

ELIZABETH BOWEN AND THE ANGLO-IRISH: DESCRIBING WOMEN IN *THE LAST SEPTEMBER**

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Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) frames, in an implicit way, the decay of the social group known as the Ascendancy. The purpose of this essay is to analyze the feminine protagonists of this novel, but it also aims at showing by what means these women are influenced by their belonging to the Anglo-Irish identity, which constitutes a fundamental element of the tensions and agitation of the narrative. First of all, I will discuss the importance and different definitions attributed to the Ascendancy. Then, I will show that the psychological and social properties usually assigned to this social group are directly interrelated to the development of the characters, but rather than identifying all these features with every woman in *The Last September*, it is worth formulating and connecting these different relationships on a more abstract and open level dismissing a simplistic Anglo-Irish approach to the novel itself.

Keywords: *Elizabeth Bowen, Anglo-Irish identity, The Last September, gender, class and race representation, women's image.*

La obra *The Last September* escrita en 1929 por Elizabeth Bowen plantea de una manera implícita la decadencia del grupo social conocido como la *Ascendancy*. El propósito de este artículo es el de analizar a las protagonistas femeninas de esta novela e igualmente se pretende mostrar la manera en la que estas mujeres están influenciadas por su identidad Anglo-irlandesa, la cual constituye un elemento fundamental de las

tensiones propias de la narrativa. En primer lugar, me dispongo a tratar la importancia y las diferentes definiciones que se han atribuido al término *Ascendancy*, para después mostrar las características propias de este grupo social que se podrían aplicar directamente al desarrollo de los personajes de la novela; sin embargo, en lugar de identificar una serie de rasgos específicos con cada mujer de *The Last September*, es interesante formular y conectar estas relaciones en un plano más abstracto y abierto que rechace una simple actitud Anglo-irlandesa en torno a la novela en sí.

Palabras clave: *Elizabeth Bowen, identidad anglo-irlandesa, The Last September, representación del género, clase y raza, imagen de la mujer.*

Probably no other writer has described the decay of the Ascendancy better than Elizabeth Bowen. In the early 1920s, the manifest conflict of the Independence of Ireland was a sign of the beginning of the end of the Anglo-Irish; “a dispossessed former landowning elite, eminent culturally, marginalised politically” (McCormack 1993: 200). Bowen, Anglo-Irish by culture but Welsh and Celtic by ancestry, portrayed in *The Last September* (1929), of all her books that which was nearest her heart (Bowen 1986: 123), some of her own life experiences.

It is my intention in this essay to focus on the main female characters of *The Last September* as a way of showing how they are determined by their Ascendancy identity. The author, affected by social, political and cultural changes occurring in Ireland, illustrates the decline of the beleaguered class she belongs to. Moreover, the interaction of the Anglo-Irish temperament in the feminine characters of the story triggers an atmosphere of decay and paralysis that will influence the entire content of the novel. Although I shall not dwell here on either a discussion of Anglo-Irish history or an inquiry of the various ways in which the Anglo-Irish intermingle with British or Irish gentry, I wish to stress in the first place that critics have frequently shown an inconsistent use of concepts such as race, class, nationality

or culture when commenting on the nature of the Ascendancy, also referred to, without distinction, as the Anglo-Irish group¹. However, it is important to define the Anglo-Irish as a starting point in analyzing its connection with the females inhabiting or visiting Danielstown, the Big House in the novel.

In its breaking away from common assumptions, Anglo-Irish literature gathers those Irish authors writing in English and those who belong to the Ascendancy itself. Elizabeth Bowen, who lived between England and Ireland, mentioned in *Bowen's Court* her pride in her Irish origin: "my sense of nationality showed itself - as too often with Irish people in England - in a tendency to show off" (Bowen 1942: 311). But the hybrid Anglo-Irish community, commonly identified as a class, was also defined as a race in Bowen's writings². As H.B. Jordan acknowledges, "the shared experience of her ancestors justified the designation of a race distinct from both the Irish and the English" (1992: xii). Nevertheless, as Terence de Verne White firmly states, it is too broad a view of the Anglo-Irish as a race since for him "they were a class" (1972: 265); however, I will argue that the Anglo-Irish or Ascendancy is more than a class, and its importance goes beyond that classification. Class is a complex word to define; it can elucidate a social or economic division and has fixed categories or formations, as Karl Marx denominated them, as: the upper, middle, lower and working classes being the common ranks (Williams 1990: 60-69). According with this classification, the Anglo-Irish belonged mostly to the upper-middle class, like the characters in *The Last September*. John Atkins's study grades class as an aggregate of people possessing the same status; but this is a static definition, as the category of class is becoming obsolete and those rigid divisions of high, middle and working are no longer of any value. He identifies the Ascendancy as Bowen's heritage or nationality and therefore as a separate definition of class as previously presented (Atkins 1977: 17-18).

Elizabeth Bowen, who grew up in a divided country, was nearer this cosmopolitan group rather than that of the Irish revival which promoted Gaelic language and their ancient traditions³. Moreover, her singular use of English as well as her style and fluency could be seen as a feature distinguishing her group. At the time of their arrival in Ireland, a new Protestant English aristocracy became a

“virtual colony of Great Britain” (Fallis 1977: 21), where the control of landowner Ascendancy was almost feudal. In fact, it is worth mentioning that many authors such as Shannon Wells-Lassagne have considered Elizabeth Bowen as a postcolonial writer for this reason: “*The Last September* is not just analysing the ramifications of the Anglo-Irish War and the end of English rule, but that here Ireland is an example of colonisation and its effect on dominated and dominating groups” (2007: 451). Nevertheless they as a class were doomed; in the 1920s, the country-less Anglo-Irish were living in the past, like ‘spectres’, as though their big houses had been built as proof of their intention of remaining forever in that territory. The Anglo-Irish became “redundant within Ireland: their absurdity, their isolation, their lack of an active position, their helplessly conflicting loyalties. Grandeur has become snobbery” (Lee 1981: 18). Years later, in 1926, Bowen narrated their self-destruction in the short story “The Back-Drawing Room”.

The Ascendancy, more than a conventional class, could be recognized as a state of the mind suffering from fragmentation and a sense of not-belonging in its final years of existence, when this novel unfolds. Such a sense of disassociation, which provides the author as well as her different female protagonists with a lack of settlement, promotes a feeling of being no longer integrated in any tradition; the Anglo-Irish constituted a group incapable of accepting its new status of isolation, disintegration and decline: “a hyphenated people, forever English in Ireland, forever Irish in England” (Kiberd 1995: 367) who were about to disappear. Bowen accredited that the landscape of her writing was unspecific: “Ireland and England, between them, contain my stories” (Bowen 1975: 35). In the narrative, characters turn round an inanimate protagonist, the Big House which is not considered a mere setting where the action occurs, but which helps to protect and construct identity through it. Visitors arrive, stay or leave Danielstown but we learn in the course of the fiction that the house has no future; in fact, the only permanent inhabitants are Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, whose legacy will soon be extinguished since they do not have a direct line of descent: “the Anglo-Irish have no future, no posterity” (Ellmann 2004: 60). Indeed, the issue of the destruction of the house traces the failure, even ruin of the Anglo-Irish and the loss of a culture but also, “the overt conflict within the narrative arises from the mutual

incomprehension between the Anglo-Irish and the visiting British military” (Walshe 2005: 143).

Seeing their house burnt by rebels, the Naylor’s “did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly” (Bowen 1998: 206)⁴ and remained silent, immobile in view of the demolition of their own lives and the Ascendancy itself: “the shabbiness of Danielstown also implies the obsolescence of this way of life. Nothing ever gets repaired” (Ellmann 2004: 58). Bowen regretted that isolation of the Anglo-Irish, who had no contact with anything outside the Big House. She describes these demesnes as lonely islands and “inside them the last representatives of a dying culture struggl[ing] to continue in isolation, seeking connection with England through the wireless, through ‘belligerent’ acts such as knitting for the Allied Forces or collecting for Spitfire Funds” (Wills 2007: 176). Individual lives are interrelated with the underlying political background, which enriches the novel’s contents; but not all the characters confront the unstable circumstances concerning them. Elizabeth Bowen, like Lois when Danielstown was burnt, “found herself away from the scene of the action when something decisive was happening” (Kiberd 1995: 364).

The Last September depicts Lois’ coming of age in County Cork, where her uncle Sir Richard Naylor and his wife Lady Myra, as wealthy members of the Ascendancy, live a shallow life of parties and dances together with their nephew, Laurence, and their friends and guests Hugo and Francie Montmorency and the young Marda Norton. All the characters of the novel attempt to carry on their lives in the aftermath of the war but they are obviously influenced by it; Lois, for example, is infatuated with Gerald, a British soldier, although aunt Myra disapproves this relationship. Meanwhile, Marda decides to confront every situation she encounters even if it is out of her control. At last, the Anglo-Irish gentry, rigid and lifeless, is brought to an end, as will be analyzed later.

When mentioning the common responses critics share in their representation of the Anglo-Irish, it is important to refer to the crisis of identity they endure. Lois Farquar, the nineteen-year-old orphaned girl of the novel fits in this prototype. To a certain extent, there is a

parallelism between Lois and Elizabeth Bowen, who also lost her mother when she was thirteen and was initially raised by different relatives, feeling the displacement and solitude embodied by the character. Although Bowen was influenced by the melancholy of her own childhood and adolescence, it is important to deal with these protagonists not only as projections of her experiences but as characters in themselves. Marda Norton, an intelligent and “very charming” (*Last September*, p. 103) visitor in Danielstown, has usually been identified with the young Elizabeth at Oxford while I find certain similarities between Lois’s aunt, Lady Naylor, and the author’s mother in the way they describe English people: “My mother found the English very kind but impertinent; she said she liked them best when they were a little sad. For my part, I like the bustling *newness* of England” (Bowen 1942: 310). By the same token, Bowen’s mother was insensitive to Gaelic Ireland. This generational tension is also observed in the novel in view of the fact that within this hyphenated culture the daughter’s image is “a double vision, as she finds herself simultaneously loyal and rebellious” (Frehner 1999: 11).

The explanation Bowen gives in her memoir for the passivity and insensitivity of the Anglo-Irish is essential to the understanding of her female protagonists. Their isolation seems innate. She compares them with only children (Lois or Laurence in *The Last September* have not got any siblings), since their existence is “singular, independent and secretive” (Bowen 1942: 14). Ascendancy families in Anglo-Irish literature frequently consisted of a few members, which included weak fathers and more influential mothers, who controlled every scene. Lois’s father, Walter, is hardly mentioned and he is referred to as a sad and poor man. On the other hand, Lois’s mother, who died “without giving anyone notice of her intention” (*Last September*, p. 19), is a central figure for the child. The guest Hugo Montmorency is pursued by her memory and obsessed by her disturbing figure, since “Laura has left her signature, quite literally, on the house” (Ellmann 2004: 59). Laura, Richard Naylor’s sister and Lois’ mother, is like a ghost in Danielstown whose death has not been assumed; an interesting character to analyze deeply, as her ambivalence is a reflection of Anglo-Irish unease. Thus, Lady Naylor personifies the traditions, security and opulence stereotyping her social group. The Naylor’s fight for their privileges because they are incapable of assuming their destiny; they

invite soldiers to Danielstown, but find the English insensitive to their problems and the people living there: “our side –which is no side– rather scared, rather isolated, not expressing anything except tenacity to something that isn’t there – that never was there. And deprived of heroism by this wet kind of smother of commiseration” (*Last September*, p. 82). An example such as Hugo’s provides evidence of the individuality and isolation of the group.

Loyalty to their country seems impossible since they lack a clear conviction of their national identity. For that reason, they seek out their own survival even if that means a “double stasis (England and Ireland) [which] is the characteristic emotional paralysis of [their] clan, caught between conflicting loyalties, not totally committed to either” (Cronin 1990: 121). Myra Naylor’s authority could be seen as fitting a male role; while her husband is less worried about Lois or the house and lacks empowerment, she is strong and determined. Undoubtedly, in each of these cases we can see two different positions confronting the same problem: while that unawareness of Laura’s, who “was never happy at all” (*Last September*, p. 19), makes her reject life, Lady Naylor’s innocence does not foreshadow the tragedy until the house is demolished and her family dispossessed. Although Elizabeth Bowen herself “is sharp about Anglo-Irish self-congratulation and self-delusion, she shares those firm ideas” (Lee 1981: 24); again, an ambivalent Bowen who creates a wide range of women who fit into diverse roles depending on every occasion.

In her study of her own family, Bowen also describes the complex relationships with their Irish neighbours. The Ascendancy does not obstruct the lives of the people around, but there is “a cynical tolerance, largely founded on classes letting each other alone” and there exists a “lively and simple spontaneous human affection between the landed families and the Irish” (Bowen 1942: 93), as is symbolized in the novel through the soldiers’ wives, who criticize the Irish gentry and do not have any contact with them, or by the Naylor’s neighbours themselves: Gerald, the English soldier in love with Lois, is proud of capturing a rebel who seems to be a friend of the Naylor’s; Sir Richard shows his restlessness and feels sorry about the boy’s mother; “we’ll send some grapes. The poor woman – it seems too bad - He went off, sighing” (*Last September*, p. 92). Victoria Glendinning, on the basis of

a careful analysis points out that the Anglo-Irish “are caught between loyalties” (1997: 67). The English are regularly rejected as being rude but the native Irish, many of them acquaintances of the Naylor, can also embody an “active threat to their existence” (Heath 1961: 38).

The narrative seems to be fragmented into pieces and the author acts as an observer of her own history but, at the same time, showing her belonging to the Anglo-Irish elite. She moved between the two countries, “the water simultaneously separating and joining England and Ireland” (Kenney 1975: 19); hence, anxieties related to identity and ambivalence are well acknowledged in Lois as well. Danielstown, in its isolation, makes the family a microcosm where authority is “vested in property” (Bowen 1942: 338). One would further begin to suspect that, on the one hand, the young girl as “niece always, never child” (Bowen 1986: 126) of the Big House is not concerned with the troubles of the Ascendancy and rebellions in the country. Bowen, on the other, was a daughter of Bowen’s Court, the character of the house being stamped on all of its inhabitants.

In reality, as has previously been observed, paralysis and conformism affects all the protagonists of the narrative, even the young and modern Marda is going to marry in order to save her future: “I need Leslie ... If you never need anyone as much you will be fortunate. I don’t know for myself what is worth while. I’m sick of all this trial and error” (*Last September*, p. 101), she said to Lois. The adolescent presents the most uncertain fate; stuck in her aunt’s generation, she is not in love with Gerald, as Lady Naylor knows, but wishes the romance to continue since her passiveness does not let her to consider other options. When they first kissed, it was “just an impact, with inside blackness. She was lonely, and saw there was no future. She shut her eyes and tried – as sometimes when she was seasick, locked in misery” (*Last September*, p. 88-89). As a result, these girls are “unwilling to imitate their mothers, but unable to imagine other destinies” (Ellmann 2004: 70).

Rather than showing Lois as a victim of aggravating social and economic circumstances if she does not find a husband, she has Lady Naylor’s help and advice, which encourages her to go to an arts school although she herself thinks that she cannot draw well. Aunt Myra

shows then that painting is an alternative to Gerald or any intention of marriage as well as a possibility for improving the girl's education, as we can see in the following passage:

“You have no conception of love,”
repeated Lady Naylor, and thought again
of electric light in Bedfordshire.
“But shall I never do anything?”
“Go to a school of art”
“Where?”
“It could be arranged”.
“But I don't think I really draw well”.
“There is no reason why you should
marry” (*Last September*, p. 168).

After this conversation with her niece, Myra fantasizes about her past, how she enjoyed reading and her interest in art: “When I was your age I never thought of marriage at all. I didn't intend to marry ... Girls nowadays do nothing but lend each other these biological books. I was intensely interested in art ... It all comes of dancing and all this excitement” (*Last September*, p. 167). Myra evidences her own frustration as she did not have the same opportunities she is now offering to Lois. But despite her hesitant disposition, I would like to stress that aunt Myra remained true in her integrity and consciousness of belonging to the Ascendancy, as well as her nostalgia for a vanishing civilization; “Lady Naylor's ambivalent attitude to the English, in general, should however be noted” (Bowen 1986: 126), highlights Bowen herself in one of her essays included in *The Mulberry Tree*.

This interpretation is emphasized by her judgment of British soldiers fighting in Ireland and their wives, who “can't think what Gerald sees in this family” (*Last September*, p. 195), as he, Gerald, strongly believed in the idea of Empire. Nonetheless, what Myra Naylor had noticed about them was the “disposition they had to be socially visible before midday” (*Last September*, p. 193). Their tendency to show off and their critique of Irish hospitality: “either they almost knock you down or they don't look at you” (*Last September*, p. 195), unnerves even Richard's serenity. Closely related to this, we find the symbol of the door, which “stood open hospitably upon a furnace” (*Last September*, p.

206)⁵ when Danielstown is burnt. This is shown as Anglo-Irish generosity towards guests. Bearing this in mind, the cultural panorama shared by the Ascendancy and Bowen's characters confirms "this sense of betrayal and guilt in [their] feeling of insecurity" (Kenney 1975: 28); their ambiguity divided their adherence to Britain in one way and their "temperamental Irishness" (Bowen 1986: 125) in the other.

We could acknowledge a clear separation between what the narrator says about Lois and how we actually see Lois herself acting and thinking: like her absent mother Laura, she "never knew what she wanted ... Nothing got close to her: she was very remote" (*Last September*, p. 19). It is impossible to penetrate Lois's mind; Hermione Lee describes her as someone "restless, dissatisfied with herself, impatient for her sheltered youth to be over and for something to happen. Self-conscious, unformed, easily embarrassed by the personal, susceptible, eager for illusions and drama" (1981: 45). This quotation is an extremely concise description of what Lois is and it explains the fascination with and fear of life experienced by the character herself, who is "twice as complex" (*Last September*, p. 29) as the older generation represented by her aunt and Francie Montmorency. Francie's physical and mental passivity is visibly connected to the permanent immobility affecting her class; Hugo's wife has a delicate health and suffers from long absences and "queer relapses into silence" (*Last September*, p. 19). Lois's obvious paralysis makes her stand "still in alarm" or "standstill" (*Last September*, p. 60, p. 168), while young Anglo-Irish men, Laurence among them, become uninterested in warfare although they have acquired a good social position in Ireland thanks to their belonging to the British Empire.

The author, who had explored the divisions of nationality and citizenship based on her own experience, imposes in Lois a feeling of dislocation; she cannot understand her belonging (or not-belonging) and she is indifferent to political problems, perhaps in search of an inner order in the prevailing social chaos. Yet, despite this premise, the teenager seems disenchanted and her idleness condemns her to conformity: "she couldn't look on her eyes, had no idea what she was, resented almost his attention being so constantly fixed on something she wasn't aware of" (*Last September*, p. 49), asserts Gerald. She even prefers the ante-room of the Big House, a sign of her uncertainty and

fear of the world; “fear behind reason, fear before her birth” (*Last September*, p. 33). For those reasons, I would not consider her to be a heroine as many critics, like John Cronin, Heather Ingman or Declan Kiberd have labelled her.

Lois, Laurence and Miss Norton symbolize the younger generation in Danielstown. Marda fascinates Lois, who observes with so much attention her social behaviour, clothes and words; nevertheless, she does not appear to be the best example to imitate as her engagement will introduce her into the patriarchal society she dissuades Lois from accessing. The immature girl definitely finds in Marda a confessor, an adult figure filling her mother’s absence; paradoxically, some critics have approached the novel suggesting a depiction of female homosexuality in the relationship established between the two women, but as highlighted in Marda glancing at Lois’s drawings; this “gave her the kind of surprised assurance one might expect from motherhood” (*Last September*, p. 98). In recent years, the representation of same-sex desire in Bowen’s texts has begun to be addressed. Renée Hoogland, for example, largely focused on the lesbian background of the novel, using Freud’s psychoanalysis and deconstruction to validate the “lesbian eroticism, operating in the narrative level between Lois and Marda, and on its extradiegetic level between the author and her created seductress(es)” (Hoogland 1994: 105). In the gender-divided Anglo-Irish community portrayed in *The Last September*, Marda and Aunt Myra give Lois support and advice, ‘how to live’ rather than the “sexual ambivalence stressed by some critics” (Ingman 2007: 36). According to Hoogland, Lois’s lesbianism is a phase in puberty which “naturalizes what is clearly a rather unstably ‘fixed’ standard” (Hoogland 1994: 85) while Neil Corcoran stresses Lois’s uncertain sexuality and her “tentative relationship with Marda” (Corcoran 2004: 40). The relationship between the adolescent Lois, who discovers her sexuality in the course of the novel, and Marda, in my opinion, does not have any justified hint of lesbianism, as Lois by emulating the adult woman, learns to control her anxieties and irresolution and searches for her own individuality and personality.

In one of their conversations Lois admitted: “I like to be related; to have to be what I am. Just to be is so intransitive, so lonely” (*Last September*, p. 98). Such innocent appreciations denote her effort

to justify her conduct and acceptance of Anglo-Irish norms. Subsequently, Marda predicts Lois's fossilized future and that of many women of her class including herself: "then you will like to be a wife and mother ... It's a good thing we can always be women" (*Last September*, p. 98), Lois hesitates and tries to rebel against society but she contradicts herself: "I hate women. But I can't think how to begin to be anything else ... But I would hate to be a man. So much fuss about doing things" (*Last September*, p. 99). This seems to prove a duality of her "perception and self-perception" (Innes 1995: 113). Bowen's Court grew oppressive for Bowen, as Danielstown did to Lois, giving her a sense of displacement and repression. Marda and Lois are unquestionably the two faces of the same Elizabeth Bowen; in fact both "are drawn from polarized aspects of her own personality, her self and her sub-self" (Glendinning 1997: 66).

Authors have constantly examined the mill episode, which symbolizes a crucial moment in Lois's crisis of identity related to her Anglo-Irish class; a connection again between the social violence of the historical moment and the personal transformation of the character. Hugo accompanies the two women for a walk in the countryside, although he has a special interest in Marda, "he loved her: a sense of himself rushed up" (*Last September*, p. 121); Lois witnesses his adulterous attempt to conquer Miss Norton which leads her to a new perception of life, sexuality and death. As expected, Marda's first influence on Lois is "to accelerate the girl's emancipation from romantic illusions, the past in general, and Hugo in particular" (Coates 1998: 37). Lois, who was infatuated by the guest at the beginning of the novel, soon realizes she needs to rid herself of that attraction as another step in her process of maturity; dumb Hugo, who was her mother's old lover, is also suffering from extreme emotional deprivation and has no possibility of a future: "what will become of him?" asks Lois, "nothing ... he couldn't be anything's father" (*Last September*, p. 128) sentences Marda. He represents death and sterility while Marda fights to live: "I hope I shall have some children; I should hate to be barren" (*Last September*, p. 128). As if the encounter with the rebel was an epiphany, Lois has a "revelation" (*Last September*, p. 128) and "awakens to her place in society but also to an awareness that she is unable straightforwardly to accept the identity prepared for her by her class and her sex" (Ingman 2007 :37).

It becomes increasingly obvious that places in the novel (Danielstown or County Cork) have an intrinsic value for Bowen; the ruins of the mill, compared to the cracks in Edgar A. Poe's House of Usher (*Last September*, p. 124), are one more representation of the Anglo-Irish, another "of our national grievances ... The high façade of decay. Incredible in its loneliness, roofless, floorless ... Fit to crash at a breath" (*Last September*, p. 123). As a descent into hell, Marda and Lois go inside the mill to find a rebel sleeping; when he is awoken, he takes his firearm and the women "embarrassed by this curious confrontation" (*Last September*, p. 124) feel as if they were in a nightmare. On the one hand, this passage highlights Lois's weakness; at this stage she thinks that marrying Gerald is the only option to have security and protection in those times of rebellion, while self-sufficient Marda, on the other hand, decides to confront the insurgent and is shot by accident; she is "a robust defender of civilization, she is prepared to act when her high values are threatened" (Austin 1989: 23) while Hugo stands immobile. The revolutionary then advises the two women that it would be better to "keep in the house while y'have it" (*Last September*, p. 125), which foreshadows the later events in Danielstown and even Gerald's death.

Although upper-middle class ladies, officers' wives among them, attempt to shield themselves from the conflict between England and Ireland and they act as if they were away from the Troubles, most of Anglo-Irish women (Marda or Aunt Myra) express "not only their anxiety but also their determination" (Grubgeld 2004: 55) to deal with the political confusion. Even when Gerald is killed by 'the enemy', there is a positive reading as Lois does not need to marry him: "she [Lois] did not take it as hard as I feared, girls of her generation seem less sensitive, really...I don't know; perhaps that is for all the best. And of course she has so many interests" (*Last September*, p. 205) says Aunt Myra.

The Anglo-Irish are fissured, disconnected from England and Ireland and split between two worlds, and this, irremediably has a direct effect on their identity. Once Ireland became independent in 1922, the Anglo-Irish visualized their demise. A vanishing time in which Marda's marriage, Lady Naylor's acceptance of her displacement and Lois's disappearance at that time of crisis does not

always suggest that “disturbances in cultural stability can provide opportunities for a way out of conventional fictions and imagined fates for female characters” (Lassner 1990: 139). What is often disregarded where the ambivalence of characters is concerned is that, apart from gender, men and women usually “display their own inadequacy, passivity, and frustration” (Gill 1987: 54). The interaction involving ideas of place, gender and class seems to be far more multifaceted in Bowen’s novels than where other themes are concerned. Nevertheless, the author attempts to show that to live is to disintegrate, to disappear (as happens with Danielstown), while human beings continue to develop both their individual and social facet: “what’s the matter with this country is the matter with the lot of us individually –our sense of personality is a sense of outrage and we’ll never get outside it” (*Last September*, p. 82).

NOTES

- ¹ John Atkins (1977), for example, offers a detailed argument based on nationality, while other authors as Mark Bence-Jones or Patricia Craig acknowledge that the Ascendancy is a class.
- ² See *Bowen’s Court*, where she tells the life story of her family, p.116 and *The Mulberry Tree*, p.74.
- ³ Although reviewers do not hesitate to include Elizabeth Bowen in the Anglo-Irish tradition, Alan Warner, author of *A Guide to Anglo-Irish Literature* (1981) does not mention her in this category although he devotes a chapter to the Big House, one of Bowen’s major themes.
- ⁴ Subsequent references are embedded within the text as follows: *Last September* and page number.
- ⁵ In this respect, it is worthy of mention that Lis Christensen devotes a chapter in her book claiming the importance of this symbol.

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