

Degree Project

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Clutching at Straws

An Analysis of the Construction of Anglo-Irish Hybridity as a Form of National Inclusion in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*

Author: Birgit Glashoff

Supervisor: Dr. Carmen Zamorano Llena

Examiner: Dr. Billy Gray

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Introduction

"She wished she could freeze the moment and keep it always"

(Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* 4).

This moment in the epigraph refers to the beginning of Bowen's novel *The Last September*. In retrospective Bowen sets her narrative in the year 1920, during the ongoing Irish War of Independence, in the manor house Danielstown, in Cork, Ireland. The novel is published in 1929, after the Irish War of Independence and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The moment the protagonist Lois wishes to preserve is a moment of implied normality, it is a moment when traditions and a certain way of life appear to be still in place. This moment, when the summer guests arrive at the estate, is the beginning of the novel, "The Arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency". In this first part the novel mainly evokes memories of the past which are revived, for example, in the tennis party " I am sure this [tennis ball] is one that you lost with Uncle Richard . . . in the summer of '06 [1906]" (Bowen, *The Last September* 57).

The novel consists of three parts and depicts the summer and September of 1920 in Danielstown and the life of its Anglo-Irish residents, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, their niece Lois and nephew Laurence. The residents and their summer guests, Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency and Miss Norton, spend the summer and early autumn of 1920 attempting to maintain their traditions and create an appearance of normality; they arrange tennis parties, visits and attend dances with the English officers and soldiers. In the second part, "The Visit of Miss Norton", the novel refers more to the present and the events unfolding as an effect of the ongoing war are shown. The residents of Danielstown ostensibly unaware of the war are, for example, waiting for the postman discussing activities for the day and whether to

drive to the post office to make a phone call. When the postman arrives he informs the residents of Danielstown about a raid that occurred the night before and that the lines of the post office telephone are cut: "It had been a great raid, the postman said; if the boys had not fled it would have been almost a battle." (Bowen, *The Last September* 112). The war starts to affect their plans and their lives. The third part, "The Departure of Gerald", appears to indicate future development. In this part Gerald Lesworth, the English soldier who had a romantic interest in Lois dies in an ambush, and the severity of the events in Ireland unfolds. The War of Independence is no longer just affecting certain aspects of the Anglo-Irish life, the war imposes itself and the impact is tangible, both when they attend dances "Wouldn't it be a rag . . . if they tried to fire in at the windows while we were dancing?" (Bowen, *The Last September* 209) and when the soldiers they know get involved in serious attacks "Troops had been fired on coming back to Clonmore, . . . The situation was tightening" (Bowen, *The Last September* 249). In the end of the novel Danielstown is gone, destroyed by a fire and only the trees in the avenue are left as witnesses to its former existence: "Here there were no more autumns, except for the trees" (Bowen, *The Last September* 302).

This novel about the Anglo-Irish written in three parts – tradition, war or times of trouble, and death and destruction – focusses on the fate of the Anglo-Irish in relation to the Irish war of Independence. As some criticism has observed, Bowen's portrayal of the Anglo-Irish draws inspiration from the "Irish Gothic tradition" (Eibhear Walshe). According to Julian Moynahan the novel resorts to gothic elements in order to articulate the decay and death of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Moynahan observes: "one discovers, . . . Bowen exploiting certain resources of Gothic literary style in their writings about the death – or is it the

struggle to die? – of Anglo-Irish tradition" (224). *The Last September* has also been interpreted as Bowen's expression of critique of the Ascendancy's position in society, Irish nationalism and colonialism. Matthew Brown describes the novel's "experimental style" which undermines all, "the legitimacy of Ascendancy protocol, the morality of British colonialism, and the violent expression of Irish nationalism in 1920s Ireland" (Brown 4). Likewise, Shannon Wells-Lassagne describes the novel as a critique of colonisation and suggests that "Ireland is an example of colonisation and its effect on dominated and dominating groups: thus, Bowen's critique extends not only to the Anglo-Irish and the English but to the British Empire as Whole" (451). Furthermore, it has been argued that the novel could be seen as both a "memorial to or a condemnation of the Ascendant class as a whole" (Julia McElhattan Williams 222).

These analyses, though, stand in contrast to Bowen's strong belief in the survival of the Ascendancy. In the afterword to *Bowen's Court*, Bowen still contended that there was a solid relation between the Ascendancy and Ireland at the end of the Irish war of Independence and she stated: "the tie between us [the Anglo-Irish] and our country was not broken" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court* 327). Furthermore, Bowen expressed her belief in the positive influence of the Treaty¹ for all residents of Ireland: "With the Treaty . . . a new hopeful phase started: I believe in its promise" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court* 336). Bowen's point of view is

¹ The Treaty refers to the Irish Treaty signed 1921 by the British government and Irish nationalist representatives granting the south counties of Ireland the status of a dominion, and by this creating the Free State of Ireland. The six north-east protestant unionist counties with their government in Belfast were already separated from the south in 1914 with the Home Rule Bill, and the Treaty upheld the division of the country which ultimately resulted in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Treaty came into effect in 1922. See Foster 504-508.

described by Matt Eatough as Bowen's "optimistic – one might say fantastic – belief in the long-term viability of Big House² Culture" (77).

Even though Julia McElhatten Williams suggests that Bowen in *The Last September* "provides an important interpretation on the disappearance of her own class" (226), as Bowen tries to seek an explanation for the slow disappearance of the Anglo-Irish in post-colonial Ireland, McElhatten Williams proposes that Bowen's work also supplies evidence that Bowen tries to keep the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy a vital part of Irish society: "As relentlessly as Bowen tried to preserve the Ascendancy through her essays and fiction, it seems unlikely that she believed that Irish independence was the sign of her class's extinction" (McElhatten Williams 237). McElhatten Williams also suggests that Bowen maintained the Ascendancy would re-emerge and reassert itself (237), which confirms Bowen's belief in the value of the Anglo-Irish for the Irish Free State and her faith in the positive influence of the Irish Treaty on the presence of the Anglo-Irish.

This reappearance of the Anglo-Irish as a part of society in the independent Irish state stands in contrast to the Irishness that was gradually built up in the late nineteenth century and is referred to by Mary Kelly as the "construction of Irishness" ("When things were 'closing-in'" 223). In the construction of an Irish identity it was almost unthinkable that the Anglo-Irish could have a function in post-colonial Ireland as "Anglo-Irish identities were gradually marginalised within discourses on Irish identity which came to define Irishness as opposite to all things English" (Kelly, "When things were 'closing-in'" 283). As the Anglo-Irish inevitably represent a part of the Irish population that did not meet this

² Big House: a term used in Ireland to refer to the country houses of the gentry (Kelly, "Writing the Colonial Past" 139)

characterisation of Irishness, the reading of Anglo-Irish literature is often carried out with the ambition to find signs of anticipation for the decline and ultimately the disappearance of the Anglo-Irish gentry.

Moreover, *The Last September* has been read in the context of Bowen's life and her complete work, which shows how Bowen's experience as a member of the Anglo-Irish class permeates her writing. According to Wells-Lassagne the novel has also "been considered as a Big House novel for obvious reasons having not only to do with its plot but also with the whole of Bowen's work" (459). Consequently, the parallels between Bowen's life and the plot in the novel led to "*The Last September* being read as an autobiographical text" (Kelly, "When things were 'closing-in'" 286).

At the same time there is a different view on Anglo-Irish literature, in particular the big house novels, which claims that they are not obituaries to something that has vanished. As Eatough contends, "They [big house novels] became the favourite objects of the fictional world through which the Anglo-Irish writers sought to legitimate their culture to English and Irish Society" (72). Also Bowen's work is associated with her trying to preserve the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, which suggests that she believed in the value of the Anglo-Irish culture and Anglo-Irish identity. This attempt to legitimate Anglo-Irish culture as part of Irish society and identity through her work can be seen as an effort to be acknowledged and accepted as a part of the society in independent Ireland. Thus, this thesis will show how Bowen in *The Last September* attempts to affirm Anglo-Irish identity by analysing the construction of Anglo-Irish hybridity as a form of national inclusion.

Looking at Bowen's novel in the context of hybridity is not an obvious choice, as hybridity is prevalently used in discussions about the influence of the colonial power on the culture and identity of the colonised. According to Homi Bhabha "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power" (112) but in the case of the Anglo-Irish their hybridity did not develop from being the oppressed group in the colonising process. Gerry Smyth observes, that "the Anglo-Irish were a typical colonialist community in their domination of Irish political and cultural life" (2). In that sense Anglo-Irish literature or the hybrid culture that has evolved in the Anglo-Irish society do not appear to be hybrid products of the influence of colonial power. This suggests that the Anglo-Irish hybridity is different to the hybridity of the colonised and Maria DiBattista points out: "the Anglo-Irish with their hyphenated identity represent a special case in the history of colonialism" (229). This difference and the special hybridity that is constituted around and by the Anglo-Irish, the inhabitants of the big houses in Ireland, is explained by Bowen "It is only certain that their [the gentlemen of Ireland] duties will remain. Their highest duty to Ireland will be to remain among the poor . . . Their duty to both countries will be to cement their union and make it become at last, if possible a union alike of hearts and of interests" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court* 294). Here Bowen describes the Anglo-Irish hybrid identity as shaped by unreserved loyalty to both Ireland and England, implying that this loyalty provides the Anglo-Irish with a special status that requires them to mediate. As McElhattan notes, they believed "that the Protestant Ascendancy performed a unique and necessary function within Irish society, as its bridge to the modern world" (226).

The influence and function of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland started to decline in the 1870s with the Land Act that forced many of the Anglo-Irish landowners to

sell their estates as their source of income failed, and the disestablishing of the Church of Ireland, which provided Catholics with more influence (Maguire). However, during the War of Independence the remaining estates still represented a sense of purpose and a connectedness to Ireland as Brown remarks: “the Anglo-Irish estates gave the resident Ascendancy a sense of historical mission” (7). When the Ascendancy lost their houses and their place in Irish society in the Irish Free State after the Anglo-Irish War of Independence they lost this sense of purpose and their identity. Still Bowen believed in the function that the Anglo-Irish had in the new Irish State, which Wells-Lassagne confirms when she observes that in *The Last September* Bowen “attempts to posit the Anglo-Irish as . . . possible intermediaries between the English and the Irish” (452). In line with this, in *The Last September* Bowen constructs an Anglo-Irish identity, which could be seen as a way to prove her loyalty to the Irish and to reconstruct the Anglo-Irish hybridity. Thus, *The Last September* becomes Bowen's forum to argue for the national inclusion of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland. As Smyth suggests: "The novel could become the vehicle for special pleading, a showcase where the peculiarities of Irish life could be displayed with the purpose of eliciting sympathy or arousing anger" (35). As Bowen had a strong belief in the Anglo Irish's "function within Irish society" (McElhattan Williams 226) this evokes her wish to plead for sympathy and for her gentry's national inclusion. This thesis will therefore contend that in *The Last September* Anglo-Irish hybridity is constructed as a form of national inclusion by promoting the Anglo-Irish hybridity as their national identity, as an asset and their defining quality. *The Last September* will thus be interpreted as a plea for the recognition of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland and the reclaiming of a place for the Anglo- Irish in Irish society. This will be done by

looking at how the characters in the novel position themselves in relation to the Irish and English. Firstly, however, as the terms hybridity and national identity constitute the analysis of novel it is essential to define and explain these terms before proceeding with the analysis.

Hybridity and National Identity

The Oxford Dictionary offers a basic definition of hybridity as “A thing made by combining two different elements”. This definition of combination of elements also constitutes the fundamental idea of hybridity in post-colonial literature studies, a combination of cultures, native’s and coloniser’s, although it is the origin of hybridity and its effect on, for example, language, literature and culture that form the objective of these studies. Renowned post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha defines hybridity as a “sign of the productivity of the colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (112). Bhabha links the emergence of hybridity, and a hybrid culture and identity to the execution of colonial power, which ultimately evokes a desire in the colonised to demonstrate the existence of their own individual culture. Although Anglo-Irish hybridity is not in this sense the hybridity of the oppressed, it is a product of the colonial power and, as such, it initiates the desire of the Anglo-Irish in the post-colonial times to redeem their national identity, which disappeared in the new definition of Irishness and Irish culture. Even though there appear to be parallels between the Anglo-Irish claim and the claim of a colonized people for a national identity the process differs for these groups.

According to Franz Fanon, native intellectuals in a colonized nation "passionately search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era . . . whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (Fanon 119). In other words, a national culture is that special national trait that separates the natives from the colonizers and provides them with a national identity. By looking back to a time before colonization, "The claim to a national culture in the past does . . . rehabilitate the nation and serve as a hope for a future national culture" (Fanon 120). Fanon claims that this hope generates a change in the native from being regarded as inferior to the coloniser's culture to being unique, which will ultimately lead to national identity and contribute to creating the independent nation.

Accordingly, a national identity can be seen as the effect of the re-creation of a cultural identity. However, in terms of the Anglo-Irish, this rehabilitation can not be accomplished by looking back to pre-colonial times, their national identity has to be constructed from their hybrid past in Ireland by proving the existence of an affinity with the Irish. The national and cultural identity of a group is shaped by common experience and history and Stuart Hall points out that a collective memory can provide a solid base for the national identity of a group or people. Hall suggests that this collective memory could be seen as "stable, unchanging and continuous frames" which could supply a feeling of belonging on grounds of common experience and shared culture (Hall 393). A different, and probably more realistic, way of looking at national identity is to acknowledge that there are "critical points of deep significant differences which constitute what we really are . . . or rather . . . what we have become" (Hall 394). This way of describing national identity is based on the assumption of a common history, shared by all members of

a national community but also on the acknowledgement of change as constant and inherent to cultural identity due to the progression of the individual, depending on the circumstances and persons one is "positioned by" (Hall 394).

Hall's view, according to which cultural identity is formed by how one is positioned by different external influences, mirrors the construction of the Anglo-Irish cultural identity and, given the connection between cultural identity and national identity, its position in relation to Irish national identity. This means that the description of the Anglo-Irish class at different points in time differs depending on the ideological perspective according to which different attributes are assigned to this group, which contribute to shaping their identity. Therefore, the Anglo-Irish, hybrid, as already suggested by their hyphenated name and positioned both by themselves as well as by external judgement and prejudice, need to demonstrate a common experience and shared culture with the Irish in order to assert a sense of belonging (Hall 393). The uprooting that the Anglo-Irish experienced in terms of losing their sense of belonging to the country they consider to be their home purportedly made them aware that they, as an effect of their internal and external positioning, did not belong to any culture but their own, without clear recognition from any nation. Since Moynahan observes that there is an aspect of Bowen's life that can be seen as a virtual allegory of this Anglo-Irish uprooting (224) Bowen's autobiography will contribute to the analysis of *The Last September*, only as a source for historical reference and as a text that articulates and is representative of Anglo-Irish hybridity.

Anglo-Irish and Elisabeth Bowen

Elisabeth Bowen was born into the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and her heritage is reflected in her work, not only in novels like *The Last September* but also in her work *Bowen's Court* where she depicts the settlement and history of her family in Ireland on their estate Bowen's Court. This historical review starts when her family settled in Ireland in the first half of the seventeenth century and ends in 1942 after Bowen inherited the house in 1930. When the Bowen family came to Ireland, there have been English settlers in Ireland since the twelfth century. These early settlers are referred to as the Old English. Over time they integrated in Ireland and did not longer constitute a reliable representative of English interests. Historian R. F. Foster points out that at the end of the sixteenth century observers of the English government reported that the representatives of the English crown in Ireland, the Old English, "weakened the authority of the Lord Deputy as royal representative" and states that these reports reflected distrust towards the Old English (8). As it became evident in the 1570s that the Irish were strongly averse to the Protestant English colonizer and that "protestant Reformation was having little impact on the mass of the Irish people . . . and such obstinacy . . . could only be overcome by a thorough-going plantation" (Bartlett 90), a wave of plantation, an organised colonisation, took place in Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish loyalty to Catholicism just fanned the flames for the protestant reformation and Bartlett notes "on grounds of security and profitability . . . plantations were determined upon as the way forward in Ireland" (Bartlett 91). Therefore, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century a crown policy caused thousands of Protestants to settle in Ireland and

with the ban of Catholics from the Irish parliament in the late seventeenth century Protestants dominated in Ireland. These plantation settlers were referred to as the "New English" (Fidelma Maguire) and were the predecessors of the "Protestant Ascendancy that ruled Ireland" (Maguire) until the nineteenth century. Foster remarks that the idea of settling Ireland with a Protestant population was seen as "importing a civilizing influence" (59) It appears, that the Ascendancy wholeheartedly committed to this assignment as in *Bowen's Court*, centuries after the plantation and after the founding of the Irish Free State, Bowen still commits to their duty to mediate and to have a "civilizing influence" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court* 294).

Because of the Ascendancy's importance and extensive influence on Irish society it is important to notice that the Ascendancy comprised not all Protestants or "those who had acquired noble patina through settlement or military service" (Foster 170). Foster defines the Ascendancy around Anglicanism which conferred exclusivity (170) and Foster continues "they [the Ascendancy] comprised an elite who monopolized law, politics and 'society'" (Foster 170). Even though Maguire points out that over time these families had made Ireland their home, this exclusivity contributed eventually to the Ascendancy's alienation from Ireland. The Irish, a colonized people, sought to reaffirm and redefine their cultural identity and the main attribute of Irishness was, according to Maguire, basically defined to be Catholic and Gaelic. With this developing Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century, the term Anglo-Irish was coined to describe the Ascendancy as not Irish. It "emphasised national distinctiveness and, . . . to be truly Irish was to be Gaelic and Catholic" (Maguire). She also suggests that "a sense of difference was sharpened"

(Maguire). This difference developed and became more important and looming, and

over the subsequent century [the nineteenth century] the Anglo Irish community became increasingly alienated both from the London administration, . . . and from the wider Irish Catholic community who were gradually mobilising towards political independence (Kelly, "When things were 'closing-in'" 283).

Elisabeth Bowen became a witness of this development as she was born in 1899 to an Anglo-Irish family. Bowen's life with boarding schools in England, summers in the family's Big House in Cork, Ireland and travels to Italy (Walshe) shows parallels to the life of Lois, the protagonist of *The Last September*. In contrast to Danielstown in *The Last September*, Bowen's Court, Bowen's family's estate, escaped destruction during the Irish War of Independence and Bowen inherited it 1930. Despite her efforts to keep it she was unable to manage the financial burden and Bowen's Court was sold and demolished in 1959 (Walshe).

Although Kelly describes the development of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland as fading away from dominant constructs of national identity: "they [the Anglo-Irish] were gradually written out of the Ireland then being imagined" (Kelly, "When things were 'closing-in'" 283) the autobiographical aspect of the novel suggests the opposite. *The Last September* asserts a place for the Anglo-Irish in the Irish Free State based on their hybridity. The novel negotiates their national inclusion by showing how the Anglo-Irish are positioned both by themselves, the Irish and the English.

The Characters' Positioning of Their Hybrid Identities

Bowen wrote *The Last September* in 1928 retrospectively, and sets the novel in a past that marks an irreversible development for the Anglo-Irish resulting in the establishing of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the slow decrease in their influence and their role in Ireland. Irish nationalism as a part of the construction of the new state's national identity did not include the Anglo-Irish as Kelly observes,

“it [the novel] is positioned retrospectively, being written in post-independence 1928 . . . with a particular agenda to register the experience of the Anglo-Irish community when their position in Ireland had been further marginalised and when their voice in the historical record was being increasingly silenced” (Kelly, “When things were ‘closing-in’” 285).

Thus, deprived of a national identity Bowen stated that she did not belong to any national group. As Eatough notes, “in letters and reviews Bowen characterises herself as a member of a ‘non-group group’ ” (85).

Irish nationalism grew to be the power within Irish culture that, by means of disavowal similar to the colonial power in Bhabha's theories, initiates the Anglo-Irish' need for the construction of a hybrid identity. In *The Last September* hybridity as an identity is constructed through internal and external positioning, or the description of the Anglo-Irish by different groups. Hence, *The Last September* constitutes a portrayal of a past identity connected to Ireland to construct a future identity where this connection is still valid. The novel's predominant point can therefore be seen as an attempt to reconnect the Anglo-Irish with Ireland. As Kelly remarks:

Written in 1928 when the Anglo-Irish were being written out of accounts of Ireland's past Bowen's novel may be seen as an attempt not only to explain the Anglo-Irish situation caught up on the war which they felt was not of their making but also to position them in certain respects as co-conspirators in the national movement towards independence ("When things were 'closing-in'" 289).

An example for the display of this co-conspirator spirit among the Anglo-Irish characters in *The Last September* is given by Lady Naylor, the wife of Sir Richard Naylor, the master of Danielstown. She expresses her attitude and connection to Ireland wearing "a green hat dipping in front and trimmed with clover" (Bowen, *The Last September* 17), hereby connecting to Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. This can also be seen as an expression of a connection to the Irish past and a way for the Anglo-Irish owners of Danielstown to show their affiliation to Ireland. However, it is primarily the characters' remarks in the novel that allow the reader to deduce the Anglo-Irish hybridity, not as an expandable colonial construct but interwoven with Irish history and culture and as such a component in the construction of national identity. Even though Laurence attends school in England "He isn't allowed any [politics] here because the ones he brings over from Oxford are all wrong" (Bowen, *The Last September* 24). English politics are rejected, the Anglo-Irish show that their sympathies lie in Ireland, even if the nephew is educated in England, something which indicates a hybrid identity.

The most important character who positions the Anglo-Irish in a context of mutual history and common experience with the Irish is Sir Richard Naylor, as the owner of the estate. Sir Richard demonstrates that his hybridity grants him and his family security within his Irish home. When Frances Montmorency asks him if

there was a risk that they could be shot while sitting outside in the evening he states: "We never have yet, not even with soldiers here and Lois dancing with the officers up and down the avenue. You're getting very English Francie! . . . Dou you think we ought to put sandbags behind the shutters when we shut up at nights?" (Bowen, *The Last September* 27). Sir Richard invites English soldiers to his house and finds the idea that his Irish neighbours would shoot at him unreasonable. He displays confidence in his affiliation to the Irish and acceptance of the English and positions himself in a hybrid identity. According to Eatough, the Anglo-Irish do not have any ideology, "With no innate ideas the Anglo-Irish declare themselves at one moment 'Irish in being' at another 'no more than England's creature' (86) However, Sir Richard's reaction shows that his belief and ideas, his foundation is his hybridity. Several times in the course of the novel Sir Richard reveals his sympathies for the Irish rebels, for example, when he supports the disciplining of three Irish women who were seen with English soldiers: "He was delighted when he heard from the postman... how three young women in the Clonmore district had their hair cut off by masked men for walking out with the [English] soldiers" (Bowen, *The Last September* 84) In another example he is entertaining Gerald, the English subaltern, and expresses regret when he is told that Gerald had captured the rebel Peter Connor, his neighbours' son, " 'I'm sorry to hear that,' said Sir Richard, flushing severely" (Bowen, *The Last September* 131).

Lady Naylor does not only prove her loyalty to Ireland with her attire, she also positions herself in a hybrid identity rooted in Ireland. When she speaks about an Irish neighbour, Mrs. Pat Gegan, she describes her as an intelligent woman: "She is a most interesting woman: she thinks a great deal. But then our people *do*

think." emphasising her belonging when she refers to "our people" and she continues, referring to "the English" as different from her, " Now have you ever noticed the English?" and refers to them as having "little brain" (Bowen, *The Last September* 31). For Lady Naylor the English are "they" not "we": "that horrible kind of country dancing they have in England" (Bowen, *The Last September* 79). She distances herself from the English not only by the distinct use of pronouns, but also by showing contempt toward English traditions.

The other characters in the novel position themselves in equal ways. Lois encounters an Irish rebel on the grounds of the estate in the evening and feels like she should "engage his sympathies" with an encouraging "Up Dublin!" (Bowen, *The Last September* 42), thus showing her sympathy and support for the Irish. At the same time, she is romantically involved with Gerald, the English subaltern. Marda Norton, a visiting friend of the Naylor, displays a similar attitude, by having an English fiancée, Leslie, Marda shows her loyalty and sympathy for Ireland: "Nothing would have induced Marda to confirm Leslie's opinion that her country was dangerous as well as demoralising" (Bowen, *The Last September* 187). Even Hugo Montmorency shows respect for the Irish rebels when he comments on their seriousness: "this Irish fighting is not cricket" (Bowen, *The Last September* 273). Lady Naylor appears to accept the English, even in Danielstown. However, on the occasion of the tennis party she treats Gerald not as a guest but as subordinate and asks him to take care of the other guests' comfort. "Mr. Lesworth . . . would you bring some more rugs for some more of the people to sit on?" (Bowen *The Last September* 46). Furthermore, having English guests at this tennis party embarrasses her in front of other Anglo-Irish families and Lady Naylor makes sure to state that it was not her who invited them by remarking to an

Anglo-Irish guest: "There seem to be many more people here than I thought we'd asked . . . Lois asks people she meets at the Clonmore club" (Bowen *The Last September* 47). This remark points out that the English were not officially invited, their appearance at the party is out of Lady Naylor's control, and by that she emphasises that she wants to distance herself from the English. The novel demonstrates that the Anglo-Irish position themselves strategically as hybrids within Irish society and history with the aspiration to be acknowledged. They display a sense of sharing common memories and attitudes by showing respect and understanding for and kinship with the Irish. As Wells-Lassagne states: "Bowen shows great respect for the Irish rebellion" (459). Richard Tillinghast confirms the Anglo-Irish are "caught between the nationalist agitation of the Irish with whom, temperamentally, they feel they have much in common, and the protection of the British military, whom they really don't like very much" (108).

These expressions of understanding and kinship are written by an author with personal experience and Kelly observes that "Autobiographical and family history writing is another form of subjective and located story telling that documents the intersection of life-worlds and broader social processes" ("Writing the colonial past" 139). This intersection of life-worlds, this mutual experiences and memories are not only the foundation for Anglo-Irish positioning but also their being externally positioned by the English and Irish.

The Positioning of the Anglo-Irish by the English and Irish

The construction of Anglo-Irish hybrid identity in *The Last September* does not only rely on the gentry's beliefs, it includes external influences as well. The

Anglo-Irish were not considered Irish and they were commonly referred to as 'the English' as Tillinghast states, the Anglo-Irish remained interlopers, who were referred to in the Irish language as "strangers" or simply "English" (65). The novel portrays the relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the Irish as predominantly friendly, although the Irish attitude towards the Anglo-Irish and their positioning of the Anglo-Irish shows ambiguity.

On one hand, there are Mrs Pat Gegan and the Connors, parents of the rebel Peter Connor. The novel attempts to show that there is some kind of positive attitude towards the Anglo-Irish among the Irish, and conveys this message through Mrs. Gegan, showing her sympathy for the Naylor. When Lady Naylor talks to her, Mrs. Gegan becomes emotional: " I said to Mrs. Gegan this morning: some of your friends would like us to go, . . . and she got so indignant she nearly wept." (Bowen, *The Last September* 32). Mrs. Gegan's reaction represents the fondness some tenants had for the Anglo-Irish. During Lois' and Mr. Montmorency's short stop at the Connor's farm Michael Connor talks to Mr. Montmorency and shows great respect, after complimenting Mr. Montmorency and welcoming him back to Danielstown he adds: "Welcome back, sir!" (Bowen, *The Last September* 89). Michael Connor also expresses respect when Lois gives him regards for his wife. He indicates his wife would be proud over the greetings as they come from Lois. These parts of the text show that the positive attitude, fondness and respect of the Irish towards the Anglo-Irish existed, but it constitutes only a part of their positioning by the Irish. In *The Last September* the Irish are pictured as neighbours and countrymen and, as Wells-Lassagne states: "What appearance the Irish do make in the novel are almost uniformly sympathetic" (459).

However, this sympathetic description does not mean that all Irish in the novel display a positive attitude towards the Anglo-Irish and, on the other hand, there is some positioning of the Anglo-Irish in the novel that at first appears not to be favourable. When Marda, visitor and friend of the Naylor's, and Lois encounter an Irish rebel in the ruin of a mill, the rebel states his opinion and draws a clear line between Marda and Lois, who consider themselves Irish, and himself. The rebel uses the term "yourselves" to mark a difference between him and the women: "It is time that yourselves gave up walking. . . yez had better keep within the house while you have it" (Bowen, *The Last September* 181). Moreover, the rebel considers Marda and Lois as untrustworthy, because "evidently they had the appearance of liars" (Bowen, *The Last September* 182). Thus, the Anglo-Irish appear as strangers, alienated from their country and unreliable. Nonetheless, the novel turns this event in favour of the Anglo-Irish. The fact that Lois and Marda do not reveal the presence of the rebel proves the integrity of the Anglo-Irish and their loyalty to the Irish. In addition to the dialogues, the events in the novel can be interpreted as evidence for the Irish attitude towards the Anglo-Irish. The Irish raid Laurence and this appears to place him outside the group of Irish. The family's reaction to the incident is cheerful, they apparently think it must have been a mistake to raid someone who considers themselves to be Irish. The raiders take Laurence's shoes and watch, and "he limped home to dinner and an audience, considerably cheered" (Bowen, *The Last September* 277). Kelly observes: "Rather than posing a threat or causing fear for the inhabitants of the big house, local rebels act as a point of interest and even excitement" ("When Things were 'closing-in'" 288). Also this purported position of exclusion in Ireland from the construct of Irishness is turned into further evidence for the kinship between the Irish and the

Anglo-Irish. The raid is presented as a friendly, neighbourly jest or a funny error. Hence the positioning of the Anglo-Irish by the Irish indicates their approval.

The English also contribute to the construction of the Anglo-Irish hybrid identity. Mrs. Vermont, the wife of a British officer, remarks: "I do think you're so sporting the way you just stay where you are and keep going on. Who would ever have thought of the Irish turning out so disloyal" (Bowen, *The Last September* 62). With this statement Mrs. Vermont distances the Anglo-Irish from her own nationality when she says "you" and not we but she also separates them from the Irish when she says "the Irish" and not you. Further evidence for this, the positioning of the Anglo-Irish in a group outside of what is considered English, can be found in the remarks by Mrs. Vermont: "We [the English] came to take care of all of you [the Irish]" (Bowen, *The Last September* 63) and by Gerald "It was splendid of you to forget I was English. Well we shall be leaving you soon" (Bowen, *The Last September* 49). Gerald expresses that there is we, the English and you, the Irish and by that verbalizes a clear distinction; he is English, but they are not.

With this positioning of the Anglo-Irish by the Irish and English, Bowen illustrates the predicament of the Anglo-Irish. They are connected to the English but in the novel they display loyalty to the Irish rebels. Their position as a co-conspirator of the Irish entailed certain perils, and at times the novel depicts the Anglo-Irish as neutral, keeping a connection to and showing support for the English. Therefore, it could be argued that *The Last September* does not supply evidence for the positioning of the Anglo-Irish and rather displays indecisiveness or balancing between the English and the Irish, but as Moynahan observes this balancing act was necessary because:

for the period 1919-1921 . . . if the proprietors showed sympathy for the rebels, they would be burned out by the Black and Tans, and if they were friendly to the British forces and support the efforts of the royal Irish Constabulary to enforce what still was the law of the land, they had an excellent chance of being burned out by the rebels. (Moynahan 240)

Lady Naylor demonstrates this when a lorry with English soldiers passes Danielstown, and she declares: "If it wouldn't be taken in some kind of way as a demonstration, I should ask the poor fellows in to have coffee" (Bowen, *The Last September* 38). Moynahan confirms: "All that summer and into September the Naylor's have performed a balancing act" (240). In fact, this balancing act can be seen as another positioning of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland. It vindicates the fact that Anglo-Irish actions during the War of Independence were not solely determined by Anglo-Irish loyalties to Ireland but also by the circumstances and therefore the Anglo-Irish should be granted a place in post-colonial Ireland.

Conclusion

The Last September is a novel that has elicited different approaches by literary critics and many such approaches refer to the manner in which the novel articulates the decay and gradual disappearance of the Anglo-Irish. However, this essay has shown that the novel is not an obituary for the Anglo-Irish; instead *The Last September* advocates the national inclusion of the Anglo-Irish based on their hybrid identities. In the novel the Anglo-Irish hybridity is constructed as a process of displaying Irish attributes and attitudes, which can be acknowledged in Ireland.

Thus, the Anglo-Irish hybridity is “the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (Bhabha 112). Their hybridity is constructed showing loyalty and common experiences thus reflecting Bowen’s confidence in the importance of her gentry for the Irish Free State, but also her concerns about how the Anglo-Irish are deemed by the Irish. Kelly notes Bowen’s concerns: “about the position of Anglo-Ireland in post-independence Ireland, particularly in terms of how it fitted in with contemporary Irish culture as well as how it was perceived in Irish historical imaginations” (Kelly “Writing the colonial past” 139). As an appeal for acceptance by the Irish and a sign of belonging, the novel constructs the Anglo-Irish hybridity out of the positioning of the Anglo-Irish in the Irish society and culture, thus following Hall’s concept according to which identity is shaped by how one is positioned by others.

This work has examined the construction of Anglo-Irish hybridity and showed that the characters’ position themselves and are acknowledged and identified by others (English and Irish) in their Anglo-Irish hybridity. This recognition, with its implicit challenge of dominant monolithic narratives of Irish national identity, suggests the need for national inclusion as “Bowen’s text identifies her Anglo-Irish community as Irish” (Kelly “When things were closing-in” 286). However, it is Bowen, an Anglo-Irish author, who identifies her own community as Irish and the potential bias in her construction weakens it to such an extent that using the novel’s construction of a hybrid identity as a means for national inclusion of the Anglo-Irish in post-colonial Ireland resembles clutching at straws.

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