

# ALIENATED FEMALE ANGLO-IRISH YOUTH IN ELIZABETH BOWEN'S *THE LAST SEPTEMBER*

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**ABSTRACT.** Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929), a novel about an Anglo-Irish gentry family in Danielstown, Cork in the middle of the war for Irish independence from England, portrays the fate of the youths of the Anglo-Irish. By referring to Warhol's feminist narratological approach, this research aims to display the portrayal of Lois Farquar's as a representation of a female member of the Anglo-Irish society. *The Last September*, as a modernist novel, portrays Lois's gendered experience through actions, dialogue and narrations. Lois Farquar, teenage protagonist of the novel, is depicted to be grappling with her own struggle with self-realization and the expectations set by her Anglo-Irish family. Lois's struggle with her identity is, in part, a consequence of the repression and alienation she and fellow members of the Anglo-Irish society experience, stunting the development of Lois's identity and agency. Thus, we propose that the novel, with its modernist narrative that centers around female Anglo-Irish interiority, presents Lois, and the youths of the Anglo-Irish, as aliens frozen in time, lacking the ability to inherit their legacy or undergo transformation.

**Keywords:** Elizabeth Bowen; *The Last September*; Anglo-Irish; female identity; alienation

## ALIENASI PEREMPUAN MUDA ANGLO-IRLANDIA DALAM *THE LAST SEPTEMBER* KARYA ELIZABETH BOWEN

**ABSTRAK.** *The Last September* (1929) karya Elizabeth Bowen, sebuah novel tentang keluarga pemilik tanah asal Inggris di Danielstown, Cork, Irlandia saat terjadinya perang kemerdekaan Irlandia dari Inggris, menggambarkan nasib kaum muda Anglo-Irlandia. Dengan mengacu pada pendekatan naratif feminis Warhol, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menampilkan penggambaran Lois Farquar sebagai representasi perempuan anggota masyarakat Anglo-Irlandia. *The Last September*, sebagai sebuah novel modernis, menggambarkan pengalaman Lois sebagai perempuan melalui tindakan, dialog, dan narasi. Lois Farquar, tokoh utama remaja dalam novel ini, digambarkan kesulitan dalam usahanya untuk mencapai realisasi diri dan ekspektasi yang ditetapkan oleh keluarga Anglo-Irlandianya. Perjuangan Lois dengan identitasnya merupakan konsekuensi dari pengekangan dan keterasingan yang dialami dirinya dan sesama anggota masyarakat Anglo-Irlandia, yang menghambat perkembangan identitas dan agensi Lois. Karena itu, kami menawarkan gagasan bahwa novel ini, dengan narasi modernis yang berpusat pada interioritas perempuan Anglo-Irlandia, menampilkan Lois, dan para pemuda Anglo-Irlandia, sebagai orang asing yang membeku dalam waktu, yang tidak memiliki kemampuan untuk mewarisi warisan kelas sosial mereka atau mengalami transformasi.

**Kata kunci:** Elizabeth Bowen; *The Last September*; Anglo-Irlandia; identitas perempuan; alienasi

### INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973), a female Anglo-Irish author who wrote in English, is considered to be one of the finest and strangest writers in the twentieth century (Ellmann, 2003). Her literary career started with the publication of her first novel, *The Hotel* (1927). However, it was with her novel *The Last September* (1929) that she gained widespread recognition. Characteristics of Bowen's narration include the focus on liminal spaces and conflict between the Irish and English where her characters are often torn between the dullness of domestic life and lethal desires (Ellmann, 2003). Bowen's fiction also has the tendency of "breaking up the surface of narratives with acts of sudden violence" that makes readers reconsider the capability of her characters (Hughes, 1994: 69). Although it is only her second novel, Corcoran considers *The Last September*'s style

to be matured, secure and capable of defining itself (Corcoran, 2001: 315). All of Bowen's works, both fiction and non-fiction, continue to be in print and are considered to have a sizable readership among the general public (Bennett & Royle, 1994). Bennett and Royle, in their book that argues that Bowen is one of the most important yet undervalued twentieth century writer, consider Bowen to be "emerging as a significant figure" in various areas of contemporary study, such as Anglo-Irish literature and twentieth-century women's writing (1994: xiii).

*The Last September* (1929) depicts the struggle for self-realization experienced by its Anglo-Irish protagonists, especially Lois Farquar, the younger inhabitant of the Anglo-Irish Big House, Danielstown. Lois's frustration and fixation with her potential future are perhaps a symptom of her belonging to a class that is "a relic of British imperialism" that cannot survive in a "post-British Empire world of separated

and relativized national units” (Esty, 2007: 266). *The Last September* also presents “an absent presence and a present absence” of Ireland’s historical situation. However, Bowen’s unique brand Irish modernism institutes a complex representational strategy, where, according to Greaney, “[a] hint of an Ireland is given, but it is a trace which always lacks presence in the text” (2019: 230). Thus, Bowen’s Irish modernism presents the potential for interpreting a historical context although this interpretation inevitably distorts the representation of that context (Greaney, 2019).

Reynolds considers Bowen’s modernism to be a manifestation of the experiments by Irish women authors “to represent the nuance and complexity of female experience” and explore “the movement of women into the home” (2024: 32). This move explains the “ongoing commitment to female interiority” by Irish women authors through the mode of modernism such as stream of consciousness, shifting points of view, and non-linear narratives (Reynolds, 2024: 32). However, *The Last September*, read as an Irish modernist novel, differs from other modernist works due to Bowen’s incorporation of “the omniscient narrator of the classical realist tradition” and rejection of “the notion that the novelist should show, not tell” (Greaney, 2022: 95). A unique characteristic of Bowen’s modernist writing is the establishment of both proximity and distance to certain elements in the text. This consequently leads to what Greaney refers to as the “resistance to the ascription of meaning” to elements that are frequently employed to define the text, for the case of *The Last September* (1929), the political reality in Ireland (2022: 95). Greaney has touched on this resistance against attributing meaning in their research previously published in 2019, using ‘Ireland’ as an example, in which it “[remains] as a hint never to be achieved in the novel” (Greaney, 2019: 230). This reluctance to ascribe meaning is displayed explicitly by Lois, in which she “could not conceive of her country emotionally”, resulting in the alienation that she experiences in her homeland, which also relates to the suppressive quality present in the archaic Anglo-Irish cultural norms.

This novel revolves around the affairs of the Anglo-Irish residents of Danielstown, Cork during the Irish War of Independence. The main residents of the country estate in the narrative include Sir Richard, the patriarch; Lady Naylor, the matriarch; Lois Farquar, Sir Richard’s niece; and Laurence, Lois’s cousin and Lady Naylor’s niece. These affairs involve friends and families of the Naylor’s who visit the country mansion, and the British soldiers stationed in Danielstown. *The Last September* (1929) deviates from the formula where “characters are

brought together so that they may inter-relate in plots of social, amatory and erotic intrigue”; in the novel, relations between characters does not progress as far as the usual in novels like it (Corcoran, 2001: 316). Although it is set in the middle of an ongoing national conflict (Irish War of Independence), the Naylor’s and their visitors’ lives seem to be scarcely affected throughout most of the novel. Being “scarcely affected” becomes a motif throughout the novel until the third part of the novel. The motif conveys the privilege enjoyed by the Anglo-Irish during the Irish War of Independence, where, during the first and second part of the novel, only the Irish and the English soldiers are affected by the conflict. As the novel progresses, the Naylor’s and their visitors’ lives start to be disrupted by the ongoing conflict. This disruption, however, continues to be dismissed and ignored until the latter half of the novel.

A notable aspect of *The Last September* (1929) is the relationship between gender and class. Bowen’s novels often portray how class identity adds complexity to gender identity and *vice versa*. Bowen frequently exhibits how the female members of Anglo-Irish society maneuver throughout gender and class expectations. In *The Last September* (1929), Bowen portrays the ways female members of Anglo-Irish societies oppress, through their social position and economic status, and are oppressed, due to gender identity. Bowen also illustrates how the female members of Anglo-Irish society enact control inside the estate; an example by Lassner, “the women exercise social power only in arranging the seating at dinner” (1990: 28). Ultimately, Bowen’s writing has the tendency to intersect matters of gender with class and social status. Miller notes that “Bowen’s mystification of the relationship between gender and class ideologies arises from her own class anxieties as an upper-middle-class owner of an Irish Big House” (1999: 154).

Another major element in *The Last September* is the country estate, the setting of the entire narrative. *The Last September* is a ‘Big House novel’, which refers to novels based around a family estate and its surrounding, usually owned by Protestant landlords and is mainly about the Ascendancy Anglo-Irish (Bedsole, 2019: 3). Citing Kreilkamp, Bedsole notes that Big House novels usually includes Gothic themes such as a decaying house and family, guilt and family secrets (2019: 3). Norris, highlighting Otto Rauchbauer’s explanation in the introduction of *Ancestral Voices: The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*, notes that the ‘Big House’ has been a prominent element in Irish fiction (2004: 113). As what Corcoran describes as a “country house novel”,

*The Last September* concerns itself mainly on the affairs surrounding residents of the country mansion owned by the Naylor family in Danielstown (2001: 316). The Big House, Danielstown, is not merely the setting where the narrative unfolds; the Big House also serves as a motif, a theme, a haunting presence to its residents and a mirror that reflects the decay of the Anglo-Irish class.

The novel feels almost autobiographical, considering that Bowen is an Anglo-Irish whose family owned a country estate in county Cork. Bowen notes that *The Last September* (out of all her books) “is nearest [her] heart” (2015a: 10). Bowen is the sole heiress of Bowen’s Court, a country estate in county Cork. The Bowen family can be traced back to those who came to Ireland in the seventeenth century, with the English conquest (Lassner, 1990). *The Last September* draws clear inspiration from Bowen’s life in Bowen’s Court. Although *The Last September* is not a one-to-one autobiographical retelling of Bowen’s experiences in Bowen’s Court, it does contain significant parallels. One of those parallels is Bowen’s only experience with the Irish insurgency. Like Lois, the protagonist of *The Last September*, Bowen’s sole contact with the rebellion is through her brief romance with a British soldier (Lassner, 1990). During the tail end of the Irish War of Independence, it has been recorded that Bowen spent her time travelling in Italy when houses in her neighborhood had been burned down (Lassner, 1990). The narrative in *The Last September* provides a thorough look into how the Anglo-Irish distance themselves from the violence that surrounded their home. Although their home became the stage where that violence takes place, the Anglo-Irish have no place and no involvement in the violence; they reject to acknowledge that they are involved and that the conflict will affect their lives. As Green puts it, the Anglo-Irish is a privileged minority that “actively ignore the events outside the confines of their sheltered existences” (2015: 36). This act of ignoring and dismissing done by the Anglo-Irish is a key element in *The Last September* as it is the force that drives the decay of the Big House and thus the decay of narrative within the novel.

Even though the complexity of Bowen’s work is often considered comparable to her contemporaries, her works seem to fall through the cracks; the number of studies on Bowen’s works is minuscule compared to the number of studies on works by authors often compared with Bowen, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Oscar Wilde. Studies on *The Last September* (1929) mainly revolve around the Anglo-Irish identity (Momoo, 2001; Wells-Lassagne,

2007; Martínez, 2010; Green, 2015), the Big House (Nagashima, 2007; Bedsole, 2019), the narrative style and modernism (Corcoran, 2001; Esty, 2007; Wurtz, 2010; Greaney, 2019), the political, colonial and historical background (Williams, 1995; Greaney, 2019), and female identity (Martínez, 2010; Cao, 2017; Bedsole, 2019). *The Last September* (1929) often invites a historical reading that often focuses on the postcoloniality of the text. Although this research will still include extratextual historical considerations, we aim to focus and analyze the uniquely gendered alienation experienced by female Anglo-Irish youths, particularly one illustrated through Lois.

## METHOD

The method of this research includes close reading of the research object and previous studies that discuss *The Last September* in relation to this research. This research will integrate Warhol’s (2012) feminist narrative approach that she used to analyze *Persuasion* in *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, particularly her approach in analyzing the use of free indirect speech/discourse. Warhol specifically takes notice of the use of free indirect course that serves to convey the character’s thoughts, emotion, and physical sensation. Warhol notes that “[attitudes] and expressions assigned ... through free indirect discourse in *Persuasion* generally reflect what they say (or what they would say) out loud” (2012: 123). Fludernik highlights that, in free indirect discourse, the “speech being depicted is incorporated into the flow of the narrative” and that it “[evokes] the manner of speaking and the actual words of a character” that is stylistically distinct from the neutral narrative discourse (2009: 67, 68). Thus, this research will examine how free indirect speech portray Lois’s isolation and the text’s focus on female interiority. This research will also consider Warhol’s discussion on the spatial dynamics of upper- and middle-class British society in the nineteenth century that were distinctly characterized by gender.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*The Last September* portrays how the innate isolation within the Anglo-Irish Big House hinders Lois from exploring her own identity as a young woman and as a member of the Anglo-Irish society. Isolation and alienation lead to the Anglo-Irish ‘sickness’; a ‘sickness’ that slowly deteriorates the Anglo-Irish class until it ceases to exist. The text presents how Lois, a young woman, experiences the symptoms of this disease, such as lack of direction,

paralysis and stagnating self-development. This isolation, Bowen writes about her family's very own Big House, seems to be an intrinsic aspect of the Big House;

Each member of each of these isolated households is bound up not only in the sensation and business of living but in the exact sensation of living *here*. The upkeep of the place takes its tax not only of physical energy but of psychic energies people hardly know that they give. Each of these houses, with its intense, centripetal life, is isolated by something very much more lasting than the physical fact of space: the isolation is innate; it is an affair of origin. It is possible that Anglo-Irish people, like only children, do not know how much they miss. Their existences, like those of only children, are singular, independent and secretive (2015a: 35-36).

Throughout the novel, Lois attempts to figure out what the future holds for her. When Myra and Francie were discussing Lois, Lois's voice blends in with the narrator's, But soon their tones changed, a keen hunting note came into them; they were on a topic. Carried away, Aunt Myra had forgotten. She heard 'Lois . . . Lois . . . Lois . . .' She hummed and sang: they were too intent. To one's sense of honour such things were agonizing (Bowen, 2015b: 67).

With the use of free indirect discourse, the text constructs Lois's identity as an agitated teenager that desires to avoid identification. In her feminist narratological analysis of *Persuasion*, Warhol declares that the characters social identities are "partly constructed through Austen's characteristic use of free indirect discourse" (Herman et al., 2012: 136). This is also the case in *The Last September* for Lois, where her identity as a young woman is partially constructed through the use of free indirect discourse. The use of free indirect discourse by Lois in this novel also marks the interiority of the text to be strongly gendered as female. This interiority also highlights the isolation experienced by Anglo-Irish women in the text. As the text is only concerned with matters in the interior, it isolates Anglo-Irish women, especially Lois, from external forces and influences.

In the pursuit of self-realization, Lois is terrified to assign any meaning to herself, as she protests, "[she] didn't want to know what she was, she couldn't bear to: knowledge of this would stop, seal, finish one", acting as if ascribing meaning to oneself would halt her own life (Bowen, 2015b: 68). Although afraid, Lois, being her restless teenage self, cannot help but to wonder "what Lois was" and immediately follow her inquisitiveness with defeat, "[she] would never know" (Bowen, 2015b: 68). Cao attributes Lois's hindered self-determination and identification to

the "castrating force of the surrogate mother" and the "removal of the maternal story" from Lois's narrative (2017: 223). However, these two factors are also present in Laurence's narrative and Laurence is still able to reach a form of individuality that Lois is incapable of. Thus, those two factors only affected Lois the way it does specifically because Lois is a woman; those factors do not hinder the male Anglo-Irish the way it hinders Anglo-Irish women. Therefore, the Anglo-Irish tradition and norms specifically handicap young women from achieving self-determination and individuality.

Lois extends her rejection to identification to other people, in a preceding scene, to Gerald, "I feel certain you have illusions about me; I don't believe you know what I'm like a bit" (Bowen, 2015b: 53). This becomes a fixation for Lois, where she continues to be "worried chiefly because Gerald had illusions about her" (Bowen, 2015b: 55). Dismissing Gerald's devotion to her, Lois remains convinced that Gerald does not know who she really is. She laments: "Some idea he had formed of herself remained inaccessible to her; she could not affect it," and insists that Gerald is "not interested when I tell you about myself" (Bowen, 2015b: 56). Lois's stubbornness even prompts Gerald to declare to himself that "she couldn't look on her own eyes, had no idea what she was" (Bowen, 2015b: 57). Lois then wonders to herself how to write about Gerald to her school friend, Viola, and what Viola would think of Lois and Gerald.

Lois embodies the deprived and repressed youth of the Anglo-Irish, intrigued by the world beyond the estate yet unable to fight against the haunting pull of the Big House. Lois's deprivation from life is evident in the text, even Lois herself acknowledges this; "In her life – deprived as she saw it – there was no occasion for courage, which like an unused muscle slackened and slept." (Bowen, 2015b: 41). An opportunity to exercise this muscle does appear later in the text. Not only an opportunity for courage, but the opportunity for a future for the Anglo-Irish youth does eventually appear. However, the text clearly marks opportunities for the Anglo-Irish to be 'outside' of the Anglo-Irish bubble, beyond the confines of the Big House. A lack of an 'occasion for courage' is not the only deprivation that Lois experiences. Lois, throughout the novel, has also been deprived of human connection within the Big House, whether with members of the Anglo-Irish community or the native Irish servants.

"We can sit out on the steps tonight, can't we?" persisted Lois. And because no one answered or cared and a conversation went on without her, she felt

profoundly lonely, suspecting once more for herself a particular doom of exclusion.” (Bowen, 2015b: 31)

In the example above, Lois is located in the drawing room, a room that has been established in the text to be a social space within the Big House, and is surrounded by almost every Anglo-Irish occupant of the estate. However, Lois’s attempts to participate in the social gathering have been denied and are met with either curt responses or complete silence. Lois fails to assume an active role in the Big House and thus is subjected to a passive role. The Big House paralyzes Lois, preventing her to assume another role and confining her to her preassigned passive role. After a solo excursion, Lois goes back home to the Big House and experiences the powers of the Anglo-Irish establishment.

But as Lois went up the steps breathlessly, her adventure began to diminish. It held ground for a moment as she saw the rug dropped in the hall by Mrs Montmorency sprawl like a body across the polish. Then confidence disappeared, in a waver of shadow, among the furniture (Bowen, 2015b: 42).

The Big House and the furniture inside it, a manifestation of the Anglo-Irish values, disperses and diminish Lois’s confidence and desire for exploration until it evaporates it completely. The macabre description of a rug sprawling like a body fits the underlying Gothic tones this Big House novel. Macabre and haunting tones follows the Anglo-Irish, symbolizing the decline of the Anglo-Irish as a race and/or class.

An important distinction to be made is that non-Anglo-Irish occupants, which presumably consists of numerous Irish workers that are needed to maintain a large estate, are mostly invisible and almost non-existent in the text. When the text does acknowledge their presence and role in the Big House, it is exclusively only through glances and brief mentions in the dialog. By having an entire demographic invisible, it is almost as if the text disables Lois from forming meaningful bonds with other occupants. The text’s preoccupation with the interiority of its Anglo-Irish characters leaves aspects known through extratextual texts, the ongoing Irish rebellion for example, mostly unnarrated and unrepresented. In this particular example, it is clear that a large, aristocratic estate such as Danielstown cannot operate without numerous servants. Even though Bowen’s brand of modernism centers around the domestic life of its inhabitants, the text focalizes through an Anglo-Irish lens that excludes the presence of native Irish workers who are actually responsible for the domestic work within the estate.

Lois’s most earnest and genuine bonds within the confines of the Big House are with Laurence and, briefly, Marda.

“With him, she felt committed by speech itself to a display of such unfathomable silliness that she might just as well come out and did – with assertions surprising even to herself. When he yawned, took a book up, said he was hungry or simply went away, she was not discountenanced.” (Bowen, 2015b: 19)

In the anteroom, the text illustrates the lack of pretense in Lois and Laurence’s relationship. Laurence, we propose, is Lois’s opposite gender counterpart; both of similar ages, both are orphans housed in their aunts/uncles estate, and both repressed and deprived by the Anglo-Irish and the house they live in. Interactions between Lois and Laurence display a certain brand of authenticity, where Lois’s hesitation and restraint and Laurence’s insincere compliance do not present itself.

Lois’s connection with Marda, on the other hand, mainly stems from Lois’s fascination. Marda is portrayed to be full of vigor, decisive and charming; Hugo, Lois and Laurence are captivated by her presence. The text presents Marda as an agent of chaos in Danielstown. Marda, whose decisiveness contrasts Lois’s indecisiveness, receives the affection of Hugo Montmorency, a married Anglo-Irish man who is also a visitor of Danielstown. However, Hugo does not receive the same amount of affection and adoration.

The text presents a future for Lois as if it only exists outside the Anglo-Irish estate. Outside the Big House, however, Lois has been able to form a meaningful connection with others, primarily Gerald, an English soldier. This connection, however, is also plagued with its own issue relating to Lois’s deprivation and repression.

“She would have loved to love him; she felt some kind of wistfulness, some deprivation. If there could only be some change, some movement – in her, outside of her, somewhere between them – some incalculable shifting of perspectives that would bring him wholly into focus, mind and spirit, as she had been bodily in focus now – she could love him” (Bowen, 2015b: 60).

Lois’s indecisiveness represents the paralyzing uncertainty that plagued the Anglo-Irish class—a plague that was ignored and dismissed until it materializes itself as their inevitable downfall. Lois is constantly questioning what the future holds for her and only made a decision on her future when confronted by an Irish rebel in a life threatening situation, feeling “ruled out” and that there is “nothing at all for her” in the Big House so she must

“marry Gerald” (Bowen, 2015b: 132). There are no moments in the text where Lois expresses genuine love for Gerald, only moments where Lois, in a panic, thought that she must “marry Gerald” (Bowen, 2015b: 106, 132). This thought of needing to marry Gerald arises only in moments where, in desperation, Lois is confronted with the idea that there is no other future for her, that “no one had come for her” (Bowen, 2015b: 106). This first suffocating moment came upon Lois when she contemplates Marda’s engagement, fearing that she and the moment she shared with Marda will ultimately be forgotten, Lois thought that she would rather have this memory (and the house) burned, foreshadowing the burning of Danielstown in the third part, than fade and be forgotten quietly. The second was when Marda and Lois encounter an armed man in the mill, who upon discovering their intrusion, exclaims

“‘It is time,’ he said, ‘that yourselves gave up walking. If you have nothing better to do, you had better keep in the house while y’have it’” (Bowen, 2015b: 132).

This incident is the very first time the text recognizes the violence that is happening in and surrounding Danielstown. The act of violence presents itself as one of the Gothic motifs present in Big House novels, in which the narrative illustrates threats against maiden-like characters, Lois and Marda. Although it does recognize the ongoing violence, it should be noted that the text does not explicitly identify the armed man as an Irish rebel. The narrative gets closer and closer to reference the violence experienced by Anglo-Irish inhabitants during the Irish rebellion, yet it refrains from directly representing it as such. Greaney highlights how the narrative presents “no textual testimony to support this phenomenon” and thus “destroys [the texts] potential to operate referentially concerning the wider context of a war” (2019: 228). This is also the first instance where a patriarchal power explicitly ‘commands’ Anglo-Irish women to stay in domesticity. In her feminist reading of *The Last September*, Lassner points to this accident as the reveal that “even rebellion duplicates the methods of the oppressor” (1990: 42). It becomes clear how Anglo-Irish women are “the least privileged members of a privileged class” when it is revealed that their Anglo-Irish status fails to relieve them from the very same oppression their Irish counterpart experience (Bedsole, 2019: 139).

The novel suggest that the marriage does not solve the omnipresent feeling of unfulfillment within Anglo-Irish women, it also, on the other hand, suggest that there are no other options (Lassner,

1990). Lois recognizes the no-win situation she is in, as she observes that money “confined, propped and moulded” the “regular practice of love” and that it is the “mainspring of women’s grievances” (Bowen, 2015b: 67-68). Marriage between Lois and Gerald is heavily discouraged by Lady Naylor, as she points out how Gerald’s lack of aristocratic background and lack of resources to marry Lois. Lady Naylor’s rejection of Gerald’s attempt to marry Lois stems from the devotion to voices from the past that abides to the antiquated Anglo-Irish social practices. Lois, although she recognizes marriage to be an injustice for women and doubts her love for Gerald, still reluctantly and anxiously wishes to marry Gerald. Laurence, by studying in Oxford and dreaming of becoming a writer, is guaranteed a reprieve from the loneliness and lack of opportunity that Lois experiences. Lois, on the other hand, lacks the imagination to dream of a future beyond the confines of the Big House and is thereby barred from escaping the confining walls of the Big House. Marda, however, with her refusal to be illusioned by romance, deliberately chooses to subject herself to marriage with Leslie Lawe, an English stockbroker, in order to escape the confines of her familial background. Kaplan, citing Innes, highlights that the Marda’s decision is influenced by her understanding of her own needs rather than a mere acceptance of conventional norms (2012). Marda has no illusions about what her domestic future holds:

“So much of herself that was fluid must, too, be moulded by his idea of her. Essentials were fixed and localized by their being together – to become as the bricks and wallpaper of a home” (Bowen, 2015b: 136).

As much as Marda’s self-assurance and cynicism inspired Lois, Marda does not seem to serve as an ideal role model, as her impending marriage will lead her into the patriarchal society from which she advises Lois to avoid. In the end, no matter how much they detest their suppression, all the younger female protagonists of *The Last September* suffer from the “paralysis and conformism” that the older Anglo-Irish generation had to endure (Martínez, 2010: 104). The influence of the Anglo-Irish legacy haunts the youths in the estate as memories of past glory days is continually perpetuated by the older Anglo-Irish inhabitants.

Lois exhibits symptoms of paralysis and dislocation, in which she is imprisoned to a life she perceives as unfulfilling, while endeavoring to establish her identity within an environment characterized by illusion and disconnection; Green describes that this makes Lois a “product, and in

many ways a victim, of the novel's Big House" (2015: 35). Through actions, dialogue and thoughts, the text reveals Lois's detachment to her country, as she "could not conceive of her country emotionally" and that it is merely "a way of living" (Bowen, 2015b: 42). With no sense of belonging to her country, Lois is "kept apart from Ireland's historical and political realities" (Yamaneki, 2014: 6). Lois complains

"How is it that in this country that ought to be full of such violent realness, there seems nothing for me but clothes and what people say? I might just as well be in some kind of cocoon" (Bowen, 2015b: 56).

The Big House (and the Anglo-Irish identity) manifest as Lois's 'cocoon', not one that protects, but rather one that alienates her from reality and prevents her from forming a definite national identity. Thus, revisiting the discussion that the text only presents a future for Lois to be beyond the Big House, Lois is only able to pursue self-realization and growth outside of her 'cocoon'.

In the end, the 'cocoon' must burst, the Big House is burned down and leaves Lois with no choice but to seek a future beyond it. Although Lois reluctantly seeks to marry, her potential groom, Gerald, meets a fatal end, thus halting Lois from pursuing the marriage she dreads. Lois pursues her future abroad, leaving the novel with an open ending that gives the impression of opportunity for the heroine. Lois's departure is abrupt, two weeks after Gerald's death, and told by Lady Naylor without Lois present. This departure from the Big House represents Lois's departure from the domestic/private sphere to the public sphere. Warhol notes that feminist theorists have established that the spatial dynamics of upper- and middle-class British society in the nineteenth century were distinctly characterized by gender; the home, or the domestic sphere, was regarded as the 'private' domain associated with femininity, whereas 'public' life, which encompassed the realms of commerce, religion, higher education, politics, and law, occurred in environments that were perceived as masculine (Herman et al., 2012). Thus, the text portray the impossibility for a future for Lois and the youths of the Anglo-Irish within the feminine, domestic walls of the Big House.

## CONCLUSION

Lois is more often portrayed as in a passive manner, however, through actions, dialogue and narration, the text has illustrated how aware she is of the dichotomy between gender and class and of the uncertainty of her future as a woman. This awareness is also presented by other Anglo-Irish women, though with different degrees and differing priorities. Lois is aware of

her detachment to her birthplace and the peril that her gender experiences under the Anglo-Irish patriarchal tradition. Martínez notes that Hermione Lee's description of Lois, as someone "restless, dissatisfied with herself, impatient for her sheltered youth to be over and for something to happen", as a succinct description of Lois that also explains her simultaneous fascination with and apprehension regarding life (2010: 106).

Lois, as the youth of a dying class, is also illustrated to be in a cycle of attempting to form meaningful connections and failing miserably. Those who do give her the chance to bond, however, are never completely there for her and would soon leave her. Marda, who Lois treats as a role model, would soon marry and leave Ireland. Laurence has another 'home', a space where he feels more appropriate for himself, that waits for him. Gerald, a connection that Lois made outside of the Anglo-Irish sphere, is rejected by Lois's maternal figure, Lady Naylor, and meets a gruesome end by end of the novel. It is no wonder that the Anglo-Irish are often described as a dying class when their youth, the one that should be continuing their legacy, are castrated and shackled by a cloistered tradition. This seclusion also prevents the youths of the Anglo-Irish, especially Lois, from forming an unambiguous sense of belonging and identity.

*The Last September* thus presents a narrative focused on female interiority and the Anglo-Irish domestic life. Through the utilization of the Irish modernist mode, Bowen represents isolated women who struggle with agency, alienation and identity. Free indirect speech within the text portrays the narration's focus on the interiority of its female characters, especially Lois. As they are isolated within the Big House, young Anglo-Irish women, such as Lois, face repeated failures in their attempt to assert themselves and build a future for themselves. The innate hopelessness that haunts the Anglo-Irish Big House forces their youths to exit and abandon Anglo-Irish traditions in order to secure their survival and future. Lois, as a young woman, is not unable to survive and thrive in the culture that produced her, thus requiring her to leave, letting the Anglo-Irish culture to decline until it finally ceases to exist.

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