, she genuinely cared for Alan in an almost platonic manner.

In 1935, the Camerons' moved to Regent Park, London. With Elizabeth's growing social and literary importance, Alan seemed to recede, mainly due to eye trouble ever since he was gassed in World War I. He, however, continued to enjoy a challenging career at the BBC.

During the war, Elizabeth was an A.R.P. Warden and served in the Ministry of Information. This also involved travelling to Ireland and making reports about Irish attitudes towards England's part in the war. The war brought destruction but was both frightening and exhilarating. Elizabeth later said "I would not have missed being in London throughout the war for anything; it was the most interesting period of my life".

During this time she met Charles Ritchie, a Canadian diplomat who also became both her lover and friend. In her

novel The Heat of the Day, which is dedicated to him, there appear aspects of his character in the portrayal of Robert Kelway. Charles and Elizabeth were later separated by careers and their respective marriages, but not before finding in each other the possibility for fulfilling the passions of grown-ups without the dependencies of childhood feelings.

During the war Elizabeth's Town house was bombed several times and she and Alan barely escaped being killed. After the war came to a victorious end, the excitement of the war years gave way to disillusionment about a changing political and social style.

As Alan's health deteriorated the couple spent more time at Bowen's Court. Elizabeth continued her career, making sure at the same time that Alan was cared for. She often gave radio broadcasts and started lecturing abroad. She was awarded an Honorary D. Litt from Trinity College, Dublin in 1949.

On 26th August 1952 Alan Cameron died and a bereft Elizabeth wrote in a letter to May Sarton: "But he's not gone. I feel him so constantly close to me in this house. The chief thing is not being able to talk. And oh, without him I feel so cold. I think no presence than his can have been warmer".<sup>3</sup>

Following Alan's death, she rarely stayed in one place. She travelled on lecture tours to the U.S. and

Europe, accepting fellowships at American Colleges and also meeting Charles Ritchie whenever possible.

In 1960, she suddenly decided to sell Bowen's Court, as she realized the futility of retaining an expensive house whose upkeep expenses were not commensurate with her income. The new owner demolished the house - thus ending an emotional era for the previous owner who had breathed its air for decades.

In the evening of her life, Elizabeth Bowen found herself a small cottage on the English coast near the spot where she had once lived with her mother as a child. This plain, unpretentious residence was a far cry from the grandeur of her ancestral home. This house witnessed her painful final battle against cancer, that treacherous disease to which she succumbed in 1973. Thus a curtain fell on a careful and dedicated writer who left behind ten novels as her principal achievement, was an excellent short story writer, produced noteworthy non-fiction and without doubt gave us products from an aristocratic world. At their finest, her fiction achieves a fusion of physical and psychic impressions. Her persistent theme throughout her fiction is the power and unsettling nature of love. Her vivid apprehension of the visible world is what makes her writing so memorable. It is an abnormally acute apprehension and this is the quality one chiefly remembers about her work.

She was a regular prolific writer since her first book Encounters was published in 1923. As a short story writer, many critics have hailed her as a lineal descendant of Tchekov and Katherine Mansfield. The short story as a genre was perfectly suited to a particular facet of her talent.

II

Elizabeth Bowen Criticism : A Brief Review

A brief review of Elizabeth Bowen criticism from Jocelyn Brooks (1952) to Phyllis Lassner (1990) brings out the changing spectrum of major critical responses to her fiction. Jocelyn Brooks in her British Council Pamphlet published in 1952 has mainly concentrated on the nature and scope of the concept of sensibility in Elizabeth Bowen's fiction. Contesting the usual notion that sensibility is merely a kind of temperament belonging to the writer, at the cost of certain other qualities, Brooks has asserted that in the case of Elizabeth Bowen, sensibility is a kind of instrument generating a vivid apprehension of the visible world and evocations of places and people. Brooks also states that the pictorial quality so strongly present in Elizabeth Bowen -- in particular her intense feeling for light is reminiscent of French Impressionism. Placing Elizabeth Bowen in the tradition of Tchekov and Katherine Mansfield, Brooks observes that her stories are characterized by an 'acute delight' in the passing moment with an insightful observation of social nuances.

Frederick R. Karl in his A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel (1962) has commented on the moral universe of Bowen's fiction. In this respect, Karl compares her both with Jane Austen and Graham Greene. Like Jane Austen, he says, Elizabeth Bowen weighs her morality carefully but unlike her, Elizabeth Bowen's good people are not always rewarded nor are the bad ones always ridiculed. She is interested, like Graham Greene, in good and evil, but her vision in this context is essentially a woman's -- more immediately personal and 'close to the facts of daily reality'.

John Atkins in his Six Novelists Look at Society (1977) describes Elizabeth and says that this typical Bowen focus on the individual can be historically traced to a social situation in which the class divisions became increasingly rigid, leading to loss of sympathy and understanding. Elizabeth Bowen thus concentrates on the individual in a bourgeois culture where wealth and style go together.

Hermoine Lee's book Elizabeth Bowen : An Estimation (1981) published in 1986 can be described as a major advance on the earlier Elizabeth Bowen criticism. Drawing upon Elizabeth Bowen's autobiographical utterances, Lee talks about the aspects of 'terrain' and 'inner climate' as characteristic of Bowen's fiction. Tracing the ingredients of this terrain to an early literary influence like that of Rider Haggard, Lee points out how Elizabeth

Bowen's fiction deals with juveniles and innocents who have not found ways of compromising with adult society.

Phyllis Lassner in her Elizabeth Bowen published in 1990 convincingly shows how Elizabeth Bowen transformed an uneasy mix of two cultural identities, English and Irish, into a rich and fulfilling personal life. A significant aspect of Lassner's criticism is the emphasis she lays on 'a new woman's energy' as seen in Elizabeth Bowen's fiction. She shows how Elizabeth Bowen has portrayed women who are trapped in maternal and sexual roles they may have chosen, but in which self-fulfilment and self-expression are always compromised by social expectations. Bowen's woman characters, says Lassner, assert that a woman is more than her sexual attractiveness and her potential for motherhood. Each woman in Bowen's work represents a powerful energy frustrated by domestic expectations. In this sense, remarks Lassener:

Bowen's tie with other British women writers enables us to re-evaluate her originality. Her experiments with language now have a thematic purpose and her treatment of women and children have a critical place in literary history. The surfaces and attitudes of her work are conservative only in the sense that she presents a world bound to tradition. But all her work serves as well to question and revise the ideological and social assumptions of all traditions.

## III

The Short Story as a Genre

Everyone is born with an instinctive desire to be entertained by fiction. Almost the first sentence a child utters when he is of school going age is "Tell me a story!" Fiction reading gives satisfaction and pleasurable emotions. Enjoyment is the purpose of all art.

Most of the world's best stories not only entertain the reader but also enable him to realize what it means to be a human being. Myths and legends, heroic tribal tales, folk and fairy tales have all existed since early times and many have been written down. (There was of course, the oral tradition of handing down stories from one generation to another). Aesop's Fables and Animal stories about Reynard the Fox are also of ancient origin.

Certain early pieces of Literature resemble the short story. The Hindu Panchatantra before A.D. 500, included fables and prose fiction. Some of the accounts in the Old Testament, such as The Book of Ruth, the adventures of Jonah and the combat between David and Goliath, have provided plots for later writers. The parables of the New Testament are stories offering a lesson. Greek Literature includes short fiction, parts of the epics of Homer, such as the adventures of Odysseus and his friends with Cyclops, may be considered forerunners of the later form. All these, however, can be considered to resemble the modern short story by accidental invention.

In Japan, around the year 1,000, Lady Shikibu Murasaki, strung together a long series of episodes collected as The Tale of Genji.

In the Middle Ages in Europe, the Gesta Romanorum (1250) provided many plots. Giovanni Boccaccio's The Decameron (1353) containing a hundred tales, is still popular. The Arabian Nights around 1450 included the stories of Ali Baba, Sindbad the Sailor and many others remembered today. One of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, story of Melibeus, was written in prose before 1400.

In Cervantes novel, Don Quixote (1605) some stories were just stories with little to do with the main plot. Fielding's Tom Jones (1749) is filled with separate stories. The popular essay also contributed to the development of fiction, eg. Joseph Addison's essays in the Spectator (1711).

The romantic tale in the early 19th century in Europe is closest to the modern short story, which evolved from it. American author Edgar Allan Poe slowly developed a new form which might be defined as the modern short story.

The modern short story differs from longer forms of fiction such as the novel, not merely in length. Its particular quality is Unity of impression. Clayton Hamilton has said that the short story aims to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis. Grove defines it as a

piece of prose fiction which can be read at a single sitting, it presents an artistic and unified impression of life through many devices, especially theme, characters, action involving conflict and crisis setting and style.

Poe recognized that brevity of this form demands a single striking effect : the short story differs from longer fiction not only in length but in purpose. The short story has to have a sharp impact.

One of the greatest American short story writers before the civil war was Herman Melville, also a great novelist.

The story also evolved in Russia, France and Scandinavia, where authors began writing realistic stories marked by a feeling for unified effects. At about the same time that Hawthorne began writing, Alexander Pushkin in Russia published "The Pistol Shot". He and his contemporary Nikolai Gogol showed the way to later Russian masters such as Ivan Turgenev, Fodor Dostoeivsky, Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov. Chekhov began a continuing school of writers interested more in character depiction than in contrived 'plot'. Three Frenchmen, Prosper Merimee, Honore de Balzac and Theophile Gautier by 1830 had demonstrated that the anecdotal conte could be adopted to their needs to reveal contemporary life. They were followed by other French short story writers like Gustave Flaubert, Alphonse Daudet, Anatole France and Guy de Maupassant. Maupassant's famous

"The Necklace" originated a school of imitators who depended on an ironic, ending best exemplified by the American writer, O. Henry. There is a definite limit, however, to the possible dramatic twists of events, whereas varieties of personality in the human race are unlimited.

The most important group of writers were those who concentrated upon the psychology motivating the actions of their characters. Henry James was the foremost among those. He began publishing stories in 1865. His best work depicted the international scene through the eyes of travelling Americans. He insisted less upon stirring action than upon unravelling complex human relationships. His technical comments and his insistence that literature was worthy of serious, artistic devotion, influenced a growing number of authors.

The American and continental experiments were slow to affect the age - old tradition of English writing. Not till the beginning of our present century, with writers like Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence and W. Somerset Maugham were the English aroused to the realization that a new generation demanded 'new modes' of expressing age old emotions.

A firm definition of the short story is impossible. No single theory can encompass the multifarious nature of a genre in which the only constant feature seems to be the achievement of a narrative purpose in a compari-

tively brief space. The brevity of a short story is something recognized by relative, not absolute means. No sooner is a definition of a short story formulated than exceptions begin to multiply insisting on their value as literature and upsetting the tidiness of a homogenizing approach.

Valeric Shaw says that instead of asking what a short story ought to be, the relevant question is what does a short story do particularly well because IT IS SHORT? Emphasis must be given to those qualities which are best displayed in short narrative and which become increasingly difficult to sustain as the LENGTH INCREASES.

The short story's technique is inclined to be oblique. So it is only possible to describe it by indicating what it is not, and remaining flexible to what it is. A rudimentary working definition of a short story could be a stretch of fictional prose which is shaped and controlled so as to leave no margin of error in the way it creates a pleasing, unified impression on the reader's imagination.

The shorter the piece, the truer Katherine Mansfield's remark about the short story. She said that if a thing really come off -- there should not be one single word out of place, or one word that could be taken out. Mansfield's stricture applies to the ideal story than most actually written.

Good stories usually establish their own terms of

comprehension and appreciation.

Unlike the novel, the short story cannot accommodate a fully developed fictional world but must focus on one or two incidents to be effective. It is an inherently dramatic form lending itself to vivid scenes and it cannot comfortably bear digression and inflated language. For many years prose writers experimenting with short fiction had no real appreciation of the form's potential.

Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most important shapers of the short story, was the first to discover and implement the idea of unity of effect in short prose narrative.

Poe asserted that a successful short story ought to be short enough to read at one sitting. It must have the immense force of totality. He said that the short story writer ought to accommodate his incidents to a preconceived, desired effect, that everything in the story ought to contribute to establishing this effect. The readers should finish the story with a single, vivid impression which is not attributable to plot, theme or any other single element but rather to the harmonious blending of all elements. "Whatever interferes with this unity", said Poe, "must be rigorously excluded".

Realism became the dominant literary movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century and provided a ready and fertile ground for the rise of short fiction.

The stories of Maupassant are objective, detached

renderings of farmers, clerks, priests, prostitutes and soldiers living ordinary lives. He was a master of selecting just the right details and of never violating the economy of a narrative. His early stories move swiftly on clear, smooth plots, his late stories are austere and remarkably short.

It is to be noted that the story found a convenient vehicle in the newspapers and periodicals that had proliferated throughout Europe and America in the nineteenth century. Designed to satisfy the verbal appetite of the rising middle class, these publications played a vital role in promoting and sustaining the modern short story. In the case of British writers, they were reluctant to turn from their long, three volume novels to wrestle with the more formally demanding short works. These British writers did not at first understand that the language of short fiction differs markedly from that in the novel.

The first British writer to restrict the action and scope of his narratives was R.L. Stevenson, whose stories began to appear around 1880. However, the British short story did not blossom until the 1890s, with the works of Kipling, Wells and Conrad.

How long is short? This is a question often asked regarding the short story and it is difficult to answer precisely. The lower limit of length in theory comes down to a mere sentence. The upper limit is less clear. A via-media would be to accept as short stories whatever an author

wishes to nominate as such. Somerset Maugham notes, in the preface to his Complete Short Stories that the smallest item there comes to about 1600 words in all, the longest about 20,000 words.

### The Modern Period

A radical change took place in Western civilization toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. An irreparable break occurred between traditional values of the past and those of today.

This break was the beginning of the modern era. Science and industrialization the salient features of modernism, have been a boon and a bane to man. The material well being and the spiritual malaise that characterize the modern period are attributable to those two phenomena. Freud's theories of psychoanalysis explained the hitherto unknown principles of man's inner life. Therefore if the fiction of the modern period tends to be disturbing in theme and difficult in technique, it should not be surprising. Art reflects its own time. The twentieth century writer has to deal with new, difficult and complex experiences. Irving Howe, one of the best critics has said "The kind of literature called modern is almost always difficult to comprehend: that is a sign of its modernity".<sup>5</sup> The modern writer works with unfamiliar forms, he chooses subjects that disturbs the audience and threatens its most cherished sentiments. Poets and prose writers of earlier periods enjoyed a harmonious relationship with their readers and

shared their values. Modern writers have generally felt estranged from the mass audience.

The short stories written in the modern period constitute a major achievement. The modern short story moved steadily away from the objectivity and realism of the nineteenth century towards a more metaphoric, symbolic presentation. Eg. In Katherine Mansfield's "The Dolls House", the external world of the Burnells is carefully presented, but the significance of the story emerges from the implied meanings of the Doll's House; its toys, the tiny lamps, and the children who play with the house.

The modern story tended to follow the lead of Chekhov in attenuating or eliminating plot. The modern masters of the short story are generally not concerned with the conclusion but rather with the middle of the narrative. James Joyce, whose fictional manner is the epitome of the blending of realism and symbolism, developed a broadly influential technique to deepen and unify narrative, which he called an epiphany.

Coming towards but not at the end of a story, the epiphany is a sudden illumination, a movement of intuitive understanding for the protagonist, which explains much that was problematic for the reader and ties the whole story together.

Twentieth century short fiction is overwhelmingly ironic in tone. Irony is the discrepancy between what one

expects or assumes and what really happens or is the case. It is particularly well suited to a period of anxiety and incredible atrocities.

'Unique', 'Single', 'Wrought' these words remain key terms in discussions of the short story. A highly self-conscious form, the short story can celebrate spontaneity and the instinctual, or dramatize a moment of revelation which brings a character to full consciousness for the first time in his life; it can use its intactness to say that life's possibilities are hedged and narrow, or to express a view of life as violent and torn by harsh conflict, deliberate and calculated in aim, it can have the apparent casualness of a snapshot.

Seen as a form which arouses a feeling of wonder at finding so much expressed within such narrow boundaries, the short story is an intrinsically witty genre which has affinities with a wide range of artistic strategies for compressing meaning.

Latitude in establishing a canon of short stories and eliciting the characteristics of its members is essential if the diversity of the genre is to be prized, as it deserves to be. Because it has not been given the exalted position of the novel or drama, the short story has lent itself to continuous experimentation.

However, one of the advantages of this lack of prestige attached to the genre is that the short story has

been free to cultivate diversity in an uninhibited way.

In a 1959 BBC Interview, Elizabeth Bowen declared that writing was "an extension of the play thing a child has -- that life isn't amusing enough, so you build it up with imagination of your own".

For Virginia Woolf, short stories offered the chance to experiment with techniques and ideas which might turn out to reveal new ways of writing novels.

Chekhov said that whenever he struck a snag in a 'long tale' he could always switch his attention to a short story.

The implication might seem to be that short stories are gloriously easy to write, a false idea which theorists sometimes try to correct by drawing comparisons between the Short Story and the Sonnet. The short story is the most difficult prose form to manipulate successfully.

D.H. Lawrence once said in a letter to Louie Burrous that the great thing to do in a short story was to select the salient details, a few striking details to make a sudden, swift impression.

As with all writing, there is no single type of difficulty and too much emphasis on technical expertise can provoke justifiable retorts like Arnold Bennett's, made on the occasion of the Poe Centenary in 1909. As for the greater difficulty of the short story, ask any novelist who

has succeeded equally well in both.

It can be seen, therefore, that the short story as an art form in its own right, is international, timelessly appealing, supremely flexible, and has a unique capacity to create its own brand of intimacy between the reader and the fictional world it depicts.

The present dissertation is a thematic attempt to provide a critical statement on the war stories of Elizabeth Bowen. One need hardly stress the fact that right from the days of The Mahabharata and The Illiad, war has always been a basic kind of collective experience which brings into a special critical focus all the institutional and inter-personal relationships in a given social structure. Writers all over the world -- in England, Europe, America, Japan and India -- have always reacted to the collective social trauma of war. Elizabeth Bowen with a fine collection of war stories to her credit, is no exception to this phenomenon.

#### IV

#### English Literature and the Two Wars

The outbreak of the first world war was a major historical event. Never before had the entire population of modern England been engaged in warfare. There was immediate terror. Conditions were now, frightening, disconcerting. War a stupid barbarism, brought many base things to the surface. This war hurt England more than she knew.

Quite naturally, literary life could not stand against such a storm of violence. Names known in the literary world remained alive and wrote - but what they wrote underwent a dramatic change. Subject matter changed. Methods of narration altered. The poet, dramatist, novelist or short story writer himself changed. Often they came into conflict with authority.

The way was being opened for that inter war world of fruitless intolerance which found literary expression in the highly theorized work of the intelligensia of all countries.

Julian Grenfell, Charles Sorley and Robert Nichols were among the earliest to tell in print what they felt and suffered. Thus came a new personal note in poetry - thus first sounded they cry of disillusion, of disenchantment - of beautiful dreams of life broken. Young men of heightened emotions enlisted and became soldier poets.

With the work of Wilfred Owen (killed in war) we reach strictly war poetry. There is no effect or noises of guns or other instruments of death. Instead of impressionism there is a peculiar hatred of war from which hysteria is entirely absent. He gives us the silent thoughts of men, the deadliness of trench warfare and the deep indignation of the soldier at civilian barbarism. Owen was killed within a week of Armistice and was given a Military cross for great bravery.

Siegfried Sassoon could not forget the war, its senseless slaughter, the loss of friends and the horror of carnage. When Sassoon resumed civilian life, he became a socialist. He could not forget the storms of war.

Hardy, Yeats and Walter de la Mare were writing at the end of the war. Yeats started in the English tradition but was an Irish poet from the outset. His Irishness was more than a matter of using Irish themes in an Irish atmosphere. He devoted to the Irish cause rare qualities of character and intelligence. Walter de la Mare was given a good deal to the contemplation of the human plight that desolated him.

Rupert Brooke was representative of Georgian poetry. It was T. S. Eliot's, "The love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) that constituted an important event in the history of English Poetry. This represented a complete break with nineteenth century tradition and made a new start.

"I grow old - I grow old.  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled"

illustrate the oddness of imagery and tone. We have here in Eliot's works, poetry that expresses freely a modern sensibility, the ways of feelings, the modes of experience of one fully alive in his own age. His technical achievement was tremendous. The poet is as close to the contemporary worlds as any novelist can be. The presence of the new anti hero image is complete in Prufrock - his self ironical, self distrustful attitudes. Complex, difficult and uncongenial

circumstances with flexibility and variety of tone are the hallmark of Eliot's works. His Wasteland is difficult to comprehend; it has neither narrative nor logical continuity. Its emotional intensities are seen in the mixing of memory and desire in present barrenness. The poem first appeared in The Criterion October 1922 and January 1923. The title is taken from Miss J.L. Weston's book From Ritual to Romance, the theme of which is anthropological.

What is the significance of The Modern Wasteland? Its rich disorganization and seeming disjointedness are characteristics that reflect the present state of civilization. Being 'high brow' it can be appreciated by a small minority; and references have to be taken from Frazer's The Golden Bough for its comprehension.

Ezra Pound was associated with Eliot. His poetry did not differ from Eliot's. However he was an aesthete. His concern was always art. He did not have Eliot's complex intensities regarding soul and body.

The poem 'Maunderley' was published in 1920. That too had the presence of war in it. Gerard Manley Hopkins was a major poet who died in 1889, but his works were published in 1918. He was a Catholic and entered the Jesuit Order. He was a man of rare character and intelligence and his friends included Robert Bridges and Canon Dixon.

It would be accurate to say that Eliot-Pound-Hopkins together represent a decisive reordering of the

tradition of English poetry caused indirectly at least by the war experience.

## V

The World War II was a different kind of collective experience. It did not have the kind of romantic patriotic fervour so characteristic of World War I. It did not therefore produce a Rupert Brooke or Wilfred Owen. On the contrary many novels arising out of the experiences of soldiers in the war of 1914-18 appeared in 1929 and 1930. Among these Frederic Manning's Her Privates We (1929) and Richard Aldington's Death of a Hero are notable fictional works. Women writers who were contemporaries of Elizabeth Bowen such as May Sinclair, Rose Macaulay, Virginia Woolf, though part of the socio-historical change caused by the war, did not deal directly with the war experience. In a novel like Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf does portray a shell-shocked soldier, Septimus Warren Smith. But this too is only an indirect reference and not an actual involvement. Elizabeth Bowen stands apart from these women writers as well as from quite a few men writers in that in her short stories she directly explores the social, interpersonal and emotional disruption caused by the war. Hence the relevance of the present study.

The present dissertation is an attempt to provide a comprehensive critical statement on the war stories of Elizabeth Bowen. In order to place the war stories in a proper perspective, Chapter II undertakes a critical survey

of Elizabeth Bowen's early stories. The approach adopted in the dissertation is basically a thematic one; but wherever necessary, aspects of language, form, image and symbol have been taken into account.

## NOTES

1. Glendinning, Victoria. Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer, 1977, p.23.
2. Lassner, Phyllis. Elizabeth Bowen. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990, pp.21-22.
3. Ibid., p.23.
4. Ibid., p.163.