"What about Hercules? Elizabeth Bowen's Silenced Children in The Last September"

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The subject of children and war in literature can take several different approaches. For example, some people may examine literature written for children, such as C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* that is set against the backdrop of World War II. Others may look at the depiction of children in wartime literature. The latter, specifically the depiction of children in literature about the Irish Troubles, can illustrate the convergence of sympathy, empire, and ambiguous national loyalties, as in Elizabeth Bowen's work. Her first novel, *The Last September* shows the splintering of the individual due to imperial pressures plays out across an entire socio-political group equally marginalized by both the colonizer and colonized. The profound effect of this splintering upon the children and young adults in the novel highlights Anglo-Irish frustration and often-ambiguous sense of identity. The Anglo-Irish, for Bowen, are often relegated to a middle position which silences and incapacitates them. In *The Last September* the Anglo-Irish characters are unable to side with either the British or Irish because such public expressions threaten their lifestyles and safety. However, they are caught in a double bind because remaining passive is also risky. Since Bowen's Ireland is a politically explosive and volatile place, the costs of sympathy are menacing as they may manifest in violent retaliation from third party groups. Although the Anglo-Irish are privileged, their lives and homes are under immediate threat by both the British and the Irish if they appear to be more understanding of one side than of the other. The precariousness of their position is no more evident than in their effects on the children and young in *The Last September*.

For Bowen, danger lies in the tension between expressions of sympathy and its absence, for both instances have the potential to erupt into violence when a group feels excluded. In other words, the British might consider sympathy for the Irish to be a sign of treason, which would cost the Anglo-Irish their privileged position. Conversely, the Irish might attack those who appear unsympathetic to their struggle for independence. Thus, the dangerous landscape of sympathy is covered by mountains of pain that for any single character to climb could cost him or her life or livelihood. To be caught in the middle becomes imminently threatening. *The Last September*, then, is set during these last moments of the Ascendancy. This perilous time is dominated by silence in the novel, which becomes more than an inability to speak or a symbol of the decaying Anglo-Irish lifestyle. Rather, silence becomes an essential survival tool, particularly for the adults of the novel as they are haunted by the threat of openly sympathizing with one side and then provoking retaliation from the other (Kenney 53 – 54). But, why are the children silenced before the adults are in *The Last September*? One seemingly obvious reason is that children are not Bowen's first priority in the novel because they are not as ingrained in the crumbling lifestyle of the Anglo-Irish as the adults are. Furthermore, children are not granted the same political weight as adults. Yet, the younger the character, the quicker he or she is silenced in Bowen's novel. For example, a young boy, little Hercules, is only given four pages, but the young Lois Farquar figures prominently in the novel.

Also, the older characters are left with the last words of the novel. Although Bowen is primarily concerned with adults both young and aging, halfway through the novel she introduces readers to the small Anglo-Irish boy, Hercules: "He [Mr. Montmorency] was followed by an anxious little boy called Hercules, the only child among the guest and gravely *de trop*" (55). In the span of approximately three pages, Hercules provides a portrait of young children in Ireland at the time of the Troubles. He discovers a "pre-war" tennis ball (55), overhears the women at the match comment on the number of unmarried women, discusses his own family life, and asks Lois' cousin Laurence why he remains at the match if he does not want to be there. While Hercules appearance in the novel remains brief, his presence at the tennis match does leave an impression on the other characters who mention him twenty pages later and wonder why his parents made him attend the match. Yet, small as Hercules' role in the novel is, he does fit into an emerging pattern throughout the novel. Bowen's Anglo-Irish characters are increasingly silenced, and none more so than the young. The older adults, specifically Lois' aunt and uncle, the Naylors, are not silenced until the end of the novel when their house burns down. Lois and her cousin Laurence seem to lose their ability to express themselves shortly after the death of Gerald, at which point Bowen sends them to France. Hercules is gradually silenced in three pages as the adults slowly forget that he is with them as their discussion of the tennis match drifts into a discussion of money and materialism.

And, when Francie wonders after him on page 74, the subject is almost immediately changed to that of the Army. Hercules' disappearance from the text leads to several questions:

1. What does the silencing of children mean for the future of the Anglo-Irish?
2. Why are the last ones Bowen silences the same characters who lose the most in the novel?
3. Why did she only mention Hercules on four pages?

Stuck in the Middle: The Anglo-Irish and Identity Politics

The complex social structure of Ireland exacerbated the difficulty of interpersonal relationships during the early twentieth century. In addition to the Irish peasant class and the British imperial government, an aristocratic group, known as the Anglo-Irish, straddled a type of privileged middle ground between the Irish and the British. Not a middle class, the Anglo-Irish held ties to both Great Britain, in that many of their ancestors were of Welsh descent, and to Ireland, in that they were landowners who employed the peasant Irish to work their estates. Although privileged, the Anglo-Irish did suffer from their split identity and spent much of their time trying to define themselves within this middle space.[1] At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, they were in economic and political decline, which may have exacerbated their efforts to identify themselves within this volatile political arena (Moynahan 241).

The Anglo-Irish remained on the margins of the British Empire and Irish rebellion, which complicates cross-cultural sympathy. Caught between the oppressed and the oppressors, the Anglo-Irish find identification and benevolent assistance problematic. According to Robert Tracy, "Ambiguity is at the heart of the colonial situation, and shapes the behaviour of the colonial master and subject" (12). This ambiguity presents itself in the hyphenated identity used to refer to Bowen, W. B. Yeats, and other Anglo-Irish writers. The term Anglo-Irish carries a deeply politicized weight in which those under its label are defined as being somehow "not Irish" and "not English." Such demarcation leads to a complicated relationship between the Anglo-Irish, the Irish, and the English in which questions of loyalty, political support, and identity are tantamount. That is, the Anglo-Irish are part of Ireland—they live and work in Ireland—but their privileged position results from their ties to England. While they often sympathized with the Irish desire to be rid of English control, to be free would mean that the Anglo-Irish way of life could collapse.

The Last September is concerned with the last days of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy before Irish unification. Phyllis Lassner examines emotional expression in "The Past is a Burning Pattern: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*." She hints that emotion is dangerous to individual identity and refrains from examining its effects. Arguing that the novel is concerned with "the twilight of Anglo-Ireland and the fate of those younger people born to inherit the myth of the ancestral home," Lassner claims that these younger people "suffer its 'innate' isolation as well as its 'intense centripetal life'" (41). Within the isolated and alienated world of the Anglo-Irish, she asserts, "[F]eeling is dangerous, [and] action could be deadly" (49). The threat of violence, then, necessitates a silencing of any sympathetic urge, and no one is more subject to being silenced than the young who may not necessarily understand the danger of political expression.

Silence dominates *The Last September* and is more than merely the inability to speak or a symbol of the decaying Anglo-Irish lifestyle in *The Last September*. Silence is an essential survival tool, particularly in terms of national and social sentiment. Edwin Kenney explains:

> The Anglo-Irish of the Big House are dependent on the good will of the local Irish not to be threatened or destroyed; when they are threatened, they are dependent on the protection of the British. The Anglo-Irish, thus, have no real side during the Troubles; they too are isolated and scared, and they are unable to conceive of another identity for themselves or, if they could, the autonomy to achieve it. (53 – 54)

The Anglo-Irish of the text are haunted by the threat of openly sympathizing with one side and provoking retaliation from the other, and they continually censure one another for any expression. Because their compulsions to help must be silent, they are forced further into isolation from both England and Ireland, which leads to questioning whether or not the this urge has any value if they cannot carry out efforts to ease others' suffering. And, the more dangerous adult politics become, the less Bowen allows her young to speak, possibly for fear that they might unwittingly compromise their safety.

Porches, Buried Guns, and Socialites

Early in the novel, Lois' youth and naiveté creates a precarious situation.

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[1] In the *The Unappeasable Host: Studies in Irish Identities* Robert Tracy calls this attempt "the Anglo-Irish obsession with an identity defined in terms of their separation from the unhyphenated Irish" (200).

The question of whether or not the party will be able to sit on the porch safely after dinner demonstrates the tenuous position of the Anglo-Irish. The main character, Lois Farquar, asks, "'We *can* sit out on the steps tonight, can't we?" (26). One of the guests worries that they might be shot by Irish rebels if they do sit outside, but Sir Richard Naylor argues that they are perfectly safe since the Irish do not seem to mind their dealings with the English. He says:

> "We never have yet, not even with soldiers here and Lois dancing with officers up and down the avenue. You're getting very English, Francie! Isn't Francie getting very English? Do you think, maybe we ought to put sandbags behind the shutters when we shut up at night?" (26 – 27)

Although the party is safe while they sit on the porch, Sir Richard's bravado accomplishes two things. 1.) He snubs the English when he refers to Francie's fears as "very English" and suggests that they board up the windows at night. 2.) Sir Richard suggests that the Irish do not care whether or not they seem to sympathize with the British. He claims that they have not been injured yet, even with his niece dancing with English soldiers outside. If readers are to believe Sir Richard, then his family appears to have transcended the threat of exclusion, for both English and Irish do not harm them. However, later in the conversation, he must censure his bravado when the question of buried guns arises.

They are deeply suspicious of anything that might allow either the British or the Irish to encroach upon their lands. The party then discusses the tales of the Irish servants about guns being buried on the property, and they wonder if they should dig for them. Sir Richard becomes agitated at the suggestion. He berates Lois for pressing the matter, telling her, "'You'll have the place full of soldiers, trampling the young trees. There's been enough damage in that plantation with the people coming to sightsee: all Michael's friends. Now I won't have digging at all, do you understand?'" (29 – 30). Although Sir Richard had just boasted of their safety on the porch, he expresses concern that the presence of soldiers would "trample the young trees." Damage to the landscape seems to be an excuse, for the real threat seems to lie in the possibility of trouble arising over the presence of the guns, particularly since Sir Richard is the only character who openly speaks out against English involvement in Ireland. After scolding at Lois about not digging up the guns, he complains:

> "This country … is altogether too full of soldiers with nothing to do but dance and poke old women out of their beds to look for guns. It's unsettling the people, naturally. The fact is, the Army's got into the habit of fighting and doesn't know what else to do with itself, and also the Army isn't at all what it used to be. I was held up yesterday for I wouldn't like to say how long, driving over to Ballyhinch, by a thing like a coffee-pot backing in and out of a gate, with a little brute of a fellow bobbing in and out at me from under a lid at the top. … And those patrols in lorries run you into a ditch as soon as look at you. They tell me there's a great deal of socialism now in the British Army." (30)

Sir Richard's complaint is the most explicit expression of sympathy for any political side throughout the novel; that is, he sympathizes with his own group, the Anglo-Irish. In complaining of the soldiers upsetting the people and pointing out their treatment of the Irish, Sir Richard tentatively aligns the plight of the Anglo-Irish with the Irish because he disagrees with the behavior of the British soldiers. He complains that the army has lost its focus and that it engages in fruitless and meaningless battles for the sake of asserting its authority. Because he combines the army's disregard for Irish dignity with their disregard for the Anglo-Irish, he emphatically argues against anything that might allow the British to treat the Anglo-Irish as they are treating the Irish; soldiers disrupt an elderly woman's sleep *and* they push the Anglo-Irish "into a ditch as soon as look at you." He does not want the authority of the British to extend to the Anglo-Irish, thereby signaling the tenuous position of the ascendancy during the period.

Sir Richard's outburst does not go unchecked, however. His complaint, if overheard or repeated to the wrong people, could make him appear to be complicit in the Irish struggle for identity, and he and his family might be considered traitorous. His wife tries to soothe him: "'Well, it's difficult for them all . . . and they're doing their best, I think. The ones who come over here seem quite pleasant" (30). Lady Naylor tries to include the British within the Anglo-Irish sentiments by calling attention to their good-natured attempts to restore order in Ireland, thereby checking Sir Richard's anti-English remarks. But, her conciliatory comments are met with sarcasm as her nephew Laurence adds, "'It would be the greatest pity if we were to become a republic and all those lovely troops were taken away" (30 – 31). Laurence's sarcasm does not indicate sympathy with the Irish over the English, however. Rather, he calls attention to the inadequacy of Lady Naylor's silencing Sir Richard to reduce the threat against the Anglo-Irish. The Anglo-Irish, then, are reduced to what Heather Bryant Jordan refers to as "a state of suspension" in which they "find themselves particularly vulnerable" (192). That is, they are caught in a double-bind where each remark, each act, each tendency must be checked for its potential to alienate because alienation could lead to retaliation. Silence forces characters to make their political sympathies more ambivalent; however, this ambivalence is precisely what threatens them the most.

The Splintered Identity of Lois and the Difficulty of Finding a Place

Lois' maturation requires that she learns when to speak and when to be silent, but her desire to connect with others inhibits this growth. In an attempt to forge an interpersonal connection, she writes to English soldiers. Yet, this activity is unsatisfying, for Lois is unable to see the men as individuals needing intimate relationships. Bowen explains Lois's understanding of this activity:

> If these young men wrote to her, they were unimportant; besides, she only answered every third letter. These young men, concrete, blocking her mental view by their extreme closeness, moved shadowless in a kind of social glare numbing to the imagination. (12)

The soldiers are not individuals for Lois, and she cannot conceive of them as human beings with feelings. Rather, they represent an aspect of her society to which she is not intimately connected. Her writing to them, to return to Sir Richard's understanding, is merely a duty she feels compelled to perform and is, ultimately, an empty, but relatively safe form of communication.

The closest Lois comes to experiencing a sympathetic connection is in regards to Peter Connor—the IRA member who is hiding in his home on the Naylor estate. When Lois visits the Connor house with Hugo, she speaks with Michael Connor, Peter's father, about his family. Although Lois asks Michael if he has had any news of Peter, she later explains to Hugo that she "'was so glad'" to know that Peter had escaped English custody (91). She goes on to tell Hugo, "I know he is home, for Clancey saw him three days ago. But don't speak of it—one cannot be too careful. Poor Mrs. Peter must be in a dreadful state, wherever he is'" (91). Lois's caution to Hugo to keep Peter's hiding place secret and her relief that Peter was able to escape the army is the first moment in which Lois seems to be sympathetic towards anyone else in the novel. She wants to prevent the Connors from suffering the loss of Peter, so she is compelled to warn Hugo against mentioning Peter's whereabouts. Like her uncle Richard, she appears to side with the Irish, but this too is silenced. Deirdre Laigle argues, "Rejoicing in Peter Connor's escape from British custody, she is struck by the anomalous position which results from the conflict between individual relationships and political side-taking" (65). By sympathizing with Peter and his family, Lois places herself at odds with the English political agenda, whether or not the English realize that she has done so. Unfortunately, she naively fails to recognize that by excluding the English from her relationship to the Connors, and by extension, to the Irish rebels, she admits a significant impediment to her relationship with Gerald.

Lois believes that because she has maintained a sympathetic relationship with the Connors, she, and anyone accompanied by her, is immune to potential violence from the Irish. When Hugo suggests, "'Peter might have shot Gerald,'" Lois corrects him, claiming, "'Oh no, not when he was with me'" (91). Laigle argues that Lois's confidence is not unwarranted. She writes:

> The social relationship is thus powerful enough to put Lois and her friends out of personal danger, and to make it unthinkable that she betray what she knows for political reasons, even taking into account her attraction to Gerald and her links with garrison society. On Lois' side this ambiguous position is tenable because her interests and motivations lie in immediate experience and in individuals: her judgements are emotional rather than intellectual and can thus accomodate [SIC] an absence of Logic; causes are largely irrelevant. (65)

Lois's confidence in her safety from an attack by the Connors or their Irish friends may be justifiable; however, she is not as confident in the potential safety afforded to her friends by Gerald, the English soldier. She wonders if Gerald would have shot Peter Connor if they had come upon him while walking, or if Gerald would have let Peter go since he was off duty (91). That she is uncertain of what Gerald would do and questions whether or not her friendship with someone would outweigh Gerald's loyalty to the British Empire illustrates a central problem for Lois as she cannot find a way to discuss the situation with Gerald. She wonders if his nationalist loyalty would prevent him from identifying with people who hold different political beliefs and from feeling compelled to help them when they suffer. Silence, again, serves as a preservation tool, despite its ambiguous display.

Hercules on four pages

The character of Hercules, then, becomes an interesting case study within *The Last September*. If we follow the theory that the young and the most silent are more able to survive, then why does Hercules only appear on four pages of the text and never appears towards the end of the novel to show the survival of the new generation? After Francie wonders about him on page 74, Bowen never mentions him again. We could assume that Hercules survives the Troubles and goes on to adapt as Laurence and Lois do, but he lacks their resources to go abroad and is wholly dependent upon his family. He does not even have the ability to choose his own name once he goes to school, and tells the others:

"'Hercules is a family name because I am the only boy, but when I go to school I shall be called Richard after my godfather as everybody says that Hercules even as an initial would be such a disadvantage to me, though not nearly so bad as being afraid of bats'" (56). While a lack of control may be advantageous to Lois and Laurence, it might be damaging to Hercules. He is bound by what other tell him to do. He is "'using up the end of [his] sisters' governess'" because "'they do not see how [he] can possibly go to school till [he has] got over being afraid of bats'" (56), and he must attend the tennis match and listen to Laurence tell him where to put the pre-war ball he finds simply because of his age (55, 57). So, what happens to Hercules? Is Bowen suggesting that only those coming of age like Lois and Laurence are most adept at handling the Troubles? Are small children simply extensions of their parents on whom they depend for everything? Are they casualties of war because they lack any control over their lives? This silencing, then, suggests that the children of the Troubles are led to break with the traditions of their parents. They are somehow prevented from carrying on a way of life that is broken by the tension between the British and the Irish that culminates in varying degrees of violence. Perhaps this refusal to continue with the Ascendancy is part of their urge for self-preservation. In order to survive, they must give up the old ways and look for new ways to identify themselves.

Laurence, Lois's cousin, is particularly intriguing in these terms because he prides himself on being emotionally unavailable throughout the novel, which may stem from his dual cultural identity of being from Ireland but educated in England. Deirdre Laigle suggests, "The fact that his opinions are based on nothing more than attitudinizing becomes inescapable, and it is obvious that maturity will come too late to make him able or wishful to help save Danielstown [the Big House owned by his aunt and uncle]" (67). Laigle argues that the young, like Laurence, cannot participate in the preservation of the Anglo-Irish because of a lack of maturity. However, I would suggest that rather than a lack of maturity, their ability to adapt to a changing political and social situation is way prevents them from saving the Ascendancy. That is, they are more flexible in their understanding of political currents, and, if silencing is a survival technique, the younger the character for Bowen, the easier he or she will be able to survive the Troubles. Children, then, who do not control the estates that their adult counterparts do, are necessarily silenced because they do not yet hold a socio-economic stake in the political situation of the day. And, a character like Hercules, who is younger than any of the other characters in the novel, has the least amount of contol—he cannot even leave the tennis match because someone brought him (57), whereas he can question why Laurence stays since Laurence has more control over his own presence than Hercules has.

Yet, the more control that a character has in *The Last September*, the more he or she struggles with keeping political sympathies quiet. The Naylors continually struggle to keep their sympathies for the Irish and frustration with the British soldiers under wraps. Sir Richard complains that "this country… is altogether too full of soldiers with nothing to do but dance and poke old women out of their beds to look for guns" (30). Because the social standing of the Naylors depends on their hosting British soldiers and citizens at Danielstown, they are seen as sympathetic to the Empire, which provokes the rebels into burning the house at the end of the novel. Sir and Lady Naylor must stand and watch their home burn whereas Laurence and Lois are safely away in Europe. Speaking, then is a dangerous game, and one that the adults find most difficult to navigate in the novel. Bowen seems to suggest that if only the adults kept quiet, their way of life might have been preserved. But, the text is not that reductive. Rather, Bowen's novel seems to suggest that the responsibilities associated with growing older can put one in a more dangerous position during a time of violence. She does not, however, offer any alternatives or suggestions for survival. Rather, she portrays a moment in time where those without such responsibilities are the ones who are most equip to weather the storm.

Sincerity to Mask Fear

The speech of adults is not without problems in *The Last September*, and the problems that ensue as a result of their expressions underscore the danger of political allegiance. Lady Naylor is the most problematic character in these terms. Lorna Reynolds asserts, "Lady Naylor, the real head of the house, is a fine example of an Anglo-Irish snob, obtuse, bossy, and sublimely self-confident: she is also dangerous, because she thinks she has the right to interfere in everybody's life" (150). When her husband speaks out on behalf of the Irish, Lady Naylor is quick to feign sympathy for the English soldiers because they are simply doing their duty in Ireland. She entertains the English in her home. She presents her argument against Gerald and Lois' engagement in terms of her sympathetic attachment to her niece and out of sympathy for the unloved Gerald. However, Bowen continually subverts Lady Naylor's sympathetic expressions by relating her petty remarks about the people with whom she is supposed to sympathize. For example, Lady Naylor tells Francie:

> "They [English soldiers] are all alike—it's a pity, I always think. … [Lois] made very nice friends at her school in England, but it's so unlucky, they're never allowed to come over.

> Something said in the English press has given rise to an idea that this country's unsafe. …
> *I* should never go by the papers about England." (78)

Lady Naylor expresses disdain for the English who believe what they read in the newspapers about Ireland. Her comment indicates that she sees herself and her family as being apart from the English—and they are: they are Anglo-Irish. However, what she does not say is that she necessarily identifies with the Irish. Rather, in her disparaging observations on the English soldiers and press, Lady Naylor stakes out a markedly separate and distinct identity for the Anglo-Irish that sets them above both the English and the Irish. However, this demarcation appears to lead to the final destruction of the Naylor home. Ultimately, Lady Naylor's sympathetic rhetoric reveals only narcissism—the complete lack of sympathy translates to political isolation and demise. Lady Naylor finds the English soldiers unsuitable and snubs Lois's English friends, but at the same time she sees value in maintaining social relationships with the English. As Victoria Glendinning argues:

> The land-owning Irish, like Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, are bound by interest and tradition to the union with England. They hope for a 'favourable' end to the Troubles; they entertain the British officers and their wives. And yet they find the English among them vulgar and insensitive; they comment on this among themselves. (81)

Because of her self-interested reasons for affecting a sympathetic attachment to the English, the sincerity of Lady Naylor's expressions becomes suspect. In simultaneously disparaging and coddling both the English and the Irish, Lady Naylor leaves her true agenda—a separate, distinct, and stable identity and socio-economic rank for the Anglo-Irish—unsaid.

Throughout *The Last September* she denigrates the English through scathing assessments of their behavior and attitudes in comparison to that of the Anglo-Irish. She complains, "'Really altogether, I think all English people very difficult to trace. They are so pleasant and civil, but I do often wonder if they are not a little shallow: for no reason at all they will pack up everything and move across six counties" (80). Because Lady Naylor finds them to be "not a little shallow," she distances herself from the English, signaling her inability to identify with their imperialist aims; therefore, she cannot support them even in polite conversation where she resorts to catty comments that articulate her lack of sympathy for them. Her criticism is indirect because an open attack on the English would appear treasonous. When she seems to be sympathetic about Gerald's death at the end of the novel, it is nearly impossible not be suspect of her sincerity. She tells Mrs. Trent:

> "Yes, it's been sad here, lately; we've been so much shocked and distressed about that unfortunate young Lesworth. I think I felt it particularly; he had been out here so much and seemed so glad to talk, and had come, in a way, to depend on one. Though it was a shock, too, for Lois. . . . She did not take it as hard as I feared, girls of her generation seem less sensitive, really . . . But it was terrible, wasn't it? I still think: how terrible—But he did have a happy life. I wrote that to his mother; I said, it must always be some consolation to think how happy his life had been. He quite beamed, really; he was the life and soul of everything. And she wrote back—I did not think tactfully, but of course she would be distressed—that it was *her* first consolation to think he died in so noble a cause." (301)

Her comments about the shock and distress provoked by Gerald's death are dubious since her prior behavior towards him does not suggest that he was ever a truly significant figure to their social group. She snubs Lois for not behaving as though she were more affected by Gerald's death, thereby indicating that, for Lady Naylor, emotions are to be performed, particularly when performance will prevent unseemly consequences. She also seems to forget that the end of Gerald's life was not particularly happy as he had broken off his engagement to her niece. Most significantly, though, her off-hand comment about Mrs. Lesworth's response to her note of condolence betrays her own political sympathies. She complains that Mrs. Lesworth is not comforted by the fact that Gerald was supposedly happy; Mrs. Lesworth is comforted by his death on behalf of the British Empire—something even the superficial Lady Naylor cannot seem to completely condone.

Bowen uses Lady Naylor instead to show the inability of sympathy to provoke benevolent socio-political change in times of political instability when it must be silenced in order for the individual to survive. Lady Naylor may not be the most sympathetic character in the novel, nor the most reliable, but her final speech indicates that she has learned a way to preserve her way of life. Unspoken loyalties precipitates disastrous ends in *The Last September*. While Sir Richard and Lois silently sympathize with the Irish, they outwardly exclude them, and Irish perception of this exclusion leads to the burning of the Danielstown and the end of the Anglo-Irish reign in the town. Public expressions of the desire to help the Irish are risky for them, but their absence potentially results in destruction and violence. Bowen struggles with the inability to find effective avenues for communicating sympathetic responses in troubled geopolitical zones because danger resides in both their expressions and absences.

Lorna Reynolds confirms, “The point is a condemnation of Anglo-Irish society as it had become at the time, its unawareness of the dangers in which it stood, of the fact that it had not succeeded in reconciling the people, nor even, it would seem, the very countryside” (153). The Naylors and Lois are blind to this threat because they see themselves as immune to the violence of the Troubles. They believe that because they are on friendly terms with the Connors and other Irish inhabitants, they will be spared any act of violence that might befall their neighbors. However, the ending of the novel shows that this is false hope, for it is the rebels, and not the English, who destroy the Big House.

Bowen writes: “For in February, before those leaves had visibly budded, the death—the execution, rather—of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night” (153). Referring to this “execution” as “unreckoned,” Bowen indicates the oblivion under which the Naylors and their neighbors have operated (303). The burning of Danielstown signifies the ultimate failure of the Anglo-Irish attempt to straddle both political extremes. In other words, the Anglo-Irish unsuccessfully negotiate their political position, for in assuaging the English army by ignoring the Irish, they have, quite probably and even unknowingly, excluded the Irish. Bowen’s Anglo-Irish may sympathize with the Irish, but because that sympathy is constantly silenced, they do not pacify the Irish as they have pacified the English. The Naylors entertain English people at Danielstown, but they do not invite the Irish into their home. They only interact with the Irish by going to the Connor house or meeting them on the road. When they experience an urge to connect with the Irish, they sublimate it, as Lois does when she sees the IRA man in the lane. Their fear of offending and alienating the English results in isolating them from their Irish neighbors and places them in a dangerous position.

Bowen’s Anglo-Irish adults appear to fare the least well throughout *The Last* September. Their big houses are burned, and they are left in a land consumed in a political tug-of-war. The young adults, like Lois and Laurence are able to escape to Europe where they forge new identities for themselves and leave the traditions in Ireland. But children, like Hercules, disappear from the text. Readers never learn what happens to young Hercules who is unable to control his own fate and must follow whatever his parents and his governess tell him. If they, like the Naylors, stay in Ireland where the big houses burn, then, these children become casualties of war in such a way that they are stripped of identity and agency. They are even removed from the generation of young adults coming into their own who could influence the developing nature of Irish life as they are the very people—like Lois and Laurence—who have left Ireland for Europe. Thus, the youngest members of the Ascendancy are left, like Hercules, to languish as mere footnotes to the story of a declining way of life. The cost of the Troubles on the Anglo-Irish in *The Last September*, then, is the increasing instability of the individual’s understanding of his or her own identity and, by extension, the identity of the structures supporting their surrounding reality. When those individuals are children, their lack of agency leads to increased instability, and readers can only speculate about their slippery futures.

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