Titel der Masterarbeit

“Traumatized Women in Eire: As Reflected in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* and Pamela Hinkson's *The Ladies' Road*”

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

"I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes."

Türkan Kaplan
HINWEIS

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1 Introduction

As with the rest of the world, the first quarter of the twentieth century was an extremely harsh time for the Irish as a nation. As a part of the United Kingdom, the Irish experienced the deprivations and losses caused by the Great War between 1914 and 1918, quickly followed by the Irish War of Independence fought between 1919 and 1922. It was, however, Irish women who were most affected by these and other internal and external events. This thesis investigates the state of Irish women in the early 1900s by focusing on the depiction of female characters in the work of two war time novels: The Last September by Elizabeth Bowen and The Ladies’ Road by Pamela Hinkson. Specifically, the focus is an exploration of traumatized Irish women during the early 1900s and how they were treated from different historical and sociological perspectives. By tracing the history of Irish women from the period in question, the second part of this thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the female characters and consider to what extent it is faithful to the historical background in both works. There are a number of female characters in both novels from which the reader can learn about the lives of Irish women during this period.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter covers trauma literature and explains the term trauma in order to show why the female characters in the works discussed are considered to be traumatized. The second chapter provides a survey of the historical background. It contains an analysis of the major historical and political events that shaped Ireland from the late 1800s until the 1920s and the effect these events had on Irish society, including the social condition of Anglo-Irish society, political turbulence in Ireland, and the social background of the “the troubled years”, during which the “Big House” concept also emerges. The third chapter is an analysis of the function of women in Irish society; it is divided into three sections: the first section looks at the role of women as “Homemakers”; the second section examines how women are affected by religion; and the third section describes the educational level of women in the 1900s and their position in terms of employment opportunities. Chapter 4 presents a critical analysis of the two novels, including the fact that how women are portrayed exclusively as wives,
mothers, daughters in a suffering world of 1920s both in fiction and reality. In Chapter 4, a comparison will be made between the women described in the novels, and historical reality which suggests that the representation of female characters is historically fairly accurate and could serve as a useful source of information about Irish women in the 1900s.

In Chapter 5, the conclusion, the findings of the first part of this thesis will be compared to those of the second part demonstrating how historical facts are represented in both works, reflecting the situation of women in the troubled years of Ireland in the early 20th century.
2 Trauma Literature

“Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: This is the meaning of the word unspeakable.”

Judith Lewis Herman

This chapter is not concerned with the technical details of traumatic disorders as defined by psychotherapists. Rather, its focus is to explore the traumatized aspects of the female characters in the selected novels in the last two chapters of this thesis. Still, it is essential to explain the nature of trauma with clear definitions provided by the psychoanalysts as a part of the theoretical analysis. It will also consider how the term is represented in the world of letters in order to understand better why the female characters in the novels discussed are considered to be traumatized.

Since the 1990s, academic interest in trauma has grown, as psychoanalysis, feminist, postcolonial, race and African studies have formed around the themes of genocide, war trauma, torture, the holocaust and rape. These studies share a common interest in themes like memory, and memory repression, testimony, oppression, recovery and migration. Although this thesis cannot cover each and every one of these aspects in depth, some of them will be examined in the final chapter – namely psychoanalysis and trauma theory.

This chapter starts with the definition of trauma before proceeding to the subject of traumatized women in Ireland in the 1920s in the selected texts. The cornerstones of trauma both in theory and in literature will then be explored in relation to some of the significant scholars who have specialized in trauma literature.

The term “trauma”, originates from Greek etymology, its meaning varies depending on usage. In medical contexts, trauma is defined as a disordered

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1 Herman, p. 1.
psychic or behavioral state resulting from mental or emotional stress or physical injury.\textsuperscript{2}

In order to clarify the terms from the beginning, Kopf notes that “‘Trauma' in everyday’s language is often used synonymous with the traumatic event.'Being traumatized’ then equals having lived through terrible events one is not able to talk about and has to suppress in one’s memory.” (Haehnel, 50)

During war, men, without fail, are wounded through violence and ravaged by starvation. However, they are also emotionally scarred by the fear, loss, and grief that war entails. The president of the British Psychoanalytic Association, Ernest Jones, commented on the mental status of the human under war conditions as follows:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{to indulge in behaviour of a kind that is throughout abhorrent to the civilised mind... All sorts of previously forbidden and hidden impulses, cruel, sadistic, murderous and so on, are stirred to greater activity, and the old intrapsychical conflicts which, according to Freud, are the essential cause of all neurotic disorders, and which had been dealt with before by means of ‘repression’ of one side of the conflict are now reinforced, and the person is compelled to deal with them afresh under totally different circumstances.}\textsuperscript{3}
\]

However, the women and children on the home front are also emotionally scarred by their experiences, as they are similarly marked by the fear, loss, and grief experienced by the men on the front line, and they are also witnesses to the injustices of inequality. Therefore, as diagnosed by some of the therapists as the “shell- shock” effect of the war on people, “everyone had a 'breaking point’: weak or strong, courageous or cowardly - war frightened everyone witless.”\textsuperscript{4}

At this point, it is worth mentioning what Khan notes in order to compare the situation of women and men during any war time and how she finds women’s situation worse and harder as they had to keep quiet as everything around them is spoken aloud:

\textsuperscript{3} http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml#three.
\textsuperscript{4} http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml#three.
The claim that war makes upon women is, in comparison with that made upon men, more hidden and often more difficult; for it is easier to be active than passive, easier to place oneself under obedience in a time of crisis than to serve by silent anxiety. Courage is manifest not only in brilliant attack, but also patient waiting and patient endurance. In war-time, women, too, go to battle; they battle with the slow torture of fear and suspense, the long agonies of anticipation; the sleepless nights and fevered imagination; the pitiless hours usurped by visions of battered bleeding bodies (Khan, 138).

On this point, there are differing opinions concerning trauma theory. As Geertsma mentioned in her paper, Klein’s therapeutic suggestion of trauma as “excesses of the real” conflicts with the Freudian view on trauma as “symbolic”, in which “the loss is interpreted not as a hole or void but as a prohibited content” (Geertsma, 13-14). Given these disagreements, this study’s definition of trauma is based on Freud’s suggestion that trauma can be considered to be ‘a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind’ (Caruth, Unclaimed, 3). Caruth argues that such wounds do not necessarily occur immediately after the violence, but unconsciously at a later stage in one’s life. She states: “This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (Caruth, Unclaimed, 4).

Silverstone points out in her article that Caruth defines trauma

[...] as the response to an unexpected or overwhelmingly violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena”, adding paradoxically: “[...] that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness.” (see Caruth, Unclaimed, p. 91-92)

Considering this definition of trauma, it is not surprising that war-time literature, especially the ones examined here, has been particularly focused on women’s socially prescribed roles as mothers, wives and daughters and their physical and psychological violation and vulnerable members of society. However, in his dissertation, Hwangbo claims that fictional sufferers of trauma have a more
controlled and artistic impact on their readers than real sufferers because “... the narrative function of healing and defiance, which the author produces by his or her sustained empathic stance toward victims of trauma, critiques the traumatogenic forces in society that bring about the real-life trauma and helps to create an alternative vision of society that is not founded upon the subjugation of selected designated victims or minorities.” (Hwangbo, 5) At this point, it is worth stressing Kacandes’ perspective concerning the relationship between trauma and literary theory:

In accounting for a literary text, one needs to investigate components of witnessing at the level of the story (that is, the events that make up the plot), at the level of the text (that is, the specific forms the telling of those events takes), and at the level of the production and reception of the text. [...] That is to say, literary texts can be about trauma, in the sense that they can depict perpetrating of violence against characters who are traumatized by the violence and then successfully or unsuccessfully witness their trauma. But texts can also ‘perfor’ trauma, in the sense that they can ‘fail’ to tell the story, by eliding, repeating, and fragmenting components of the story. (Kacandes, 56)

Moreover, one could avoid the ambiguity of the term ‘trauma’ altogether by distinguishing, as Kaplan did, between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ trauma, and clarify Freud’s conception of trauma in terms of “Nachträglichkeit”.

Freud’s initial definition of trauma focused on “female hysteria and its traumatic symptoms as occasioned by sexual incidents in an environment of rigid sexual repression” (Kaplan, 27). In her book, Kaplan also suggests that Freud’s distinction between ‘passive’ female trauma and “active” male trauma was an attempt to answer the question of “how the contrasting positions for men and women within national imaginaries result in different traumatic syndromes is important.” (Kaplan, 27)

With regard to ‘war trauma’, Freud believed that many of the soldiers that participated in World War I did so to protect their nation against outside forces. According to Kaplan, Freud’s distinction between war trauma and female hysteria are based on causality: the former has sharp external causes and the latter is the result of suppressed illusions (Kaplan, 27-29). The idea of repressed memory is well linked with Freud’s concept of “Nachträglichkeit”,...
which means “afterwardsness”, which he later noted of repressed memory, “only become[s] a trauma after the event” (Laplanche, “Life”, 41). As Laplanche⁵ explains in further depth,

Freud’s concept of afterwardsness contains both great richness and great ambiguity between a retrogressive and progressive directions. I want to account for this problem of the directional to and fro by arguing that, right at the start, there is something that goes in the direction from the past to the future, and in the direction from the adult to the baby, which I call the implantation of the enigmatic message. This message is then retranslated following a temporal direction which is sometimes progressive and sometimes retrogressive […]. (Laplanche, “Seduction”, 222).

These ideas were later clarified by Lacan⁶, a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, who called it 'après-coup', arguing that “the real implication of the nachträglich, for example, has been ignored, though it was there all the time and had only to be picked up.” (Lacan, 216) This experience of retarded trauma exists in the traumatized person’s subconscious and reemerges at a later stage - often in one’s dreams. Thus, Freud suggests the method of “talking cure” as part of the therapy in psychoanalysis terms, carrying Freud’s discussion on to a linguistic level:

What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs... as if by chance.... The function of the tuché, of the real as encounter--the encounter insofar as it may be missed, insofar as it is essentially the missed encounter--first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to rouse our attention, that of trauma.(qtd. Belau,“The Tragic Encounter”, 10)

In order to indicate the difference between his approach towards trauma and Freud’s, Lacan uses the Oedipus complex as an example. As quoted in Belau’s, Lacan claims that

Freud, that is, embraces the Oedipus myth in order to expose the impossible and abyssal structure of identity through the Greek tragic experience of recognition. In this sense, then, the Oedipus complex, for Freud, is not so much a stage (a “time” or occurrence in the infant's life) as it is a structure. (qtd. Belau, “The Tragic Encounter”, 8)

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⁵ See http://pmc.lath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2caruth.txt, for Laplanche’s more detailed discussion of Trauma and Time which goes far beyond the scope of this thesis to be discussed here.

⁶ http://www.egs.edu/library/jacques-lacan/biography/.
By contrast, Lacan explains it by means of the metaphor of the ‘missed encounter’:

Oedipus turns away from the symbolic mandate--the infuriating pronouncements of the father--to the impossible maternal Thing. He embraces the traumatic recognition of incestuous enjoyment. What Oedipus seeks in this recognition is a knowledge without return. Knowledge comes too late for Oedipus, however. He misses the experience, which, for him, is the constituting moment of his subjectivity, precisely because he is too present to the experience. He actually did enjoy the incestuous union with the mother. This experience, however, as chance encounter, as tuché, was unreadable as such. (qtd. Belau, “The Tragic Encounter”, 9)

The subconscious or repressed mind of the traumatized people explained above may be acted out by different kinds of metaphors like ‘mirror’ or ‘shadow’. As Bohleber stated, there are two types of mirror metaphor. The first functions in a passive way and “supplies an undistorted reflection” reminiscent of the second is “a living [one] that actively adjusts to its objects” as described by Lacan, Winnicott\(^7\) and others. (Bohleber, 29-31) According to Bohleber, Winnicott also sees the reflection of mother in the mirror\(^8\) as an archetype within the frame of psychoanalysis:

The glimpse of baby’s and child’s seeing the self in the mother’s face, and afterwards in a mirror, gives a way of looking at analysis and at the psychotherapeutic task. Psychotherapy is not making clever and apt interpretations; by and large it is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings. It is a complex derivative of the face that reflects what is there to be seen. I like to think of my work this way, and to think if I do this well enough the patient will find his or her own self, and will be able to exist and to feel real. Feeling real is more than existing; it is a finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation. (Winnicott, Playing,117) As Bohleber summarised, the mirror metaphor stems from the need to explain one’s self to another person and functions “ as a guiding metaphor to describe and map the process of self discovery” (Bohleber, 29)

Additionally, Bohleber asserts that according to psychic equivalence mode, which is one of the two elementary modes of representation emerge, one’s own

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\(^8\) Cf. chapter 4.2 for mirror metaphor in The Ladies’ Road.
thoughts and feelings are confused with, or taken for, an accurate reflection of reality. (Bohleber, 33) This explanation explicitly hints at the “shadow aspect” in trauma writing. According to a glossary of Jungian Terms, shadow is defined as the repressed, inferior layer of the personal unconscious. Its contents are emotional and imaginal. All we deny, fear, or hate in ourselves collects in the shadow, which appears in dreams as a frightening figure of the dreamer’s gender (because it’s part of his or her ego). "Realization of the shadow" means growing fully, emotionally conscious of the shadow’s contents, a moral problem evaded by people whose respectable conscious selves deny the shadow and project it into personal, family, or cultural scapegoats. The shadow is often contaminated by inferior function/attitude, anima, etc. identification with the shadow produces a kind of amoral, inflated craziness.

Though shadow functions mostly as an image used for the dead people in many literary works, Jung interpreted the “Shadow of the Self” as symbolising “the dark pole of the Self archetype.” According to Saltzman, ‘Shadow’ is the reflection of one’s own nature covered by the exterior personality, which is examined in greater depth in chapter 4.2. Parallel to Freud’s idea of ‘superego’, Saltzman claims that the shadow can


 Apart from defining trauma, it is also important to examine the effects of trauma. Bloom, referring to many critics and psychiatrists in her work, claims that trauma often renders its victims unable to explain their experiences in words as those terrible experiences prevent the traumatized people from keeping the memories in mind. As long as they cannot remember that event they can neither talk about it, nor share it with others. Since it is difficult to cope with the effects of trauma on their own, “the trauma will remain unmetabolized, unintegrated and still present, continuing an existence in the ever-present ‘now’ of the nondominant hemisphere reality, haunting the person as it reappears as

nightmares, flashbacks and behavioral reenactments”, as opposed to shadows and images seen in the mirror. Moreover, the strange traumatic behavior of the victim is caused by the same loss of language because they are left with nothing but their own minds to make sense of their experiences. (Bloom, Bridging-Sanctuaryweb, 11) Consequently, the link between language and trauma is very strong, as noted by both Freud and Breuer: “Each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words.” (Freud, 1893: 6)

In the novels selected, the women are traumatized by the war for different reasons. However, it is gender which directs women’s trauma further due to the fact that they are only seen as women at home instead of examining their jobs, identities or contributions to their societies and nations. The First World War as well as the Irish War of Independence and the time in between these two troubled events, are hard on the men fighting on the front, but they are equally painful for the women on the home front, as they are confronted with the losses of their sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers, as well as by the deprivations of wartime. The experience of losing the males in the family and especially their sons and brothers have been more destructive for women concerning the fact that womanhood is generally speaking nourished by motherhood in most societies. Moreover, as Bulman states with reference to Hinkson’s The Ladies Road, “[t]raumatic experience shatters basic personal and cultural assumptions about the primary way we order reality. Suddenly there is no safety, the world no longer makes sense, other people cannot be trusted, the future is no longer predictable, and because of dissociation, the past is no longer known.” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) 11 On the other hand, some of the female characters in The Last September experience similar, but deeper tragedies, which appeared already before their birth, in their mother’s womb and

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11 This quote can be found in Bloom, p. 10: http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/PDFs_new/Bloom%20Caring%20for%20Caregiver.pdf.
soon after as a result of the oppression applied on the young lady by the over protective aunt and uncle who takes up the role of her mother after her mother’s death, or the ghostly figure of the mother who affects the role of her daughter. However, Bowen on the basis of her experience, wisely conveys the importance of art and its value in the treatment of traumatized individuals by referring to Lois and Laurence and their talents for drawing and writing. When they go to France at the end of the book, the author notes the healing power of the art surrounding them: “Artistic performance is the bridge across the black hole of trauma, the evolved individual and group response to the tragic nature of human existence.”

Bowen, in the preface to *The Demon Lover*, explains the link between such destructive events as war time and how they affect the people who were haunted by these incidents in dreams or nightmares and defined the situation of these traumatized people “as a rising tide of hallucination” (Bowen, Demon, 133):

> The hallucinations are an unconscious, instinctive, saving resort on the part of the characters: life, mechanized by the controls of wartime, and emotionally torn and impoverished by changes, had to complete itself in some way. It is a fact that in Britain, and especially in London, in wartime many people had strange deep intense dreams. (Bowen, Impressions, 49)

12 http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/PDFs_new/Bloom%20Bridging%20the%20black%20hole%20of%20trauma.pdf, p.16.
3 Historical and Social Context: Ireland and its Struggle for Independence

“...Awake or in my sleep, I have no peace now,
Before the ball is struck, my breath has gone,
And yet I tremble lest she may deceive me
And leave me in this land, where every woman’s son
Must carry his own coffin and believe,
In dread, all that the clergy teach the young.”

[Austin Clarke, *Collected Poems*, 1936]^{13}

Before examining the depiction of the suffering of Irish women in the novels selected, it is necessary to comment on the socio-political situation of Ireland in the 1920s and 30s, and consider how it affected the place of women in Irish society. Thus, the following subchapters give a brief survey of the historical, political, and social background of Irish society from the beginning of the 1900s and its negative effect on the status of Irish women. Given the limitations of space and time, this study does not aim at providing a comprehensive analysis of every single aspect of those troubled years, but must needs to be confined to key-events that play an important role in the historical context described in the novels. The focus here will be on the situation and fate of women in war-time Ireland – notably as a daughter, sister, mother, and wife.

\[^{13}\text{Clarke, p.420.}\]
3.1 Historical and Political Background: Ireland’s Troubled History from the late 1800s to the 1920s

“In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom...”\(^{14}\)

[Patrick Pearse]

This chapter explores several of the key events in Irish history from the 19\(^{th}\) century to the first quarter of the 20\(^{th}\) century, and their impact on Irish society. However, it is not possible in this thesis to cover all the political and historical incidents of the time under review and their impact on Irish society but only the major facts and incidents and other relevant historical background information can be provided. Hence, this subchapter is mainly descriptive, and its central purpose is to highlight some of the social and political tragedies, which are also depicted in the selected novels.

In the course of Irish history, as Smyth noted, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy were considered to be the representatives of the colonialist community in their domination of Irish political and cultural life, and in as such they became increasingly strung out across the constituent parts of their identity. [...] the history of relations between the earlier and the later invaders of Ireland is one of political and cultural strife, interspersed with moments of compromise and accommodation. (Smyth,Gerry, 3)

This group of people stood for their superiority over the Irish policy and tradition of Protestantism Ascendancy, most of whom were members of the Church of Ireland. This privileged class sought to apply the English way of living to every aspect of their lives, including politics, commerce, law, science and social life. (Laurence, 19-23) Elizabeth Bowen once stated on her own duality as an Irish woman and privileged member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that she felt to be “English in Ireland, Irish in England” (Poplowski, 26-28).

\(^{14}\) Genet, p.37.
The unrest that later emerged between the English, the nationalist Irish and the Anglo-Irish in Ireland can be traced back several centuries, to the invasion of the Normans, who had already conquered England. However, a particularly important watershed followed the Nine Years’ War (1594 to 1603)\(^{15}\), fought between the forces of the Gaelic Irish noblemen Hugh O’Neill and Hugh Roe O’Donnell and their allies, against English rule in Ireland. The war ended in defeat for the Irish nobles, which led to their exile in the Flight of the Earls and to the Plantation of Ulster. In 1608 the absent noblemen’s lands were confiscated and planted with English and Scottish settlers in what is known as “the Plantation of Ulster”. The Nine Years’ War was therefore an important step in the English/Scottish colonisation of Ulster and of the areas of Ireland outside the Pale (the region around Dublin). (Laurence, 18-19) Due to the plantations practised by the English Commonwealth in 1640s and 1650s, the construction of Irish identity gradually changed and conceptual confusion started to appear from those years, and has continued even into current times between “Old English”, “Gaelic Irish”, “ British” and later “Anglo-Irish “, as Lenihan noted:

Gaelic Irish and Old English were increasingly seen by outsiders, and defined themselves, as undifferentiatedly Irish. [...] The term ‘Old English’ itself was used by settlers of pre-Reformation stock to emphasise their shared civility with the ‘New’, or Protestant, English. [...] By the 1920s, then, and certainly by the 1930s, members of the Catholic élite, whatever their maternal ancestry, shared a common identity and set of political attitudes; in short, ‘Old English’ may be used as ‘a convenient shorthand to describe the political attitude of those who accepted the link of Ireland with the English crown and relied upon constitutional methods for the remedy of grievances’. [...] The term ‘British’ has validity because of its contemporary usage (in referring to grantees in the Ulster plantation, for example) and, especially, because it embraces, as it was designed to, both English and Scottish interests in Ireland. This is a reminder that the Protestant interest, however diverse in terms of class and ethnicity, was united by a colonialist mentality: the consciousness of being a privileged minority in a hostile environment. (Lenihan, 5-6)

Although many upper-class Catholics had not supported the Gaelic side in the Nine Years’ War, following it all Catholics were subjected to penal laws that were enacted throughout the century. These intensified when William of Orange (William III) ascended to the throne of England in 1690. Catholics were quickly

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marginalized by the restriction of their rights, such as the right to own property, the ability to educate or bring up their children according to Catholic teachings, and the right to hold elections following the penal laws of 1695.\(^\text{16}\)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1641</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>after the Ulster Plantation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1661</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>after Cromwell</td>
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<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>after Catholic King Charles II restored lands</td>
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<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>after the Williamite War</td>
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<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>after the Penal Laws</td>
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Figure 1: Land owned by Catholics from 1641-1778. (Liechty, 22)

According to Holloway, the United Irishmen’s failed rebellion of 1798 against British rule hastened the passing of the Act of Union in 1801. The Penal Laws were relaxed in the 19\(^{th}\) century, but Catholics still suffered many injustices. The 19\(^{th}\) century leader Daniel O’Connell campaigned for Catholic Emancipation – the right of Catholics to sit in the Westminster Parliament, which had been denied for more than a century –and for the Act of Union, which united Great Britain and Ireland into one state, to be repealed. In 1823, O’Connell established the Catholic Association which had other aims, but intended to improve the status of Irish Catholics, notably as regards electoral reform, tenants’ rights, and economic development. Eventually, the government in London agreed to Catholic emancipation and the right of both Catholics and Presbyterians, as well as members of other Christian denominations outside the Established Church of Ireland to sit in parliament. This resulted in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The Great Famine of 1845 and 1846 caused the deaths and emigration of millions of Irish, and accelerated the pace of the British Land Reform and Acts of 1870 based on the so-called “Three F’s” of ‘Fixed Tenancies’, ‘Free Sale’ and ‘Fair Rents’ and the 1881 Act broadened its limits.\(^\text{17}\) (Holloway, 8-12)

\(^{16}\) See [http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11611c.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11611c.htm) for more detailed information on this issue.

When troubles arose from Republican groups like the Irish Volunteers, which later became the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the British Prime Minister Gladstone wanted to give Home Rule to Ireland in 1886, which he hoped would calm the mounting tensions. However, many British and Irish Unionists opposed Home Rule because they assumed it would erode the bonds of the United Kingdom. In 1893 Gladstone proposed a second Home Rule Bill, but was again defeated. Though it passed the House of Commons, it was rejected by the House of Lords.

In 1905, a new, more radical Irish nationalist party called Sinn Fein was founded by Arthur Griffith. Sinn Fein sought nothing less than the complete independence of Ireland from England. (McConnel, BBC History) Meanwhile, tension between the English government and Irish revolutionists were rising. In England, a third attempt was made to pass the Home Rule Bill, this time sparking huge protests in Protestant Ulster among the men and women who had signed the Ulster Covenant and Ulster Women’s Declaration. The government in Ulster responded by founding the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to oppose Home Rule, while in Ireland the Irish Nationalists formed the Irish (National) Volunteers to support it. (Holloway, 11) When the First World War broke out in 1914, the question of Home Rule was superseded by the importance of winning the war in Europe, and was pushed out of mainstream political debate.18

However, the outbreak of the war revealed another division – this time among Irish Nationalists. When the war broke out, Irish leader, John Redmond called for the Irish to support Britain's war-effort against Germany, hoping that the British would reciprocate by passing Home Rule after the war had ended. In fact, the majority of Ireland’s population rallied to Redmond’s call and agreed to fight with the British, while a smaller part of the Irish refused to do so. The majority who chose to join Britain did so for various reasons; some did so for the political reasons mentioned above, some like future IRA commander Tom Barry19, did so simply out of curiosity or a sense of adventure, and some did so for economic reasons, as soldiers were paid twice as much as Irish workers,

18 Cottrell, p.16-17.
19 Barry became an IRA commander in 1920 by joining the 3rd Cork Brigade.
which Irish revolutionary James Connolly later noted was a simple choice for many Irish seeking to escape from dire economic situation at home. On the other hand, those who rejected to join the British began to prepare a revolution against British rule in Ireland led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. As Jeffrey Bell put it,

... when the European war began, the leading constitutional Irish politician John Redmond, who had forced his way into the booming organization, pledged Ireland to the British war effort and split the Volunteers. The overwhelming number followed Redmond’s lead and many enlisted in the British army. A hard core of eleven or twelve thousand stayed with Eoin MacNéill, the Chief of Staff. This was the base the IRB planned to use for the Rising, augmented by Connelly’s Irish Citizens’ Army and the tiny Hibernian Rifles financed by the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH). (Bell, 4-5)

Directed against British Rule, the Easter Rising was started on Monday, 24th April 1916, organised by James Connolly and Patrick Pearse. It lasted for a week. The rebels captured the General Post Office in Dublin where they proclaimed the Irish Republic. Though the rebels failed and most of the volunteers were either arrested or executed, it was considered to be a huge step towards Irish independence as it was followed by the Irish War of Independence. It is noted that the Easter Rising, which ended with the executions of the rebel leaders, increased the number of supporters of Sinn Fein, and of its leader Eamon De Valera in 1918 British General Elections. This was soon followed by the declaration of an independent Irish Republic and the establishment of a self governing Irish parliament named “the First Dail” in Dublin on 21 January 1919, giving a clear signal of war between Ireland and England.

Between the Easter Rising and the War of Independence, the Irish Volunteers evolved into the now infamous Irish Republican Army. In response, the British government established the “Black and Tans”, a group of former soldiers brought together by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) to battle against IRA, but they went beyond their mandate by their undisciplined and harsh
attacks. As a result, whereas the conflicts between 1919-1920 were relatively minor, the evident clashes began to accelerate in frequency and intensity after 1920\(^{23}\), as the Black and Tans terrorized of Irish civilians and provoked often excessive retaliation from the IRA. By talking over the attacked British soldiers on 21 November, 1920 and anger this event led on the Black and Tans which caused them to kill and injure many people in a football match, Gillies and Mahood argue that “Without diminishing the intensity of the fighting and the atrocities on both sides, many commentators, then and now, have described the tactics of the Black and Tans as state-supported terrorism.” (Gillies, 119) As Ainsworth has suggested, the irony of the British government’s response was that rather than stabilize the situation in Ireland, the reckless actions of the Black and Tans only served to strengthen the cause of Irish nationalists. (Ainsworth, 4)

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\(^{23}\) See Bloody Sunday for further information on the issue [http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract;jsessionid=41BD0C30508F6CAE18E07155C5CD51EC.journals?fromPage=online&aid=468758](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract;jsessionid=41BD0C30508F6CAE18E07155C5CD51EC.journals?fromPage=online&aid=468758).
Figure 2: Easter Proclamation, read by Pádraig Pearse outside the GPO at the start of the Easter Rising, 1916.24
Once again, the question of Home Rule resurfaced in Westminster as a potential solution to the chaos in Ireland. This time, however, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920\textsuperscript{25} divided Ireland into Northern and Southern Ireland, each with its own parliament. Though both were given the same limited rights, the Northern Irish parliament in Belfast, which consisted of Protestant and Unionist members, opened quickly in May 1921, whereas the Southern part waited until after they signed the Truce between the British Army and the army of the self proclaimed Irish Republic\textsuperscript{26} in June, 1921. However, this provoked the diplomatic period for the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December, 1921 under the leadership of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins as the representatives of the Irish Republic and Prime Minister Lloyd George on the British side. Though Ireland could not achieve its full independence with this treaty\textsuperscript{27}, in which the six counties dependent on the government of the UK, the Sinn Fein delegation could not take the risk of the Civil War in Ireland at that time so they did not insist on their attempt.\textsuperscript{28} As Michael Collins stated at the Treaty, “[...] in my opinion, it gives us freedom, not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it.”\textsuperscript{29} (Doherty,161)

Following these tumultuous events, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922 effectively established the “Ireland” we know today. Between 1922 and 1937, the Irish Free State, as it was then called, was controlled by their own Governor General, which effectively excluded the British from interference in Irish affairs. In 1937, instead of the term “Irish Free State”, the Gaelic word ‘Eire’ was used to refer to the Republic of Ireland. Later, in 1949, the Irish Free State was renamed The Republic of Ireland. Although the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923 and the numerous riots and demonstrations following the signing of the treaty took

\textsuperscript{25} For a detailed discussion of this act see http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/goi231220.htm.
\textsuperscript{27} For a detailed discussion of this act see http://www.nationalarchives.ie/topics/anglo_irish/daexhib2.html.
\textsuperscript{28} http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/easterrising/aftermath/af06.shtml.
\textsuperscript{29} For the full conversation see: http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/D/DT/D.T.192112210002.html.
hundreds of more lives, the dream of an independent Ireland was finally achieved. (Hollis, 132-137)

In conclusion, these turbulent years in Irish history had a strong impact on all members of Irish society, including not only the purely British and Irish portions of society, but particularly members of the former Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, who faced severe repression and retaliation at the hands of the Irish Republicans, who occasionally killed them and burned their homes – the most visible signs of British dominance over Ireland. Most of the members of this once privileged class emigrated, while those who remained, faced further economic and social repression due to the political, economic and religious enforcements imposed, beginning with the *Ne temere* papal decree in 1908. (See Maguire, ‘Perspectives- Political/ Social Reform’, 1).
3.2 The Social Background of the War Time: The Big House Theme as Reflected in the Selected Novels

I came on a great house in the middle of the night,
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
And all my friends were there and made me welcome too,
But I woke in an old ruin that the wind howled through.\(^{30}\)

[W. B. Yeats - The Curse of Cromwell]

The Big House is not only a symbol of great significance in Anglo-Irish ascendancy, but played also an important role in Irish history and literature. This is the subject of the following two sub-chapters. Before analyzing the impact of the “Big House” on the lives of 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century Irish women, it is necessary to examine the function of the Big Houses and their historical and cultural significance within Irish society. The first part of this chapter will offer a brief outline of the history of the Big Houses in Ireland from the time of World War I to


the Anglo-Irish Civil War in Ireland will be given; the second part will then consider the role of women in the “Big House” will be explored as portrayed in the novels selected.

3.2.1 The Function of the “Big House” and the Social Structure of Ireland in the early 20th Century

Before examining the function of the Big Houses, which date back to the early 18th century, it is necessary to give a definition of “the Big House” and to refer to its typical owners and as important “players” in Ireland’s troubled history. The term “Big House” (named ‘Country House’ in England) needs to be explained first: In the *Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, the Big House is defined as

... a theme in Anglo-Irish literature referring to the big houses of the ascendancy, reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of the Protestant landowning class in their decline, from the late 18th cent., through Catholic Emancipation, the Tithe War, the Famine, the Land League, and the growth of modern militant Irish nationalism, to the founding of the Irish State.

Originating soon after the Acts of Union in 1800, the term “Anglo-Irish” referred to the descendants and successors of the upper-class; they were Protestant landowners who largely ruled Ireland in the eighteenth century. They were English by descent and loyal to the crown. Therefore, the Anglo-Irish class is commonly understood to refer to the dwellers of Big Houses. Architecturally, the Big Houses derived from the Anglo-Norman tower houses and are so named (allegorically or symbolically) not only because they are big in size but also because they represent the “greatness” and superior status of the Irish Ascendancy and their splendid and elegant life styles.

The novels selected, and *The Last September* in particular, express harsh criticism of this social group. It is worth referring in this context to Kelsall’s view on the “Big House” and its owners: He claims, by comparing the works of Bowen, to *The Last September* that the class represented by it is “... a

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32 An organisation founded by Charles Stewart Parnell on the side of Irish tenant farmers so that they have the right to own the farms they are working on.  
34 [http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/The_Anglo-Irish](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/The_Anglo-Irish).
consistent part of the sad, astringent satire of decline and fall”. From his point of view

The Last September carries a frisson of excitement that comes from the temporal proximity of violence. But here the excitement generated by ‘the tremendous news’ as it breaks is used by Bowen to express a sense of potential class regeneration through participation in war. (Kelsall, 168)

He refers to Bowen’s Court which helps in clarifying the definition of the Anglo-Irish upper-class further:

Almost every one said they wondered if they really ought to have come, but they had come rightly: this was a time to gather ... The tension of months, of years- outlying tension of Europe, inner tension of Ireland-broke in a spate of words. Braced against the gale from the mountains, licking dust from their lips, these were the unmartialled loyalists of the South. Not a family had not put out, like Bowen’s Court, its generations of military brothers- tablets in Protestant churches recorded deaths in remote battles; swords hung in halls. If the Anglo-Irish live on and for a myth, for that myth they constantly shed their blood. So, on this August 1914 day of grandeur and gravity, the Ascendancy rallied, renewed itself. (Bowen’s Court, 1964: 323)

Kelsall considered this passage as “atavistic [...], self-consciously and strategically so, and in its sectarianism and racialism ostensibly Irish.” And he further highlighted the fact that the words ‘Anglo-Irish’ and ‘Ascendancy’ indicate contemplating the past (Kelsall, 168). Thus, the members of this ruling elite “usually adopted English practices in politics, commerce, and culture” though they claimed to have Irish identity. They flaunted their wealth and power by building large, stone houses with high ceilings, decorative fireplaces, and papered walls, all of which suited their luxurious tastes; in their free time, they pursued activities of a decidedly English flavour, such as hunting, shooting, fishing, cards, and tennis as well as eating, drinking, and visiting their neighbours, who, of course, belonged to the same social class. Both symbolically and literally, the pursuit of this lifestyle helped to estrange and isolate this elite from the rest of Irish society, which lived quite differently outside

35 http://www.answers.com/topic/anglo-irish#ixzz1XOsoud2C.
the comforts of the Big Houses. (Genet, 24-25) As Henn puts it, these houses were “built on wealth, privilege, and the large revolutions of politics and religions.” (Henn, 215) Therefore, since the dwellers of the Big Houses were of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, they had very little in common with the native Catholic Irish tenants. Sociologically and physically they lived in houses and perceived as the ruling elite associated with foreign occupation. Sociologically they shared few cultural similarities with the lower classes and physically they built their imposing homes, which served as physical statements of their supremacy.

However, the prevalent symbolism of the Big House in Irish literature has become an extremely controversial, polarizing historical subject. On the one hand, it has often been represented as the – “be all and end all” - of Anglo-Irish society and its cultural heritage typical of the work of such writers, while it also became an obnoxious symbol of English imperialism (Genet, 16), which has led Louise MacNeice to argue that “the Big House contained no culture worth speaking of” (quoted in O’Malley-Younger, 249). Still, “The Big House” concept is still considered to be the core heritage of Anglo-Irish dynasty. According to Bowen,

[...] the idea from which these houses sprang was, before everything, a social one [...] Society – or, more simply, the getting-together of people – was meant to be at once a high pleasure and willing discipline, not just an occasion for self-display. [...] The most ornate, spacious parts of these buildings were the most functional - the steps, the halls, the living-rooms, the fine staircases - it was these that contributed to society, that raised life above the exigencies of mere living to the plane of art, or at least style. (Bowen, Mulberry Tree, 25-29)

As Kreilkamp states, the concept of the big house is further based on class distinction in that other ‘functional’ parts of the house, like the kitchen or farm buildings, were hidden in order to keep the servants away from the living spaces of the aristocracy, with the exception of the stables which were open to view as an indication of horses as symbols of status (Kreilkamp, 146).
According to Genet’s “The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation”, these houses were also built to satisfy the landlords’ notion of security. They were designed in a way that they could be defended. Ironically, the elite proved to be far more vulnerable to hunting accidents and mental breakdowns. Moreover, many members of the Ascendancy avoided having children or getting married so that their heritage could not be passed on to new generations. However, it was the Land Acts which resulted in the severest damage to the Big Houses and their owners. In order to prevent the Irish from acquiring ownership of big lands, inherited land needed to be either divided into smaller parts, or were sold for a song to the Land Commission because there were too few landlords who could afford the large expenditures of such estates and were too large and pricey for existing tenants to maintain. This gradually resulted in the destruction of these houses by de-roofing, cutting-down timber, or turning the stables into dwelling places. But the most tragic end for the Big Houses was being vandalised or burned down by rebels during the Easter Rising and the War of Irish Independence (Genet, 24-28). Carcoran personified these houses, for instance, when he refers to “Danielstown [which] ‘stares’ at people and is ‘executed’ by the IRA.” (Carcoran, 37). In the novel The Last September Lois suddenly realizes the marked difference between the inhabitants of the big house and the countryside in a moment of illumination:

To the south, below them, the demesne trees of Danielstown made a dark formal square like a rug on the green country. In their heart like a dropped pin the grey glazed roof reflecting the sky lightly glinted. Looking down, it seemed to Lois they lived in the forest; space of lawns blotted out in the pressure and dusk of tree. She wondered still more that they were not afraid. Far from here too, their isolation became apparent. The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face, as though it had her vision of where it was. It seemed to huddle its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide light lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set […] (The Last September, 66)

Wolff claims that the estate described in the novel became nothing but “a dark formal square like a rug”, “a dropped pin”, etc. for Lois who acquired this new

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36 Weekes, 90.
perception in a threatening way. (Wolff, 101) But the narrative quickly returns to its usual voice:

[...]But as they drove down the home-sense quickened; the pony, knowing these hedges, rocketed hopefully in the shafts. The house became a magnet to their dependence. And indeed it was nice, they felt in this evening air, to be driving home, with all they would have to tell of the Mount Isabel party, to all they would have to hear of Sir Richard’s day in Cork [...] (The Last September, 67)

Wolff also notes that the Big House clearly turned from “an isolated, vulnerable structure, to a solid home place, to what the text intimates is a hollow illusion, to emerge, in the end, as a structure constituted by a fluctuating play of absence and presence.” (Wolff, 102)

As far as the numbers of houses destroyed by the Irish Republicans are concerned, the Big Houses were not the real target of the attackers; rather, their aim was the destruction of their residents, who represent the Protestant Ascendancy. These ‘so-called’ privileged inhabitants, who in fact acted in favour of the Free State and Republic, were in a state of continuous fear for their lives and property, and many were systematically killed or fled their native land during the turbulent years of the War of Independence and the Civil War. Indeed, due to these intense political and financial pressures, particularly the Ne temere papal decree of 1908, the Protestant population of Ireland declined from 10 to 6% - a dramatic indication of these turbulent times after the Independence. During and after the turmoil of Irish Independence, these houses lost both their symbolic and physical powers over Irish society and were representative of the fall of the Ascendancy. However, the fall of the Big Houses had the paradoxical effect of elevating their status within Irish literature. As Genet notes, the Big House only became a significant part of Irish literature when it began to disappear because its connections to the Irish economy, politics, legal issues, and social life “was too overwhelming” to be conveyed to fiction. (Genet, 16) In reality, the Big House novels do not necessarily reflect the historical facts and contain more fiction than fact. However, Maria Edgeworth,

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37 http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/num/num72b.htm
38 http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/The_Anglo-Irish.
for instance, was the first writer to refer to the Big House in a substantial and objective way in *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and in *The Absentee* (1812) in which the “Big House” is described from a mythological and historical perspective. By contrast, English writers such as Charles Lever in *The Knight of Gwynne* (1847) and Samuel Lover in *The Martians of Cro Martin* (1856) misrepresent the role of the Big House by ignoring social and historical facts. (Genet, 16) In *The Last September* the house is symbolic of a forgotten and decadent society, and is described in a way that employs both fictional and factual information (Carcoran, 44).

The issue has also been explored by Grubgeld. He claims that the decline of the Big House refers to the calamity of a society in decline rather than reflecting individual failure:

> While certain motifs of the Big House novel are conspicuously absent—there are no drunken patriarchs, peasant mistresses, money marriages, absenteeism, or swindling agents (although lawsuits and insanity are given hereditary features of family life) — it is that genre with which her own life writing had to reckon. Bowen works within its motifs of lost hegemony; a chaotic, if democratized, present; and a finale of ruination. (Grubgeld, 139)

In conclusion, the concept of the Big House was and still is as controversial as its dwellers in Ireland. The latter are characterized as being

> [...]both victimisers and victims, governors and governed, colonisers and colonised trapped in a liminal state between identities, listening to ancestral voices and using the crumbling walls of Big Houses as a symbolic bulwark against their own degeneration and decline. (Lyons and O'Malley-Younger, 249)
3.2.2 The Function of the Big Houses in the Lives of the Characters in the Novels Discussed

In the existing secondary literature on the Big House the concept is conceived differently by various scholars. There are those who emphasize the historical and political function of the houses, and those who emphasize their origin, historical past and their rootedness in Christianity and English myth. The following sub chapter is dedicated to the mythological aspects of the Big Houses, and their function in the construction of female identity as portrayed in the novels selected. In *The Last September* Bowen explores the ‘Big House’ theme rooted in her own family history: “I am the daughter of the house from which Danielstown was drawn”. By “daughter” Bowen emphasises her emotional attachment, which was marked also by her father’s illness and the trauma she felt following the loss of Bowen’s Court in 1906. This experience was an “exile from Eden” to Bowen. Before her loss of her father at Bowen’s Court, she was living in an Edenic World, from which she believed her mother had tried hard to keep her away from assuming that it would be destructive to her life. Bowen repressed all those losses in her memory, which may have caused a deep personal trauma. However, these experiences also evoked her creativity. The novel’s protagonist Lois Farquhar, during her voyage from the Eden of the innocent stage to the apocalyptic world of Ireland comes to terms with her suffering mind.(Weekes, 86-89)

It is necessary at this stage to shortly examine the mythological world of Eden and Milton’s notion of it and to relate it to with the Big House. Weekes claims that the notion of the Big House is reminiscent of the Miltonic Eden in that it stands for

[...] the golden, privileged world, the Eden of the innocent, of the Anglo-Irish. He explores this idea through the Naylor family, which, ensconced in their palatial home, displayed incredible ignorance of the social and political turmoil surrounding them: while Irish rioters clashed with British troops, they remained preoccupied with tennis and social gatherings. (Weekes, 89)

Similarly, Weekes addresses both England and Ireland where female characters are stuck and feel trapped from both sides. One aspect is
symbolically reflected in the image of ‘Defeated Ireland’ which stands for the old mythological female characters who have urged the young men to refresh their youth and beauty with the blood of the soldiers of their nation, represented by such allegorical works as “Mother Ireland”, “Dark Rosaleen”, or “Cathleen Ni Houlihan”. This is contrasted to the ‘Conqueror England’ standing symbolically for male power. The house serves as a physical manifestation of the new order imposed by the English invaders. The term “unwilling bosom” refers to mother nature and Danielstown and its link to the patriarchal order and Milton’s Adam represented by the uncle, Sir Richard Naylor. (Weekes, 91-92) Likewise, the mill where Gerald is killed embodies the “displacement caused by the patriarchal order of Anglo- Ireland”, in whose stability and permanence Lois has trusted, and functions as the “frightening reminder of the fragility of the new artificial order imposed on the body of nature.” (Weekes, 100) As far as the Naylors were concerned, they denied the forbidden knowledge “in their Edenic world by shutting their eyes to the uprising events and found “[...] the whole thing [...] nonsense” (The Last September, 26) whereas Laurence, Lady Naylor’s nephew, saw the coming troubles and does not fail to notice.” (Weekes, 92-96)

Keogh interpreted the conditions in which these characters take part as follows:

In this novel, Bowen idealised her Anglo-Irish protagonists for their courage in the face of imminent extinction at the hands of emergent Irish revolutionaries. Sir Richard and Lady Naylor of Danielstown, the house at the centre of the novel, carry on the civilised forms of the country life in the face of rebellion and insurrection and defend their traditional feudal relationship with the native Irish. Both the Naylors resent the enforced protection of the British Army and refused to acknowledge that life in the Irish Big House is, in the indiscreet words of their nephew Laurence, ‘rolling up rather’ [...] (Keogh, 193)

In The Last September, the heroine Lois considers marriage as a necessity in order to gain status and to be accepted as a proper female in Irish society. As a young lady without a specific goal in the world, Lois planned to marry Gerald Lesworth, the British officer who loved her, in order to experience romance in the turbulent years of the 1920s, where the idea of “romantic love” gave stability and meaning to one’s life. She fails to devote her life to Gerald in marriage
when she realizes that “she can merely function as the Other to his [Gerald’s] self” (Hoogland, 66):

[...] despite her need to be recognized, to ‘be in a pattern,’ our heroine is incapable of such a wholehearted embrace of her assigned place within the established power/knowledge system. Sensing the aridity of marriages around her, Lois astutely discerns the limitations imposed on the individual spouses by the institution of heterosexuality itself. Wanting no part of that, she can alleviate her fear of being “locked out” by the elder generation by deriving a ‘feeling of mysteriousness and destination’ from the thought she will ‘penetrate thirty years deeper ahead into Time than they could’. (Hoogland, 65)

Though Lois remained attached to Edenic notions, the ideals of Miltonic myth, particularly the Eve figure of *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost*, proved destructive in a dying world. Lois could only prove her presence outside of the myth by means of her inquisitiveness and wit, which itself was an heirloom from her mother. (Weekes, 89-90) Ironically enough, though it was Lois who was inclined to choose the marriage of convenience to strengthen her position in a male dominated world, she freed herself at the end of the novel and started to walk through the way to her ideals whereas Marda, who was the defender of women’s liberty and their rights, turned out to be a submissive character and functioned as “a perfect Eve” in the end as soon as she left Danielstown and was relieved from the dominance of this world. (Weekes, 93) Thus, Kreilkamp claims that Bowen’s

... heroines both flee from and seek houses that function as symbols of a psychic shelter that defines and threatens them. [...] Bowen’s protagonists inhabit and reject a variety of domestic settings that present themselves as possible solutions to a sense of homelessness. (Kreilkamp, 142)
Another Miltonic idea can be seen in Lois’s curiosity regarding the items or the possible guns being buried in her family’s garden. This refers to Eve and for Lois’s curiosity for what is secret (forbidden) knowledge: “‘grow mature/ In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know,’ eats the fruit” (quoted in Weekes, 93). However, in the end, Lois is depicted as a mature woman who never tasted the forbidden fruit but perceived forbidden knowledge as a result of Gerald’s death. Therefore, Lois’s story is not that of tragedy; rather, hers is a story of the difficult path towards maturity which made picnicking in Eden impossible from after her experiences on her path towards adulthood. (Weekes, 105) “She went into the house and up to the top to meet what was waiting. Life, seen whole for a moment, was one act of apprehension, the apprehension of death.” (The Last September, 202)

The final pages of The Last September describe the burning of the Big Houses in the neighbourhood of Danielstown. This suggests that the destruction of these houses is perceived in terms of an act of atonement for original sin. (Weekes, 107)

It seemed that an extra day, unreckoned, had come to abortive birth that these things might happen...The roads in unnatural dusk ran dark with movement, secretive or terrified; not a tree, brushed pale by wind from the flames, not a cabin pressed in despair to the bosom of night, not a gate too starkly visible but had its place in the design of order and panic. (The Last September, 206)

The novel features eighteenth–century ethics in that the tragic end of the Big Houses in the flames is accepted like an act of redemption: “Above the steps, the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace.” (The Last September, 206)

The Ladies’ Road, by comparison, is not a typical Big House novel, particularly because it is set in England and involves primarily English characters. Instead of focusing on the significance of these houses, the novel is focused more on the characters’ ethnicity and their suffering due to their non-Irish identities during the troubled years of 1900s. However, the themes covered and the depiction of the final scenes of the burning house provides significant similarities to conventional Big House novels. (The sufferings of the female
inmates of the Big House because of their ethnic identities, will be discussed in detail in the 4th Chapter).

Kay compared Hinkson’s *The Ladies’ Road* to Big House novels proper, and claims that the theme of ethnic identity is made more emphasized here in that several characters, including Stella and Aunt Nancy, are half-Irish, which gives them a unique insight into the difficult issue of Irish identity. The question of Irish-British intermarriage, for example, Aunt Nancy voices her reservation at her younger son’s marriage to an English woman, stating that Anglo-Irish marriages are a risk: “[...] English people don’t understand our ways.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 183-184). Cynthia, the elder sister, realized the fact that Aunt Nancy ignores her English identity (*The Ladies’ Road*, 184), while Irene, their neighbour’s daughter, notes that “Nancy was English, which explained everything” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 38). Furthermore, Nancy’s English niece, Stella, also suffers from her cultural and ethnic hybridity. Reflecting on her condition, she concludes: “Ireland was like that, [...] The longer you stayed, the harder it was to move. Even if one didn’t really belong to it. But Stella half belonged really.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 301)

The life of Irene Cooper, reveals another dimension to the confusion caused by a mixed, Anglo-Irish heritage. As a single woman in Ireland, Irene belonged to Ireland as a member of Cooperstown, “a great square grey house, dropped down on the land which Cromwell had taken from the Irish” – a time she remembers fondly. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 53-54) As a married woman living in London, she becomes increasingly aware of the troubling rumours surrounding the activities of Irish rebels. However, her reaction is not worry or grief; rather, she displays a degree of sympathy, excitement, and solidarity with the Irish rebels with whom she shares a common thread of identity. As the narrator notes “there was a little thrill in her voice because she had just come from London and somewhere far back in her ancestry there had slipped in some Irish blood to mix with the conquerors.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 37) At heart, Irene’s view is one of biologically determined ethnic identity, which according to Kay means it is “... as though only Irish blood can explain sympathy for the rebels, thus reducing the
complex transcultural relations between colonizer and colonized referred to earlier to a simplistic and rigid binary." (Kay, 79-81)

Take, for example, the case of the Englishman Edmund Urquhart, who is the friend of Philip, Aunt Nancy’s son. As an Englishman, Edmund is seen as “a foreigner” at Cappagh where the Irish identity is so dominant and he states that the house is in a “kindly and secure sleep” (The Ladies’ Road, 24). The thought of Edmund indicates that he is a representative of the Big House, which ignores the realities of the world around them. Ironically enough, in the last chapter the house is similarly portrayed in the eyes of Peter Murphy, who lost his father in France in the same war that Philip had died: “It lay quiet and unsuspecting, looking kindly and secure in sleep” (The Ladies’ Road, 319). According to Kay, this sense of peace and tranquillity is the main reason for the burning of the house. (Kay, 82) Thus, from the beginning to the end the characters prefer ignoring the chaos around them. Indeed, the thin line between ethnicities is drawn sharply from the very beginning of the novel already in the dialogue between Edmund and Philip, the son of Nancy and Hubert. For example, Edmund says to Philip: “And if there’s trouble here you’ll be shooting down these poor peasants. I shall be on the other side and perhaps you'll shoot me or take me prisoner ... Your being a soldier and all that.” Adding, “You should be a landlord. [...] You’d make a good signeur, Phil. And go into politics perhaps and atone for the sins of your ancestors.” (The Ladies’ Road, 25) In a similarly revealing instance, the narrator notes the strength of the contrast in Edmund’s depiction of Cappagh, the symbol of Irishness, remarking, “He looked down at the roof of Cappagh, a grey line beyond the black line of the woods.” (The Ladies’ Road, 25)

Edmund’s experiences reflect the atmosphere of the 1920s in Ireland by contrasting

[...] the life of Cappagh that summer, with its showers of rain and the sunlight between, and the tennis parties, against a background vivid with colour, the clear colour of the country after rain...No one had told him [Edmund] about the life inside these houses, built so much of pattern, big and grey with a suggestion of a fortress against their background of woods. They had been thrown down, he supposed, by the English as
they passed through, coming as conquerors and colonists, and the English influence went just as far as the sunlight went into the woods and no further. Beyond that the country lay, unaffected. You couldn’t tell inside these houses what was happening out there. (The Ladies’ Road, 32)

At each stage of the novel dilemmas become manifest, both by the characters who have various cross-cultural connections to Ireland and England, and in situations they find themselves placed, such as moments of suspense, unrest and uncertainty:

The uncertainty was part of that memory of Cappagh, a world of surprise and adventure where anything might happen. [...] At Cappagh one could never be sure of anything [...] the dusk creeping slowly through the big house. [...] At Winds you knew what you were smelling, [...] At Cappagh it was all elusive, uncertain. [...] The tennis lawns lay quiet and mysterious between the house and the woods. [...] About this time something was happening at Winds which was vaguely disturbing. (The Ladies’ Road, 7-17)

Furthermore, being largely cut-off from the rest of the world in the comfort of their Big Houses, the narrator indicates that the characters are largely ignorant of the coming troubles. For this reason they feel no need to take precautions against impending violence, so that Cappagh is eventually lost – burned to the ground like so many other Big Houses. Nancy, watching the blaze of her home, reveals her deep concern for the doomed houses:

They watched from Castle Shaw and from Cooperstown, through a gap in the trees that shut in all these houses. The branches of those trees that made a barrier, softened against the summer night sky. There would be, as Irene had thought, for the next generation, no world between two worlds, but only Ireland. And none of this really concerned them, because they had spent everything in the War and so for all their lives afterwards must lie on the bank watching the stream of life go by, unable to go with it or to discover clearly where it went. They watched from Cooperstown (because it was too far and too late to help and useless anyhow to try and put out their fire) until the watching hurt their eyes and they looked away, waiting for to-morrow night or the next night when it would be their turn. (The Ladies’ Road, 319-320)

The destruction of Nancy and Stella’s Edenic world is thus, as Kay point out, turned into hell after the death of Hubert, Philip and the others. It indicates that
the Irish Ascendancy is a “doomed aristocracy”. (Kay, 82) Historically, however, “... the number of these burnings has been greatly exaggerated [...]” (Jones, 195). Phillips claims that “the burning of several houses in one area is an historical misrepresentation but contributes to an evocation of despair and disappointment which goes far beyond the literal.” (Phillips, 270)
4 Women and Society in Ireland in the early 20th Century

The construction of womanhood has been a topic of growing interest to modernist writers. However, the long-suppressed status of women in Irish society makes it a topic of special importance. According to Coulter, the status of women’s rights in Ireland, and the Irish attitude to abortion, divorce, the domestic function of women and the role of women in the public, political sphere is more akin to the Third World than to a developing western nation (Coulter, Colin, 112).

The following sub-chapters consider prevailing issues relating to the female sex in Irish society at that time, such as the role of women as mothers and housewives or “homemakers”, the function of education, the role of women in politics and the impact of religion on their lives.

4.1 The Traditional Role of Women as “Homemakers”

The modern term “homemaker”\textsuperscript{39} is a gender-neutral\textsuperscript{40} synonym of American origin coined to replace the rather derogatory term “housewife”. However, throughout history, the term “housewife” was the usual terms used to refer to the notion that women’s lives and prospects were largely confined to the domestic sphere. Calder claims that “[i]t was the wife who made the home, who cared for her children within it, who brought her husband back to it when work was done, who provided the hot dinners and created the atmosphere of comfort and protection.”(Calder, 27) He states that “[t]he employment of women was widely condemned. It was seen as an offence to feminine decency, as a threat to the family and as leading directly to immorality” (Calder, 67).


Ireland’s constitution was eventually released in 1937, and it virtually determined the conventional role of women as housewives: Articles 41.2.1/2 of the Irish Constitution clearly stipulate:41

2.1 “In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”
2.2 “The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.”

On the basis of such legislation, the division of the domestic function of men and women was clearly marked. Irish men were expected to be the bread-winners whereas women were supposed to devote themselves to domestic duties, and to fulfil the role of mothers caring for the family’s offspring.

However, these attitudes and legal framework caused a serious problem for the institution of marriage in 20th century Irish society. On the one hand, marriage was given “a unique and privileged position”42 from legal, sociological, and religious perspectives. As G. K. Chesterton has remarked: “Wherever there is Ireland, there is the family and it counts for a great deal.” (Chesterton quoted in Ferriter, 49) The state took a similar view of the sanctity of the family. Indeed, Article 41.1.1/2 of the 1937 constitution elevates the “family” as the supreme nucleus of Irish (Catholic) society and quite specifically addresses the role of married women in the “family”:

1.1. “The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.”

1.2. “The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.” (Irish Constitution, 56-57)

42 Shannon, p.1.
However, in the early and mid 20th century marriage was a financial necessity for many Irish women. According to J. J. Lee, the Great Famine of 1845 marked a turning point in Irish women’s economic conditions, forcing women to spend much of their time cooking at home in order to survive in these hard times. (MacCurtain, 37) As a result, nonworking-class women were no longer expected to earn their living and it became the duty of their husbands to secure the income of the family. According to Calder, “[f]or a woman marriage meant the acquisition of an ‘establishment’, her own place, financed by her husband, [...] a place where she had at least some freedom of choice and activity, which she might not have had at all in the parental home” (Calder, 9).

On the other hand, marriage also restricted the social and economic mobility of Irish women and their function in public life. Indeed, the Irish constitution endorsed a patriarchal society, which implies the subjugation of women. The Land Commission Act of 1930 excluded Irish women not only from holding land, and inheriting land and money, but also from keeping the money they earned, forcing some to give up custody of their children. Irish women were thus forced to give up a number of rights on marriage. That is to say, that in 1937 the state in effect strengthened the dependence of Irish women on men and their confinement to the household.

Referring to an Irish newspaper article from 1927, Valiulis claims that the state of segregation between men and women in Ireland became so deep that women were said to fear serving on juries, fearing they would be “wrenched from the bosom of their families, from their cherished household duties, from the preparation of their husbands' dinners” (Valiulis, 123). As a result, Irish women at that time did not have the courage to rebel against the Civil Service Amendment Act, even though the act discriminated against women by excluding them from taking office in the Civil Service.

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43 Though Calder focuses on the role of Victorian women, her argument also applies to the realities of Irish women in the early 20th Century.
44 The Land Commission in the 1930s was a body set up to oversee the government’s land distribution policies. [See Galligan, p.5]
45 This act was passed by the Free State government in 1925. For more detailed information on this issue see http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1925/11/18/00025.asp.
On the other hand, the practical effect of the discrimination of Irish women was that employers began looking for unmarried female employees as they could make them work for longer hours and give them less freedom (cf. Hayes, 217). Moreover, the employers set up the “No Followers” rule which excluded single women from jobs when they had boyfriends. Single women who were independent were put under social pressure to get married in order to secure their place in society. Correspondingly, female servants often also preferred to get married to escape servitude. Thus, as women had limited opportunities to meet new people, they could only socialize with men they saw regularly, such as the butcher, the milkman, baker, shop keeper or postman (cf. Hayes, 217).

An unfortunate side-effect of the limited possibilities for social exchange was that women often consented to a marriage of convenience rather than of love. As a consequence, Irish women became the subjects of a vicious cycle of both wherein public and private discrimination, which also undermined their identity and self-esteem.

### 4.2 Irish Women and Religion

Although the Church of Ireland declared its independence from the Anglican Church already in 1869, it continued to retain some important links with the Established Church of England. The 19th century was a time of upheaval, but also one that opened up new opportunities: the destruction and seizure of the Irish landlords, lands and titles, as well as their political power through the loss of the voting rights they derived from their tenants, left a gaping hole in Irish political life; meanwhile, Irish boys were sent to English Public Schools and academies where they tried to get a job and work on behalf of the Imperial government abroad. For Irish women, however, there were no such opportunities. At best, lucky girls of affluent Irish people could hope to be educated at home by governesses. (Genet, 35)

In the 20th century the Irish Catholic Church became increasingly powerful and imposed moral strictures on Irish women. Catholicism had a

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46 A sweetheart; a beau. [Colloq.] --A. Trollope. [1913 Webster].
strong effect on family life and the role of the husband as breadwinner and that of the wife as homemaker. The Catholic Church imposed strict regulations on women. Inglis even claims that it was

[...] not just a strategy of the Catholic Church but was part of a wider puritan strategy by which women were forced into exaggerated femininity, magnifying their relative weakness into complete helplessness, their emotionality into hysteria and their sensitivity into a delicacy which must be protected from all contact with the outside world. (Inglis, 188: 1998)

Smyth shares this view stating ironically that “God and nature never intended women to take an advanced position in fighting for the emancipation of any nation” (Smyth, Ailbhe, 208). The Catholic Church and the state worked hand in hand to enforce the view of Irish women as submissive mothers, wives, and, at best, single, female employees following the Catholic Church’s teaching.

According to Owens, “the sublimation of women’s issues to controversial national questions ensured that the position of Irish women remained subservient, a situation compounded by the deepening Catholic ethos of the state” (Owens, Smashing Times, 123).

After 1926 also Irish Protestant women were an especially disadvantaged group, and subject to severe economic and societal pressures from the Church, State, and Irish society (Genet, 40). In order to avoid future discrimination, children born to mixed Catholic and Protestant families were often brought up according to Catholic teaching. (Genet, 41)

47 In 1926 was the first census of the Irish Free State. See: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/help/history.html, which also gives accurate figures concerning the status of women and the numbers of Catholics and Protestants in Ireland.
4.3 Education of Irish Women and the Experiences of Working-Class Women During the Time of Troubles

“That woman’s days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?”

[W.B. Yeats “Easter 1916” l. 17–20]

The following section highlights the educational background and political roles of Irish women in the early twentieth century and their peripheral status in Irish society. In order to properly define their status, it is important to refer to the popular traditional trope of “Mother Ireland” which allegorically represents Ireland and versions of the relationship between women and politics. Myers, referring to Haberstroh, argues that the popular image created by Irish writers boils down to a dichotomy between that of a submissive, suffering “Mother Ireland” and that of a strong Ireland, fighting for its independence. In the play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, the heroine encourages young Irish men to fight and die for the freedom of their country (Myers, 51). According to Kenneally claims that “the ide[n]tification of ‘colonized’ Ireland as celestial daughter or mother, represents a symbolic projection of a prohibited sense of self-possesion. [...] Women became as sexually intangible as the ideal of national independence became politically intangible.” (Kenneally, 108) In short, the symbolic image of “Mother Ireland” establishes a link between Ireland, nationalism, and womanhood.

As far as the education of Irish women in the early 20th c. is concerned it can be said that access to school education depended largely on class. However, there are indications that the literacy of women was, on the whole, even higher than that of men by the early 20th century:

In 1871, 37.5 percent of all grooms and 45.2 percent of all brides signed their marriage certificates with an X, an indication of their inability to read or write even their own names. By 1901, however, while 13.2 percent of all grooms still signed the marriage register with an X, only 10.7 percent of the brides did so. (Nolan, 39)

Similarly, a study conducted by Akenson showed that by the early 20th century the rate among Irish girls who were attending school was higher than that of males, with 2.244 female schools, and 1.972 male schools. (Akenson, 376)

According to Nolan, the generation of young, newly educated women became more aware of their potential, and began making an impact in Ireland, especially in Irish media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, etc.). Furthermore, many Irish women began looking for new economic opportunities outside Ireland, either as employees or brides, and many of whom emigrated to the United States. (Nolan, 42)

However, the situation for women who could not, or did not choose to emigrate was not so promising. Most lower- and middle-class girls were expected to become wives and mothers – encouraged by the traditional expectations of the Catholic Church, the state, and society. At one end of the social spectrum, women who were lucky enough to be born into upper-class families were expected to fulfil the role of the perfect lady – “both decorative and useful” (Calder, 9). The education of upper-class women was thus focused on the arts, and “feminine” skills such as music, literature, and dance, rather than studying scholarly subjects at a university or to pursue some other professional education. Working class women, by contrast, had hardly any access to higher education: “Apart from bearing children, the social function of bourgeois women was to be a living testimony to her husband’s social status. Accordingly, her virtues were chastity and a sense of propriety. They did not include either industry or intelligence” (Klein, 264).

Urban Irish women played a far more influential role in Irish society than women in rural areas, forming movements and fighting for the recognition of women’s rights and as full members of the Irish independence movement. Led
by powerful figures like Constance Markievicz, these women were convinced that a truly free Ireland could only be obtained after the full emancipation of women. As Markievicz stated, “the first step on the road to freedom is to realize ourselves as Irishwomen – not as Irish or merely as women, but as Irishwomen doubly enslaved and with a double battle to fight.” (quoted in Kiberd, 398)

Taking this statement to heart, the best way of examining the relationships between working-class women and the public sphere of state and Church at the beginning of the 20th century is to examine the roles of Irish women within the nationalist movement.

A pivotal stage in this struggle was the end the First World War. (Summerfield, 307) During the war, many women gained valuable medical skills and experience as nurses. Thus the limited rights of women were revised. In fact Christabel Pankhurst even claims that the First World War could be seen as “ [...] Nature’s vengeance - God’s vengeance upon the people who held women in subjection, and by doing that have destroyed the perfect, human balance.” (quoted in Gilbert, 422). The turmoil following the war, the Irish Independence movement put great demands on medical professionals, giving women further experience and considerable trust to women and acknowledging them as important members of Irish society. According to Kelly, these developments allowed women to begin contributing to the labour force, referring to “suffragists [who] seized the war as an opportunity to make demands for an increased role for women [at the home front in medicine].” (Kelly, 158)

A good example of this process of emancipation is the life of Kathleen Lynn, who joined the medical profession in 1895, at a time when women still faced considerable discrimination as doctors. By 1899 she was appointed to a post as a chief medical officer to the Irish Citizen Army, the only national institute capable of training men and women as Army medics (Kinsella, 137).

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49 In 1908 Markievicz joined Sinn Fein and the revolutionary women’s movement, Inghinidhe na hEireann (the Daughters of Erin); in 1909, she founded Fianna-Eireann (Warrior’s of Ireland), an organisation that instructed boys in military tactics and the in the use of firearms. She joined James Connolly’s Irish Citizen Army, designing their uniform and composing their anthem. During the 1916 Rising, she was second in command to Michael Mallin in St. Stephen’s Green. http://theirishwar.com/2011/04/countess-markiewicz/.

After joining Sinn Fein in 1917, she actively participated in the War of Independence and was eventually arrested in 1918. During the Spanish Flu Epidemic she was released in order to help patients, and in 1919 she founded St. Ultan’s Hospital – an institution staffed exclusively by women. Later, she introduced the special vaccination, “BCG”\(^5\), to combat the Flu that later spread throughout Ireland. After rejecting the Treaty of 1921, she protested by not taking her seat in Dail.\(^5\)

Some women, however, were still compelled to keep their roles as submissive wives and/or mothers and were confined to in their traditional roles and domestic world. The position of women in post-war Ireland is characterized by Ouditt as follows:

\[\ldots\] as ‘dutiful daughters’, putting pressure on them to adopt reverential role of the Mother in obeisance to the Father - the patriarchal nation state. This performed the function of guaranteeing the deeply conventional position of the organisation. The competition between these discourses, though, could be radically unsettling to the young recruits forced to negotiate between the power granted to them by their class and patriotic endeavour and the subordination that was a product of their gender and voluntary status. (Ouditt, 1994: 10)

On the other hand, the Irish nationalist movement provided new political and economic opportunities for women. They could now overcome traditional obstacles and become influential members of Irish society as doctors and nurses, and could actively participate in communal life by working as clerks, signallers, and motor-cycle despatch riders during the ‘Ulster crisis’ of 1912-14, when civil war was threatened against the imposition of Home Rule in Ireland.\(^5\)

This sense of belonging was perhaps best represented by Maud Gonne, a major figure in the struggle for female emancipation in early 20\(^{th}\) century Ireland. Reflecting on the sense of desperation caused by the First World War MacBride refers to Maud Gonne’s complaint that “[t]he men are destroying themselves, we are looking on”,\(^5\) and she demands that “[o]ne cannot remain idle when there is so much suffering”. She left for France where she worked for the Red


\(^5\) MacBride, p.347-59.
Cross between 1914 and 1915. Thus, what she says about the women in pain during the First World War, can also be applied to the situation of women suffering from the pains of the Irish War of Independence.

However, the rhetoric of male politicians and priests in Ireland continued to focus on what they saw was the traditional role of women. They blamed upwardly mobile women for this ongoing process of female subversion:

Left to himself, man is comparatively harmless. He will always exchange smokes and drinks and jokes with his enemy and he will always pity the 'poor devil' and wish that the whole business was over. The thought of his parents, or of his wife or his children, is always with him to make him consider a friendly arrangement rather than a duel, to make him think of life rather than of death ... It is woman adrift with her white feathers ... with her implacability, her bitterness, her hysteria, that makes a devil of him. (O'Hegarty, 104)

Ruth Adam comments ironically on the assumed situation of women in warfare:

Only the women were out of it. There was nothing for them to do while the men queued outside the recruiting offices and drilled in the square and marched about the countryside singing ribald men-only versions of patriotic songs. There was no exhilaration, no sense of starting a new and adventurous life for women. They were as untouched by it as a teetotaller at a champagne party, as they glumly considered what the war would do to their home and family. (Adam, 39)

Paradoxically, the Proclamation of the Easter Rising of 1916 emphasised the role of women as equals, claiming that

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irish woman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority in the past.

Maud Gonne (1866-1953) was a key figure in Irish literature and the Irish Renaissance; she took a leading part in the Irish revolution as a militant republican and wife of John MacBride, one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. [http://www.oslo2000.uio.no/program/papers/r13/r13-jeffery.pdf](http://www.oslo2000.uio.no/program/papers/r13/r13-jeffery.pdf), p.4.

Hence, the Cumann na mBan, the republican feminist organization, hoped for what the leader of the Irish Republic of Brotherhood, Patrick Pearse had promised: equal women’s rights.\textsuperscript{57}

Meanwhile, “the Irish Free State government tried to restrict the role of women in Irish public life [by the use of] the 1922 constitution [which] gave women the [full]\textsuperscript{58} right to vote and to hold office on equal terms with men but was subsequently undermined by legislation that denied political identity to Irish women.”\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, the acts which gave political rights to Irish women in theory were a failure in practice because of the common fear among influential men that they would act or vote against them for fearing and opposing female emancipation in the first place. MacCurtain claims that the long suffering Irish women came together to rebuild their nation and helped their men to set their nation free, both from the Northern and Southern parts. He considers these women’s situation parodoxical on the grounds that no matter how they “... possessed the freedom to vote, the right to hold Office- even to become cabinet ministers as Markievicz demonstrated - the expertise to set up and manage their own trade-unions, and, to a limited extent, they availed themselves of the developing technology of domestic and farm work to control their environment”, they gained their freedom in a nation they helped to be free, but unfortunately could not escape from being seen as inferior in the community they reconstructed. (MacCurtain, 56)

The essence of this irony is also addressed by Coulter:

In retrospect, the opposition of the majority of politically active women to the Treaty can be seen as the first step towards their gradual exclusion from public life in the new Ireland. In the atomisation of the movement which followed, some fell out of active politics altogether, some threw their lot in with the Labour Party, others with Sinn Féin after the foundation of Fianna Fáil by de Valera in 1926, while others like Kathleen Clarke\textsuperscript{60}, went with Fianna Fáil, at least for the time being. She and Jennie Wyse Power, veteran of the Ladies’ Land League\textsuperscript{61}, the Gaelic

\textsuperscript{57} See http://www.easter1916.ie/index.php/people/women/.
\textsuperscript{58} The expression ‘full’ is quoted from “Inventing Ireland”, p.403.
\textsuperscript{59} Anketell, 56. (http://www.ul.ie/sociology/socheolas/vol2/1/Stephanie%20Anketell.pdf).
\textsuperscript{60} A woman revolutionary and the first female Lord Mayor of Dublin. For further information see “Revolutionary Women: Kathleen Clarke, 1878- 1972: An Autobiography.”
\textsuperscript{61} An organisation founded by Irish women soon after the Land League, they had financial supporters from the USA.
League, Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan, were the only two women senators to consistently raise their voices for women’s equality within the corridors of power. (Coulter, Carol, 24)

Thus in the early 20th century Irish women were faced with the inevitable dilemma that regardless of their contributions to Irish society in politics, social services and culture, Irish women continued to be discriminated against by powerful men and institutions. These men continued to preach that a woman’s proper role is in the home, where she should inculcate “in her sons in particular, a love of country, of Gaelic culture and of freedom of Ireland.” (Hoff and Coulter, 117)

Many women at that time also sacrificed their lives for others albeit, unlike men, without getting recognition: Though “women civilians were injured and killed in the war zones, in aerial attacks on civilian areas, and at sea, dead women are rarely represented […] but when they do appear they help us to see how the bodily difference of death often outweighs the notion of sexual difference.” (Tate, 85)

Thus, the roles of women in the male dominated society of early 20th century Ireland were largely confined to the domestic ones as mothers, wives, and daughters. Rea claims that these women were not allowed to participate in politics and nationalism actively.

[…] the men’s Republicanism is fundamentally masculine in its construction and seeks to exercise control of women, the family, sexuality, the home, and reproduction as part of its formulation of national identity. The women are bodies to be policed and confined since female sexuality threatens to undermine the nation’s eugenic purity, just as it threatens to disrupt the family’s integrity. Dependent on the myth that nationality can be pure, this kind of nationalist thinking casts women as the territory upon which the men reproduce that pure nation and as the ground that can be sullied by foreign penetration. […] The exercise of strong paternal control- both on the level of the family and as ‘fathers’ of the nation- provides evidence of masculine sufficiency, whereas masculine weakness will be evident in a daughter, wife, or lover who escapes from domestic confinement, who takes up aberrant political allegiances, or whose sexuality and reproduction escape control. (Rea, 222-223)

62 Founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893 to encourage the revival of the Irish language.
63 Founded in 1914, worked as one of the leading women’s organizations which took active part as cooks and nurses, etc. Instead of fighting on the front, or in support of the struggle for Irish independence during the Easter Rising, or the War of Independence and the Civil War.
In conclusion, no matter how marginalised Irish women were in the 1920s, they nevertheless contributed to the growth of their nation, though this achievement was never publicly recognized, as Owens states:

A significant minority of Irish women had become increasingly articulate and active in feminist, nationalist and labour concerns. To the number of nationalist women involved before and during the Rising of 1916, many thousands more were added in the wake of the Rising. From this point up to the bitter political divisions caused by the Treaty in 1922, such women played a significant role in the development of the emerging state. (Owens, Social History, 251)
5 Method of Analysis

In the following chapter, the method applied in this thesis will be briefly explained. The literary texts chosen for critical discussion are analysed with regard to the historical context of Ireland at the given era. This chapter aims at examining the representation of traumatized women in early 20th century Ireland in the works of fiction selected. Some theoretical and/or psychoanalytical studies on trauma will be addressed as well, notably ones by Freud, Jung' and Caruth. The traumas of the women in the novels will be analysed on the basis of these theoretical studies.

The fictional texts selected are approached from various theoretical perspectives, including the “new historicism” and “feminist literary theory”. Moreover, the social status of women in Ireland as reflected in the texts will be related to historical facts using historical studies as reference frames. Though there are diverse and conflicting definitions of “feminism”, the concept is understood to refer to a

... a movement seeking the reorganization of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of women and men as the foundation of law and custom. (Kolmar, 7)

Feminism the ideology of women’s liberation since intrinsic in all its approaches is the belief that women suffer injustice because of our sex. Under this umbrella various feminisms offer differing analyses of causes, or agents, of female oppression. (Humm, 74)

It is in this sense that “feminism” is understood in this thesis. The fictional novels selected are obviously also part of “Irish women writings”

The interdisciplinary approach to the two novels will reveal both the causes and consequences of traumatic experiences of the heroines, but also reflect the historical context which will be assessed against textexternal enquiries provided by historical studies.
6 Traumatized Irish Women in the Works of Fiction Selected

The following sub-chapters aim at examining the traumatized Anglo-Irish women featuring in Pamela Hinkson’s *The Ladies’ Road* (1932) and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (1929).

6.1 The Historical Context of *The Ladies’ Road* and Analysis of the Novel’s Female Characters

Pamela Hinkson’s *The Ladies Road* was first published in 1932 and is set historically in the Ireland of the late 1910s and early 1920s. It thus covers the tumultuous years following the First World War, and the Irish struggle for independence, featuring the Irish War of Independence and the Anglo-Irish Civil War. According to Connolly “[the early twentieth century] Irish women’s movement combined nationalism and unionism with other important ‘isms’ that have been eclipsed in the writing of mainstream Irish Studies (such as socialism, pacifism, internationalism and religious differences)” (Connolly, 153). Connolly sees this as “a small opportunity for the ‘(female) subaltern’ to ‘speak when spoken about in Irish Studies’.” (Connolly, 154) Thus, *The Ladies’ Road* reflect Hinkson’s deep concern and sorrow about the consequences of World War I on the lives of women.

The novel is told from the perspective of a 3rd person narrator, who empathically recaptures the sufferings and experiences of the characters, but especially of the heroines afflicted by violent, traumatic events beginning in the summer before the outbreak of the World War I. The time-span narrated covers about seven years, as explicitly stated in the novel: “[...] the real world was that
which the War had destroyed, and the rest all a gigantic accident, talked of
talked of Irene and of Cicely as he had talked seven years ago.” (The Ladies’ Road, 284)

The narrator’s voice is reliable and faithfully records the innermost thoughts and feelings of the characters.

The novel mainly focuses on the lives of two families, the Mannerings of Sussex and the Creaghs of Cappagh in Ireland, as they are faced with the troubles of the early 20th century, in particular, World War I, which they felt “[...] didn’t end although everyone prayed for peace” (The Ladies’ Road, 204).

The novel is divided into three sections. Part one begins at the estate named Winds in England, describing the happy childhood years in the nursery and memories of the Mannering siblings, whose mother died long before, and their father was killed while hunting. Godfrey, Cynthia, David and Stella, their Nanny and Miss Irving, Cynthia’s governess, are the major English characters, and their father’s sister Aunt Nancy and Uncle Hubert are the main characters living in the “big house” in Cappagh, Ireland, where the Mannering children often spend their summers. The summers at Cappagh are the happiest time in the lives of Godfrey, Cynthia, David and Stella. However, these moments of happiness do not last long and are terminated by World War I. Then unrest and fear prey on their minds and when they are faced with death and other calamities. During the war, the female characters are afflicted by fear and pain for the well-being of the male members of the family, who are called to arms. These female characters lose at least one of their loved ones; sons, or husbands or brothers. Later in this section, the narrator portrays the aftermath of the War and the changed feelings and attitudes of the characters who have already experienced the futility of this battle. But the end of World War I is not the end of the calamities suffered by the Irish family: the final chapter describes the acts of terrorism by Irish patriots and paramilitary groups, burning down the “Big Houses” of Anglo-Irish landlords, and ultimately also the estate of Cappagh.
The trauma of the novel’s central character Stella is elaborated in greater detail than that of the other characters. As an heiress of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, Stella’s experiences are in a way prototypical of the dilemma and sufferings of all the heiresses of Ireland’s privileged ruling-class. The novel focuses on Stella and her attempts to cope with her traumatic losses and to rearrange her future life. Alongside her two brothers David and Godfrey and her sister Cynthia, Stella’s dilemma is briefly addressed already in the in the first page of the novel, when the narrator describes the two houses, or rather the two worlds, in which she was raised:

[...] In that mirror in which things looked small and strangely clear and yet an immense distance away, Cappagh stood framed against its background of dark trees and the mountains beyond, with the lake in front and uncertain sunlight in the windows. [...] Winds on the other hand was Winds, and indescribable. [...] It stood against its background of ordered English country, so different from the background of Cappagh, between the Downs which in the evening were the same green yellow as the stone of which the house was built. [...] There was an indefinable magic about the memory of the house lit in the green dusk. It was Winds and part of childhood. (The Ladies’ Road, 7)

The difference between Winds and Cappagh – as perceived by the protagonist – the shift from happiness to a deep sense of loss are indications of her traumatic experience. The tone is serious though from time to time the characters are joyful, and full of hope. The prevailing tone, however, is one of sadness and emphasized by the imagery. For instance in passages such as:

“ [...] a dead body [...] feeling frozen [...] War-wounded men [...]” (The Ladies’ Road, 174). Also the acute sense of fear and awareness of death of the young men going to the frontline (e.g. David, Godfrey) is evoked repeatedly:

“If he’s killed with me, [...]”, “If I am killed [...]” (The Ladies’ Road, 64).

“ [...] they [British soldiers including David] would find themselves ‘like rats in a trap.” (The Ladies’ Road, 205)
“She [Stella] made a sound which he thought was laughter, but she was crying a little because she must share what she and David had held, for fear she should be left altogether alone and the darkness close over her.” (The Ladies’ Road, 200)

The horrors of war and the growing (apparent) indifference in those confronted with atrocities in warfare is conveyed in the following passage:

He was not shocked by these things because he was used to them and the instinct of self-preservation covered many horrors in war. When he went to France first, just after his nineteenth birthday, he had never seen a dead man. Then he saw a great many dead men and the sight was not a pretty one after an attack, No Man’s Land full of dead men was infinitely safer and preferable to No Man’s Land full of living men. […] Like most people of his generation he was not troubled about right or wrong […] He was only nineteen and he accepted it then whatever he might have felt after.” (The Ladies’ Road, 160- 161)

As David was confronted with his new situation, Stella was traumatized by the sense of helplessness regarding her brother’s condition: “[…] he sat silent and lonely, and Stella tried to reach him and failed for the first time.” (The Ladies’ Road, 160)

The atmosphere evoked by the two major locations enhances the sense of foreboding of impending calamity, contrasting the sense of happiness and security and “certainty” experienced in childhood, and the keen awareness of the loss of happiness after childhood and the deep sense of “uncertainty” experienced after the outbreak of World War I:

The uncertainty was part of that memory of Cappagh, a world of surprise and adventure where anything might happen. (The Ladies’ Road, 7)

The kitchen in childhood’s memory was as secure as the nursery. (The Ladies’ Road, 9)

At Cappagh one could never be sure of anything. […] At Cappagh it was all elusive, uncertain. […] The tennis lawns lay quiet and mysterious between the house and the woods. (The Ladies’ Road, 14- 15)

[…] the house looked still asleep with the sunlight on it- kindly and secure in sleep. (The Ladies’ Road, 24)
Life was like that now, wavering, uncertain and suddenly blown out. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 123)

[...][...] in comparative security and quietness she was able to think for the first time since the War began. And life stretched before her, long and desolate and empty; and even her garden at Cappagh might not fill it. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 188)

They [the men] were nearly all done with the War and were troubled already about what they were going back to, when it was over. [...][...][...] It had built a sort of security for her [Stella] in her thoughts of David, this world she knew, even apart from the fact that it was twelve miles behind the line. Anything one knew was less terrifying than the unknown. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 198-199)

Within a few pages, the narrative moves from the glorious days of Stella’s childhood in the “small secure world” of Winds, to her early adulthood at Cappagh, whose natural beauty is contrasted to the horrors of the ongoing war causing the loss of her loved ones. This contrast is also reflected in the ironic demise of Edmund and Philip. Just before they were both killed in battle on the same day, Edmund warned Philip not to leave the army and take part in Irish politics, describing Cappagh as “a world of its own between two worlds, kindly and secure as he remembered it with the sunlight on the grey walls.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 65)

The trauma experienced by the female characters, is revealed in their painful memories throughout the novel. With regard to Irene the narrator states, “She felt suddenly that if she could go to bed she would sleep for a week and perhaps forget the lifetime in which she had tried to wake George and always he had slept again, his head against his shoulder.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 54) In Nancy’s case, the loss of her husband Hubert in an accident shortly before to the war is followed by the death of her son Philip in the war, and she is thus confronted with two traumatic experiences in a very short time.

*The Ladies Road* pays a great deal of attention to the social role of Irish women. In this male dominated world Hinkson’s female characters are constantly trying to reassert their social role, trying to get rid of feeling guilty or for appearing to be merely “useless mouths” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 80) by helping
the men at the front. For instance, Edmund reacts negatively to Irene’s hospital work, noting that her hands “were roughened,” to which the narrator adds,

[they were] scarred by work, and he [Edmund] felt a shock looking at them. Irene’s hands. They had been so beautiful. They were ugly now. He hated ugliness and he looked away from them secretly to her face. He wished he could see her again in tweeds at Cappagh. There was going to be so much ugliness he couldn’t avoid. (The Ladies’ Road, 55)

It is not only Irene who has changed physically during the war, but also Mary, Godfrey’s wife: “[Mary] obviously hadn’t bothered what she looked like. Her hair which had always been lovely and shining and neat was rough and disordered, as though she could not be bothered to brush it.” (The Ladies’ Road, 120) Thus the War has not just had long-term after-effects, physically and mentally, on the men fighting in World War I, but also on the women staying at home but engaged in hospital services and other institutions supporting warfare.

Irene’s efforts to heal her wounds by assisting the men at the front turns out to be an irony of fate as she is eventually faced with the bitter truth that both her husband Philip and her secret admirer Edmund are killed: “Irene read Philip’s name and Edmund’s in the casualty list, in a brief moment of rest between carrying trays and polishing brasses (this last seemed a stupid way of helping on the War, but her hands were quite spoilt now, anyhow)” (The Ladies’ Road, 70).

Stella is confronted with a similarly paradoxical blow of fate. Upon learning of Philip’s death, Stella questions whether she should pretend to go on attending grammar school as if nothing had happened: “She was at school, which seemed a silly place to be when there was a war on.” (The Ladies’ Road, 72) In the end, she concludes that “[i]f the War lasted another five years, she thought, one would have to give up school altogether. Anyhow, there would be no food. It was becoming more and more difficult to feed people at all.” (The Ladies’ Road, 77) This sense of futility and deterioration is further supported by
The narrator’s claim that “[Stella] was less physically fit than he [David] was, because she had been underfed for the last three years […] She had had neuralgia the whole of the last term.” (The Ladies’ Road, 176) Stella’s friend Margery expresses the same sentiment, stating that “[s]chool life was so dull when the War was going on outside.” (The Ladies’ Road, 74)

The atrocities of the war and the acts of violence in Ireland in the early 1920s are the causes of the traumas inflicted on the characters in Hinkson’s novel. The female characters, however, are afflicted on multiple levels, not least because they are entrapped between their peaceful, or even blissful past and the bleak and uncertain outlooks for the future.

As has been noted64, Stella “strongly desires to contribute in some direct practical way to the War effort” (Jeffery, 5). This desire is evident in her attempt to convince Cynthia to allow her to quit school in order to take an active part during the War time: “Must I go back, Cynthia … can’t I? […] It’s awful. […] Day after day, just the same - doing nothing. Couldn’t I? […] Can’t I leave? […] Do something- in a hospital or something?” (The Ladies’ Road, 114) But her request was not approved on the grounds that she is too young. Therefore, as Phillips notes “Hinkson’s novel has elements of resistance to patriarchal domination rather than to the war itself, and may be seen as its title suggests as a distinctly female rather than a pacifist voice.” (Phillips, 271)

The word “Road” in the title of The Ladies’ Road is metaphoric, as indicated in several passages of the text, like, for instance: “The road dipped before them [Stella and David] into a tunnel of trees. They went down together into an abyss … Gallipoli … France.” (The Ladies’ Road, 125) The metaphoric use of “road” is also employed in the following passage:

But the trouble was they couldn’t go together. […] She was quick, anxious, listening, careful to keep up because of that terror of being left behind. They went to the very edge of the abyss and looked over. She was only breathless because of that terror that she might not keep up,

that she might lose him on *the road* [emphasis added] if he went faster than she did. [...] She learnt quickly, patiently, things that did matter, building the road for herself. *The road* [emphasis added] at this time became part of her life. She saw it wind across flat country through cornfields, white and dusty and endless like a French road on which they had walked in their childhood with no shade anywhere, no trees. [...] The road was familiar to her, a part of her life like the names of towns she had never seen, which were yet more familiar than any towns she knew. Baapaume, Ypres, Menin, Loos. People one knew had been killed in these places. They stamped themselves on her childhood, being part of it, to be remembered afterwards when many closer memories would be forgotten. They were part of life, of the making of life in those important, ineffaceable years. She accepted them in common with all her generation, not realising their importance. *The road belonged to all of them.* [emphasis added] (*The Ladies’ Road*, 126-127)

Thus, the road signifies the road of life to be taken by the characters, regardless of their ethnicity, class, age or gender. The burden on the shoulders of the men is implied in the following quote: “Men going up to the line bent under the weight of their equipment, stumbled and slipped in it.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 126) Like the metaphorlic use of “road”, “map” is another image used symbolically: the young people of the time lack confidence in their future and are desperately in need of guidance particularly when faced with the challenges of warfare:

Already life before the War was blotted out for people of her age. There were maps too which she traced with David, elaborately concealing with a new cunning what she was trying to do. They had always shared a passion for maps and they had liked roads, especially the roads that ran round the edge of a hill circling it, with endless suggestions and possibilities. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 126)

In a more literary sense, the title also alludes to “The Chemin des Dames”, “the Ladies’ Way”, a French phrase meaning “a pleasure walk along a ridge offering views across the Aisne River and the surrounding landscape, and designated

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65 These places were actual locations at the Western Front of World War I.
by the French king, Louis XV for the amusement of his daughters.” 66 The reference to “Chemin des Dames” occurs in the passage: “At the end of May David was reported ‘Missing, believed killed.’ For Stella the road led to the Chemin des Dames and ended there.” (The Ladies’ Road, 205) Thus, the author conveys the idea that with the death of David, Stella has reached to the end of the road which promised a life of peace and joy: “A chapter of life had ended. No one knew how or when the next chapter would begin, or what to do with it.” (The Ladies’ Road, 211) Even the end of the World War I cannot provide new hope to her: “Stella said nothing because it didn’t really matter now; but looking at Cynthia she knew that Cynthia was thinking of Francis. The end of the War had something to bring her.” (The Ladies’ Road, 207)

Another aspect of the female characters’ tragedy is their loss of innocence. Matured by the trauma of war, Hinkson’s female characters are also mourning for the early loss of the bliss of childhood. Actually, Cynthia was aware of the fact that Stella is well qualified for the jobs she might apply for, but she feels pity on Stella for being as yet too young and unable to develop her potential because she is traumatized by the loss of her beloved brother in the war:

She could pass for more, she said eagerly. People took her for more already. She was as tall as Cynthia. Yes, Cynthia knew she had been growing... out of her skirts. [...] She was terribly sorry for her, looking back on her own childhood. Death coming decently and in order had not seemed to disturb that childhood; not like this hurried, disordered death. [mentioning the death of Godfrey!] But she hoped very much suddenly that the War would end soon for Stella’s sake, feeling for the first time that it was harder on Stella than on any of them. But if they could keep her at school- still a child (for she thought of Maythorpe as she remembered it, not knowing what the War had done there and that you couldn’t shut it out.) And when the War was over, Stella would have her life before her. And her good times, Cynthia thought, never having had

any good times she could enjoy, because she had always been looking at the clock. She had grown up at just the wrong time she thought, but it was a good thing that Stella was so young. She said, ‘You'll have to wait, I am afraid,’ and Stella’s heart fell as heavy as lead. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 114-115)

Stella pours out her grief concerning her in-between-ness to Margery, stating “I wish I was one of the kids. They don’t seem to mind ... or much older. We’re just the wrong age, the worst age.” In a supporting statement, Miss Braye remarks of the children: “They’re using up all their strength. [...] By the time they are twenty, they will have none left. Girls of that age used to be children. Now they’re women with children’s bodies.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 80-81) This feeling of being not yet accepted as an adult woman is a recurring motif: “… the mirror did not show her [Stella’s] own face, because she wasn’t old enough or young enough and must live always in a No Man’s Land left by the War with a country on either side that was not hers.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 313) Similarly, in a conversation with Cynthia, Nanny mourns the loss of her own youth after years of exhaustion, and her exploration of the traumatic years is addressed in the novel’s final chapter:

Her [Nanny’s] thin breast ached for the feeling of a child’s head against it. But she thought it wasn’t her age. She felt as well as ever, but she had to be more and more careful remembering things painfully, where they were and where they ought to be, so that she might find them without seeing. It made her nervous. She had nightmares sometimes of children stumbling too near the fire, and she [was] not able to find them. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 306)

Nancy’s trauma as well as her feeling of empathy with the other female relatives in the novel is advanced by her own experiences and observations as a nurse on the Western Front: “Nancy Creagh, weeping for Philip, wept for Edmund too as though she had lost two sons. She had so much sympathy and imagination that she had lost many sons before her own. Working in a canteen in London she washed dishes and served food to hungry men thought of Hubert.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 66)
Indeed, the above statement establishes a link between Irish and English women afflicted by the War: no matter where they live, women experience suffering as mothers, wives and sisters. The narrator reveals this general aspect of female suffering when he states that “... women were the same the world over when there was fighting...” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 266). According to Phillips, women experience loss differently than men do, concluding that although “[p]arting is sometimes the lot of men, [it is] always the lot of women”. For Phillips, the ultimate proof of the centrality of this theme can be found in the final conversation between Stella and David before David departs for the front line (Phillips, 268):

David said that was all, because he too couldn’t think of anything else to say. The relationship of brother and sister [who are very close to each other] left them only pain and the room was full of it. They had nothing to say, no careful, slow, last talk for the one staying behind, or easy talk which did not matter between two people going together, free because of that, leaving nothing after them to show what they had been.

Hubert Creagh had talked to Philip before he went out and Philip had talked to Guy. And George had talked, slow difficult talk to Irene. Husband and wife, lovers, friends, talked before they parted. But these two were only brother and sister and the closeness of their relationship lay on them like a weight. And David was too young to have anything to leave.

She said, forcing her tongue to move: ‘Perhaps it won’t last much longer now.’ (It had lasted for ever.) (*The Ladies’ Road*, 175)

In his analysis of the novel Phillips focuses on the relationships between the siblings and the trauma of deprivation, noting that Stella felt it was unfair for Godfrey’s former comrade to judge her feelings of loss to be less than his wife’s. “Men were like that’ she reflects, ‘They only understood the relationships they created. It was part of their vanity...You could get another husband. But she had lost two brothers.” (Phillips, 268)

Hinkson’s novel goes a step further in discussing the effects of war on memory and the impact of trauma on women sharing a similar faith. As Caruth claims, women, by observing each other, tend to develop some kind of secret bond or relationship, a willingness of “listening to each other’s voice”.67 As

Caruth puts it, "...history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas." (Caruth, "Unclaimed", 20-24) This phenomenon is also addressed in the following passage of the novel:

She [Irene] lived with other women, as women were living all over Europe in that strange isolation. The fullness of her sympathy for the girl who shared a room with her, when her young husband was killed, was guilty with a sense of inadequacy. It might have been George and this girl knew – everyone knew – that one’s thoughts flew to that, even while one spoke words of sympathy.[...]. They loved each other, these women, and hated each other at once, were in sympathy because they knew, and separated. Each one’s safety menaced the other’s safety. They, all of them, lived alone, touching each other and going back to that small world where they were shut in with some man who belonged to them. (The Ladies’ Road, 71)

When the telegraph boy arrives at their door with a bunch of envelops, a painful period of waiting begins for the women, because they have to wait for news from the frontline:

There was a moment when she was lost, helpless, staring at the strangely colourless faces of the girls, from which the blood had ebbed away slowly and painfully. They looked their helpless apprehension at each other, all of them equal, shut into this room by a wall of fear. (The Ladies’ Road, 77)

Those who didn’t receive letters were relieved, but they shared an equally strong sense of sympathy for less-fortunate women: They only thought: ‘He’s all right’. (The Ladies’ Road, 78)

Like Caruth, Erikson also argues that traumatized people share “a spiritual kinship”, suggesting “... they know one another in ways that the most intimate of friends never will, and for that reason they can supply a human context and a kind of emotional solvent in which the work of recovery can begin. It is a gathering of the wounded.” (Caruth, “Trauma”, 187) However, according to Erikson, trauma is experienced in two, distinct yet overlapping forms: “individual trauma” and “collective trauma”. On the one hand, “individual trauma” represents “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively”. They
suffer a “[...] deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and, as so often happens in catastrophes of this magnitude, they withdraw into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone.” On the other hand, “collective trauma” is “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality.” Unlike “individual trauma”, the effects of “collective trauma” are not always readily visible, as “it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with ‘trauma’.” However, “[the] gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support” can be quite powerful and far-reaching. As a result, a part of the individual self is lost in the process: “ ‘I’ continue to exist, though, damaged and maybe even permanently changed. ‘You’ continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But ‘We’ no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body.” (Caruth, “Trauma”, 187) This idea is supported by Bloom who noted that “[t]rapped within the tragic circumstances of their lives, the silenced victims of trauma are bereft of the shared experience of tragedy.”(Bloom, Creating, 251)

Trauma can also have a long-term effect on the sufferer’s memories, as they attempt to repress haunting memories and prevent them from surfacing. Ironically, the destruction of the “Big House” of the family at the end of each novel, turns out to help the traumatized women of these houses to erase the painful memories and to move on. It enhances their resilience and makes them pursue actively their life of the future, no matter how desperate they are and how bleak the prospects. In The Last September, the inmates of the “Big House” witness the burning of their home in quiet resignation: “It burnt easily,” says the narrator, “as though there had not been long winters followed by long wet summers to drench the walls through. [...] The flames leaping up, when it was too late to save anything more - they had saved a few things and left those they most wanted to save ... ” (The Ladies’ Road, 319). However, it is still a traumatic experience which haunts them for the rest of their lives. Though repressed the traumatic memories tend to surface in their dreams: “She [Stella] heard him [Guy- her cousin] talking in his sleep at night as David had talked, or
his deep breathing which waking, half asleep still, she sometimes thought was David’s, forgetting that he was in France.” (The Ladies’ Road, 188)

The mirror motif is used to refer archetypically to the mother-figure. The mother figure that appears in the mirror of The Ladies’ Road is Stella’s sister Cynthia, who has been a surrogate mother to Stella after the early death of her real mother. Stella sees in Cynthia a mother figure:

[...] coming to the end of the corridor, stared at the long mirror that faced her [Stella’s] on the wall. The mirror gave her back her own reflection with the corridor behind her in the September dusk. She started a little. It had seemed to hold more than that, reflecting something she could not define. And she had not recognised her own reflection for a moment, although she had seen herself so often in this mirror. She must still have been seeing Cynthia with that white thing about her shoulders and her hair over it. For she had thought for a moment that it was Cynthia in the glass. And it was only herself in the white frock she wore at school for parties and great occasions. And how plain she looked, she thought, staring at her own reflection. How could she have thought that she had seen Cynthia’s face with that shadow over it and the look of mystery as though Cynthia saw something of which she was half afraid? She couldn’t have looked like that. She blinked and opened her eyes and saw her own face looking back at her from the mirror, and her own overgrown body in the white frock which was too short, and she didn’t seem now to fit her anywhere. She smiled at her own reflection and in the dusk with the shadows deepening, Cynthia’s face smiled back at her, heavy with mystery and some secret sorrow. (The Ladies’ Road, 90)

In addition to the metaphor of the mirror, the major events that caused the characters’ trauma are described in terms of shadows or ghostly figures: “Soldiers going up to the line at night guided by a tape, had passed other soldiers going down, ghostly figures, half hidden. Voices had spoken, felt for each other in the darkness. [...] The War was over, but they had lost touch and running along a tape in the darkness could enable them to catch up. [...] What had they been before they became prisoners who are the same the world over? [...] In that peaceful country which had been behind the German line most of the War, they were ghosts searching for something they remembered [...]” (The Ladies’ Road, 212- 213). In order to illustrate how this shadow metaphor functions and how women experience encounters with shadows and the ghosts of persons they love and have lost to death, and the frustrated quest for personal identity is no longer disconcerting:
There would be, as Irene had thought, for the next generation, no world between two worlds, but only Ireland. And none of this really concerned them, because they had spent everything in the War and so for all their lives afterwards must lie on the bank watching the stream of life go by, unable to go with it or to discover clearly where it went. (The Ladies’ Road, 319-320)

The Great War has in some way helped them to cope with the violence they are faced with in Ireland during the Anlo-Irish War, as Foster points out:

The Great War has insulated or inoculated the Anglo-Irish to some extent against the pettier (but epoch-making) war of the IRA launched under cover of darkness. Together, the Troubles and the Great War bring the decline of the country house to a climatic end [...]. (Foster, New Bearings, 470)

The contrast between the past that belongs to pre-war times and the present and the prospects for the future is expressed by Stella’s nostalgic yearning for the bliss experienced in Cappath in her childhood. Her memories and nostalgic yearnings indicate the remoteness of “that other life before the War” (The Ladies’ Road, 185). Edmund Urquhart, another visitor with nationalist sympathies, may be disappointed that Cappagh isn’t really Ireland, “yet it had the indefinable magic of the country about it” (The Ladies’ Road, 32). By the novel’s end, the magic spell of Ireland has dimmed, and the land has become a place of danger, sinister conspiracies, violence and thus rather an adventurous place. (Foster, New Bearings, 470)

Thus, one can say that the life in Ireland and the “Big House” and its inmates in particular, as described by Pamela Hinkson in The Ladies’ Road is close to historical reality, and thus accurate a realistic representation of the lives and hard times of Anglo-Irish women in the upper-class milieu of the “Big Houses” in rural Ireland during World War I and the early 1920s.
6.2 Historical Context of “The Last September” and Analysis of the Female Characters and their Sufferings

*The Last September* by Elizabeth Bowen was published in 1928. Being the last female heir to an Anglo-Irish country estate, ‘Bowen’s Court’, a “Big House” in County Cork, embodied many things for her. That is why Bowen felt the need to acknowledge the tensions of Anglo-Irish Society living in the Big Houses in the early 20th century. The “Big Houses” stand for the social values which “shape the consciousnesses of those who thrive and those who are entrapped in them” (Lassner, 7).

In the years under investigation, Bowen attended a boarding school which was formerly the home of Charles Darwin “‘under the intolerable obligation of being fought for, and could not fall short in character’ without remembering that men were dying for them.” (Ellmann, 29) It was impossible for her as a writer to ignore the biting facts of her country as well as her life. And there appear to be some affinities between the life of the author and her protagonist Lois. For instance, both Bowen and Lois lost their mothers early in infancy, which had a great influence on their lives. Ellman considers *The Last September* as a typical example of Bowen’s fiction, in which “fathers recede into the background, whereas mothers seize the limelight [...] Yet dead or alive, the characters occupy the same dimension, as if they had been dreamed into existence by the house”. Ellman refers to Sir Richard and Lois’s father who are surpassed by their wives (Ellman, 59). Bowen, like Lois, had an affair with a British army officer whom she met at one of the parties, but their relationship did not last long (Walshe, 6-7). Moreover, Bowen lived both in England and Ireland, but had a strong tie with Ireland, and many of her novels are inspired by her own experiences there, which were often interwoven with the history of the chaotic years of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Bowen emphasizes her own sense of divided cultural identity or hybridity when she says that “she felt English in Ireland, Irish in England and at home on the Irish Sea”, thus “her fictions turn on from this divided, fractured sense of identity” like the female characters she had created.
in her novels (Poplawski, 26-27). However, despite these affinities, *The Last September* cannot really be considered to be autobiographical. Bowen’s life was not as adventurous as that of Lois. Moreover, during the time the novel is set in, Bowen was in Italy. In the novel the Big House of Danielstown, the home of Lois, is burnt down by Irish rebels, like other Big Houses in the neighbourhood, whereas Bowen’s home, “Bowen’s Court” escaped unharmed and was sold nearly 40 years after the historical period in which the novel is set. (*The Last September*, Introduction, 2-3)

The novel focuses on the time of the Irish Troubles in the early 1920s and is set in County Cork, Ireland. It is told from a third person perspective. The novel’s central focus is on the life of upper-class women in the Big House of rural Ireland, addressing such issues as love, sexuality and the tension and impact of the political turmoil of the early twentieth century Ireland and its traumatic effect particularly on women. It can be read as an elegy in prose. *The Last September* is weaving together typical Anglo-Irish themes and the tragedy the young heroine is exposed to and the development she goes through. Bowen’s preface claims that the book is an authentic representation of the times:

> The action takes place during ‘the Troubled Times’ – i.e. the roving armed conflict between the Irish Republican Army and British Forces still garrisoning Ireland. Ambushes, arrests, captures and burnings, reprisals and counter-reprisals kept the country and country people distraught and tense ... The position of such Anglo-Irish land-owning families as the Nylors of Danielstown [the Bowen’s Court of the novel] was not only ambiguous but was more nearly heart-breaking than they cared to show. Inherited loyalty (or at least, adherence) to Britain – where their sons were schooled, in whose wars their sons had for generations fought, and to which they owed the ‘Ascendancy’ lands and power-pulled them one way: their own temperamental Irishness the other... [Their] ambivalent attitude to the English ... is a marked Anglo-Irish trait. (Bowen, Preface, A. 98-99)

This sentiment is echoed by Genet: “[...] Bowen’s only wholly ‘Irish’ novel, *The Last September*, was written in this elegiac mood, chronicling the autumn world of the Anglo-Irish and the tragic fate of the Big House during the War of Independence. [...] in terms of theme and setting [it] is her only entirely ‘Irish’
one – is in a very real sense an elegy, a posthumous account of the twilight world of the Anglo-Irish whose tone and atmosphere throughout is coloured by the mood of valediction, ‘the poetry of regret’.” (Genet, 144-145)

Kiberd likewise states that Bowen’s novel is true to historical facts. The events described are true to life, and the places and the way of life of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy conveyed realistically. There are explicit references to historical incidents such as the IRA’s attack on the R.I.C (Royal Irish Constabulary) barracks at Ballydrum, the brutality of the “Black and Tans”, the M.F.H (probably the abbreviation of Military Funeral Honors), as well as to the V.A.D certificate68. Thus, the narrator evokes a realistic historical context. The omniscient narrator describes the events chronologically, with occasional flashbacks to events having taken place earlier. The narrator can be said to be reliable and objective, adopting the voice of a chronicler. Corcoran, for instance, confirms the historical accuracy of the speech of one of the major characters, Hugo Montmorency, concerning Ireland’s “national grievances” against the punitive nature of English law (The Last September, 123). According to Corcoran, “What Hugo is alluding to here is the English economic stranglehold which, in the nineteenth century, ensured- by means of custom duties, tariffs, and so on- the virtual destruction of Irish industry.” (Corcoran, 52) Furthermore, the paragraph that begins “[i]n those days, girls wore crisp white skirts and transparent blouses clotted with white flowers; ribbons, threaded through with a view to appearance, appeared over their shoulders” (The Last September, 7), indicates that at that time young ladies were forced into traditional, socially accepted forms of dress, leaving Lois, for example, trapped in the same societal mould as her friends. In the early 1920s, Anglo-Irish society of the time, appropriate dress and behaviour of women was more important than their actual character. As Ellmann notes, “Lois’s costume is introduced before its wearer, for Lois herself feels trapped in this appearance, trussed up to embody ‘youth’ and ‘freshness,’ yet afraid to contemplate a life outside such roles.” (Ellmann, 54) Moreover, Lois is implicitly complaining about not yet being

68 Voluntary Aid Detachment. Founded in 1909 to provide nursing services and this group of young girls and women who mainly were upper and middle class, offered considerable support during the First World War. See Peterson, 19-21.
acknowledged as an individual of her own but merely as a young girl, when she says: “[...] But you never take in a word I say. You’re not interested when I tell you about myself.” (The Last September, 49)

At this point, it is worth mentioning the motif of ‘silence’ which recurs in the novel. As Tigges claims, the dominance of ‘silence’ in Bowen’s work is established by either the little or longer pauses given in the text, or the unspoken words imposed on the objects to mirror the characters’ feelings (Tigges, 282-283):

The pale room rose to a height only mirrors followed above the level of occupation; this disproportionate zone of emptiness dwarfed at all times figures and furniture. The distant ceiling imposed on consciousness its blank white oblong, and a pellucid silence, distilled from a hundred and fifty years of conversation, waited beneath the ceiling. Into this silence, voices went up in stately attenuation. Now there were no voices; Mrs. Montmorency and Laurence sat looking away from each other. (The Last September, 20)

Tigges further points out that

There is a silence, a reticence surrounding Lois’ character, who often finds herself at a loss for words. A loss which is often mirrored by the silence of the House. Nothing has changed from the previous visit of the Montmorencys, apart from this all-pervading silence. Silence becomes therefore a figure, a figure of thought, and a figure of speech, almost a character in the novel. Silence is a figure which stands for the immobility of the historical and social situation, and at the same time the prelude to the forthcoming catastrophe. (Tigges, 284)

The same room hosts another scene addressing the ‘silence’ motif: “Silence healed, but kept a scar of horror. The shuttered-in drawing-room, the family sealed in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paperweight—were desirable, worth much of this to regain. Fear curled back from the carpet-border [...]” (The Last September, 33). Moreover, in the scene in which Lois cannot hear all that Lady Naylor and Mrs. Montmorency are saying about her, there are eloquent gaps of silence in the discourse “[...] the missing adjective is immediately transcribed in the crack that appears in the basin Lois is handling. And in that crack, in that gap in the discourse, in the silence, Lois will read on the enigma of her reality [...]” (Tigges, 287). “For Lois, the possibility of speaking out can simply be inferred, delayed to some future moment when her self-knowledge mirrors the new reality in which the Irish find themselves after achieving independence from Britain.” (Gillies, 125)
Just before the novel’s tragic events begin to unfold, Francie and Hugo Montmorency, close friends of the Naylors, and Marda Norton visit at Danielstown, the Naylor’s big Irish estate. Mr. Montmorency, who once had a love affair with Lois’s mother Laura (now dead), and who has been married to Francie, “a frail, affectionate older woman, his house sold, his life an uneasy mixture of ‘the perception of regret’ and lack of prospects, seem[s] [...] irritatingly unsatisfactory to Lois.” (Lee, Estimation, 46) Mr. Montmorency has platonic feelings for the other visitor of Danielstown, Marda, which are, however, not requited. Marda has no interest in Hugo at all, and a rather different way of life:

She particularly dislikes him for falling in love with Danielstown’s most romantic visitor, Marda, who is an Anglicized, sophisticated, professional house-guest, about to make a rich London marriage, and quite cut off from Irish life. Marda seems as promising and glamorous to Lois as Mr. Montmorency seems depressing; but both characters are there to pass a disenchanted verdict on the fate of the ‘dispossessed’ or ‘exiled’ Anglo-Irish. (Lee, Estimation, 46)

Sir Richard and Myra Naylor, the owners of Danielstown, have no children but they host Lady Naylor’s nephew Laurence, who studies at the university of Oxford, and Sir Richard’s niece Lois, whom they have the legal right to authorize as her ward, as she is an orphan by Sir Richard’s sister Laura. When creating the heroine of the novel Elizabeth Bowen was evidently inspired by her own experience as a young woman in early 20th century Anglo-Irish society, and her conflicts during her quest for identity:

It was not until after the end of those seven winters that I understood that we Protestants were a minority, and that the unquestioned rules of our being came, in fact, from the closeness of a minority world [...] I took the existence of Roman Catholics for granted but met few and was not interested in them. They were, simply, “the others,” whose world lay alongside ours but never touched. As to the difference between the two religions, I was too discreet to ask questions — if I wanted to know. This appeared to share a delicate, awkward aura with those two other differences — of sex, of class. So quickly in a child’s mind, does prudery seed itself and make growth that I remember, even, an almost sexual shyness on the subjects of Roman Catholics. I walked with hurried step and averted cheek past porticos of churches that were “not ours,” uncomfortably registering in my nostrils the pungent, unlikely smell (of incense) that came round curtains, through swinging doors.” (Bowen, Seven Winters, 508)
During this troubled period, many members of Anglo-Irish society felt trapped because of their mixed-descent and/or divided loyalties between England and Ireland. Bowen, sympathizes with their predicament, and shared this feeling of standing in between two cultural identities for she felt to be “Irish in England and English in Ireland” (O’Faolain, 15-16). This experience was “... indicative of the gulf dividing the Anglo-Irish from the native Irish”, and turned out to by symptomatic of the final years of British rule. The contemporary historian Hoogland anticipated that “this war will eventually lead to the destruction of the colonizing power of the Anglo-Irish landed gentry, of the Ascendancy itself, and of the way of life it still barely upholds. Founded on unequal power relations embedded in an outdated class system, the Anglo-Irish community is shown to have rendered itself virtually obsolete.” (Hoogland, 50)

Bowen had experienced the tension between her English and Irish roots herself, and this is also reflected in *The Last September*, in particular in the portrayal of the female characters. On one hand, the British side is represented by the character of Betty Vermont, the wife of a British officer, who is constantly irritated by the “ambivalent” approach of the Anglo-Irish to the growing Irish threat (Lee, Estimation, 51). “All this is terrible for you all, isn’t it?” she says at one point,

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 - I mean, of course, the lower classes! I remember mother saying in 1916- you know, when that dreadful rebellion broke out- she said: ‘This has been a shock to me; I shall never feel the same about the Irish again!’ [...] She always said they were the most humorous people in the world, and with hearts of gold. Though of course we had none of us ever been to Ireland. (*The Last September*, 46)

After Mrs. Carey has welcomed her to Ireland, Mrs. Vermont replies:

Oh well – you see we didn’t come over to enjoy ourselves, did we? We came to take care of all of you – and of course, we are ever so glad to be able to do it. Not that I don’t like the country; it’s so picturesque with those darling mountains and the hens running in and out of the cottages just the way mother always said. But you see one can’t help worrying all the time about Timmie – my husband – and all the boys;
Bowen also addresses the issue of race, i.e. aristocratic lineage. O’Toole claims that Bowen’s own experience corresponds to that of an Anglo-Irish girl who lives in one of the Big Houses in Ireland and who falls in love with an English officer, a relationship that reflects ‘the wide gap’ between the British and the Anglo-Irish. (O’Toole, 138) However, the heroine Lois is not the only character in the novel who suffers from an identity crisis and who feels trapped in a “Cocoon”, as she puts it (The Last September, 49). The word “trap” in the given context has a double meaning in that it may also refer to a carriage, and Lois and Mr. Montmorency are seen travelling in a “trap”, and the metaphoric function of this vehicle becomes obvious in Lois’s thoughts in the given situation:

[...]
a time when they could have talked was gone. They might have said, she felt now, anything; but what had remained unsaid, never conceived in thought, would exercise now a stronger compulsion upon their attitude. [...]
she fidgeted in the trap, [...] ‘This trap’s too small,’ she said finally. (The Last September, 62-63)

But Bowen, through the narrator’s voice, also reveals her scorn at some of the English characters and their snobbishness. Lady Naylor, the wife of Lois’s uncle, for instance, criticizes the decision of Lois to have a relationship with an English officer by indicating the big gap not only between the two nationalities, but also in class and descent. She comments in a rather scathing manner on the English:

His mother, he says, lives in Surrey, and of course you do know, don’t you, what Surrey is. It says nothing, absolutely; part of it is opposite the Thames Embankment. Practically nobody who lives in Surrey ever seems to have been heard of, and if one does hear of them they have never heard of anybody else who lives in Surrey. Really, altogether, I think all English people are 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. (The Last September, 58)

When Francie reminds Lady Naylor of the nice people living in villas in England, she replies in the same cynical and condescending manner: “Very nice in their way, I am sure [...].” (in their relationships with men, are reflected in the conversation between the two young girls Lois and Livvy: The Last September,
58) Some more prejudices against the English, in this case the easy going and
carefree behaviour of English girls:

[...] You see, he [David Armstrong, Livvy’s fiancee] is accustomed to
English girls who are very free; I believe there is almost nothing they will
not let a man say and that they get kissed before they get engaged. Now
I should not like him to think I had no heart at all. You know Irish girls in
books are always made out so fascinating and heartless; I should not like
him to think that of me. And if he does recover, he might go back to
England and get engaged to a girl simply out of his lower nature. [...]  
(The Last September, 69).

Genet suggests that Lady Naylor’s function in the novel is to emphasize that
there is a gulf between the two nationalities, but one based largely on
snobbishness and condescension on the part of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy
against English middle classes and soldiers with no “aristocratic background” in
particular:

[...] At one point, her objections to Lois’s suitor Gerald – an army officer
but with no aristocratic background to recommend him – causes her to
consider the problem of the English and their deficiencies with all the
detachment of one race contemplating another. [...] Lady Naylor,
ultimately, seems to oppose the semi-feudal ethos of the Anglo-Irish
aristocracy to what she evidently perceives as the fallen world of post
Edwardian England. (Genet, 150)

The importance of “class” and “aristocratic background” in Anglo-Irish society is
a striking aspect in Bowen’s novel, as also Coates has pointed out: “The Last
September insists, firstly, that the Anglo-Irish are an Irish sub-group or tribe and
not simply the English in Ireland. Lois, her friends and her family maintain a
distinct social and cultural identity, defined largely in opposition to English
mores” (Coates 11).

Moreover, Genet claims that

Ironically, she [Lady Naylor] seems totally unaware of the flaws in her
logic. Remembering a visit to a friend’s country estate in England, she
comments on how she conveyed her lack-lustre impression of the local
villagers (criticising them for their lack of ‘brain’) to the philanthropic
landlords, who retorted that ‘at least they were loyal’. Lady Naylor’s reply
is characteristically disparaging: “I said they hadn’t got any alternative,
and if they had an alternative, I didn’t suppose they’d see it.” (The Last
September, 27). Carried to its conclusion, Lady Naylor’s logic would not
appear to justify the confidence which she professes to have in the infallibility of her own regime. (Genet, 150)

The title *The Last September* suggests the impending end of a tradition, caused by the troubles of the early 1920s culminating in the displacement of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and the end of the tradition of the “Big House”. The title is thus elegiac way and the season of fall metaphoric, followed by the cold of winter (Anglo-Irish War and Civil War). (Genet, 144-145). The title also suggests metaphorically the change inevitably linked with the autumn season, thus the physical and material changes in the fortunes of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, the loss of their homes and the termination of their extravagant or luxurious way of life enriched, with tea parties, tennis parties, dances and other forms of leisure, which are terminated by Irish partisans and/or the IRA. It is the last September of the Big Houses, and of the glamorous days of Anglo-Irish aristocracy, and thus also the last autumn for Lois, signifying also the transition from adolescence to adulthood: “She is tossed about by bouts of extreme self-consciousness and a sense of doom springing from the suspicion” (Hoogland 41). “With the dissemination of (Freudian) psychoanalytic theory or, in Foucauldian terms, with the ‘invention of sexuality’ at the end of the nineteenth century, adolescence became generally regarded as by far the most crucial stage in identity formation precisely on account of its sexual overdetermination” (Hoogland, 41-42).

Lois, the 19 year old heroine, brought up by her uncle Sir Richard and aunt Lady Naylor, appears to be a peaceful young girl who suffers like most of the other women in a male dominated world. But what makes Bowen’s novel different from Hinkson’s is that Lois does not passively surrender, but struggles to overcome the suffering and chaos inflicted on her. After Marda and the Montmorencys have departed from the Naylors’ Big House, and after the death of Gerald, Laurence and Lois decide to start a new life elsewhere and thus to move away from Danielstown for good, embracing the new freedom. It is only a matter of time before the Naylors’ house is destroyed.
Bowen claims that *The Last September* has been a novel “nearest her heart”69. Danielstown and Bowen’s Court have much in common, and the inmates of both Big Houses display a similar degree of ignorance, isolation, aloofness and detachment from the peasantry and the Irish people. “They were in most ways ... fairly ordinary Anglo-Irish country gentry.” Bowen states,

I do not feel that they require defence – you, on the other hand, may consider them indefensible. Having obtained their position through an injustice, they enjoyed that position through privilege. But, while they wasted no breathe in deprecating an injustice it would not have been to their interest to set right, they did not abuse their privilege - on the whole ... Isolation, egotism and, on the whole, lack of culture made in them for an independence one has to notice because it becomes, in these days, rare. Independence was the first quality of a class now, I am told, becoming extinct ... I recognize that a class, like a breed of animals, is due to ... become extinct should it fail to adapt ... The gentry, as a class, may or may not prove able to make adaptations ... To my mind, they are tougher than they appear. To live as though living gave them no trouble has been the first imperative of their make-up: to do this has taken a virtuosity into which courage enters more than has been allowed. In the last issue, they have lived at their own expense. (*Bowen’s Court*, 456)

Thus, the character’s greatest failure is their ignorance of and withdrawal from the unrest around them by continuing to engage in ostentatious social gatherings and entertainments. The following dialogue between Marda and Mr. Montmorency exemplifies this ignorance as well as the “impotence of their kind” (Lee, 47):

> How far do you think this war is going to go? Will there ever be anything we can all do except not notice?
>
> Don’t ask me, he said, but sighed sharply as though beneath the pressure of omniscience. ‘A few more hundred deaths, I suppose, on our side- which is no side- rather scared, rather isolated, not expressing anything except tenacity to something that isn’t there - that never was there.’ (*The Last September*, 82)

This ignorance of the actual state of affairs is already apparent at the beginning of the novel, when Francie is teased by the other characters because she is worried about the potential danger of “being shot” when sitting in the open:

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69 See *The Last September*, Intro. p.2.
‘Listen, Richard,’ said Francie; ‘are you sure we will not be shot at if we sit out late on the steps?’ Sir Richard laughed and they all shared his amusement. ‘We never have yet, not even with soldiers here and Lois dancing with officers up and down the avenue. You are 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 nights?’ ‘No, but Richard, seriously- ’ began Francie, then, as they all stared, laughed and had to give up and go on laughing. [...] (The Last September, 23)

In the novel most characters tend to ignore the potential threat or deny that the country has become “unsafe”:

‘[...] Something said in the English press has apparently given rise to an idea that this country’s unsafe. It’s unlucky for Lois. I should never go by the papers about England ... No, Francie, if you didn’t mix up the young men, I really don’t know what you mean.’ (The Last September, 56-57)

But Francie’s concern is quickly abated: “‘Oh, it’s been very stupid of me,’ cried Francie, flushing with agitation. [...] But I thought from what everyone said [...]’” (The Last September, 57).

Lee claims that

... the position of unconscious isolation came to a painful climax in the Troubles and the Civil War of the 1920s. The Anglo-Irish families, enclosed in the Big Houses, aloof from the nationalist cause but already- ever since disestablishment- feeling themselves abandoned by the English, and about to be left to their fate by the Treaty of 1921, had to watch their own or their neighbours’ houses burn, to see the tenants they had known all their lives at war with the English soldiers, with whom they themselves would be taking tea or playing tennis.” (Lee, 43)

Lois, however, is made aware of the acute danger when she encounters a sinister man in a trench-coat on the premises one evening. However, she finally decides not to tell the others of this strange encounter, because she is sure that “they would not listen” (The Last September, 35). Thus “[...] her adventure immediately loses all urgency of narration and Lois decides to pass over it in silence the exact moment when she notices a shawl abandoned on the floor” (Tigges, 286).

Moreover, as a young lady of nineteen, Lois is too self-interested that she does not take the indications of an oncoming turmoil around her seriously. Lois is too much occupied with herself and feels trapped in Danielstown and the
social web around her. Lee compares Lois’s condition to Danielstown, saying “[...] she is like the house. All round her is a war she cannot understand or share.” (Lee, Estimate, 45) Similarly, Cronin claims that Lois is so “preoccup[ied] with her own destiny” that she “has less time to spare for abstract political thought’ (Cronin, 118). Lois (and Laurence) share a “sense of dislocation ... at the center of the narrative ... through the novel’s sociohistorical setting, metaphorically foregrounded by the violence of the Troubles.” (Hoogland, 50). Hoogland also claims that

[...] to Laurence and Lois this all had already a ring of the past. They both had a sense of detention, of a prologue being played out too lengthily, with unnecessary stress, a wasteful attention to detail. Apart, but not quite unaware of each other, queerly linked by antagonism, they both sat eating tea with dissatisfaction, resentful at giving so much of themselves to what was to be forgotten. The day was featureless, a stock pattern day of late summer, blandly insensitive to their imprints. The yellow sun ... seemed old, used, filtering from the surplus of some happy fulfillment; while, unapproachably elsewhere, something went by without them. (The Last September, 118)

But Lois is not the only character involved in a love relationship. Lois’s friend Livvy is determined to find a suitable male suitor though she observes sardonically that “[...] it is only when a man is ill that he understands what a woman means in his life.” (The Last September, 68). Marda, who becomes Lois’ role model, is too busy to think about political matters. Thus all these women are unable to grasp the precarious state of Ireland at the time and fail to recognize the impending tragedy. Lady Naylor ignorantly, or rather foolishly, comments on the behaviour of British soldiers in Ireland: “... if they [the British officers] danced more and interfered less, I dare say there would be less trouble in the country.” (The Last September, 164). Thus Coates is right when he claims that “... novel is frank about the Anglo-Irish failure of perception” (Coates, 18). Sir Richard Naylor’s conservative view on female behaviour and misjudgement of the rising violence and intimidation imposed by the IRA is revealed when it is stated that:

... [Sir Richard] announced, he had been thinking for some time [emphasis added] subalterns should be fewer and more infrequent. He was delighted when he heard from the postman, and was able to pass on, how three young women in the Clonmore direction had had their hair
cut off by masked men for walking out with the soldiers. And indeed they got no sympathy from the priest either, the postman said, for the priest knew that English soldiers were most immoral. (*The Last September*, 61)

Such incidents do not deter the Naylors in the least from staging tea parties and tennis games with British officers.

Unlike other character, the heroine Lois does not deliberately shut herself off from reality. She is able to assess the political situation, but is torn by an inner conflict: “[…] sympathising with the native Irish but unable to commit to the IRA, disliking and resenting British paternalism but desiring a British lover because marriage seems the only avenue to middle-class female maturity.” (Foster, 190) Lois dilemma originates from “her sense of entrapment in the role of an irrelevant female actor, watching helplessly as events unfold around her and she claimed her wish for at least the chance to feel something when all these things were happening as a reply to Gerald’s questioning her about what she could have done. (*The Last September*, 49) “How is it”, she asks herself “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” (*The Last September*, 49). Moreover, she does not only feel helpless, but restrained, overprotected, and under immense pressure to be someone she does not really wish to be: “In her life-deprived as she saw it - there was no occasion for courage, which like an unused muscle slackened and slept.” (*The Last September*, 33) In this context Hoogland claims that “[o]nce gendered adulthood has been successfully realized, adolescence represents a period of intense anxiety, sexual confusion, and an often daunting sense of nonexistence, while at the same time marking the individual’s definitive subjection to the constraints and demands of a given symbolic order.” (Hoogland, 43)

It is argued here, that the female characters in Bowen’s novel try to take advantage from the chaos surrounding them in order to break out of their gendered prisons. According to Grubgeld, the Anglo-Irish women “record the wartime loss of fathers, brothers, sons, and friends, … [and] also ponder the greater freedom of speech and behaviour arising out of wartime conditions.”
Thus, after the destruction of Danielstown — a symbol of the extinction of the class of Anglo-Irish gentry — Lois feels ultimately relieved as this tragic event has eventually enabled her to shed the “cocoon”, of which Danielstown has been a symbol. It is a liberation, enabling her to begin a new life:

... [t]he rebels, like Lois and Marda, are simply marginal witnesses and participants in a history which eludes any final control by individuals; ‘not noticing’ is part of their ethic too. And yet somehow the rebellion frees both parties, returning Ireland to the Irish, and freeing Lois and her cousin Laurence to become themselves. [...] there can be no doubt that the end of the house means that at long last she [Lois] can escape the cocoon; she is free now to enter a world of risk and growth rather than languish in one of fear and inexperience. (Walshe, Sex,143)

Hence, it is no surprise when Lois says in a revealing moment: “I should like to be here when this house burns” (The Last September, 44).

Lois’s predicament, or trauma, is thus caused by both the political turmoil of Ireland in the 1920s, and the fake world of Anglo-Irish aristocracy confined to the “Big House”, the “cocoon”, imposing strict constraints on her. Lois’s sense of confinement and imprisonment within the territory of the “Big House”, and in a wider sense, the gender role and class, is clearly indicated by the narrator’s comment that the “... house became a magnet to their dependence.” (The Last September, 67). Lois’s inner conflict about her identity becomes manifest also in the following passage:

She hoped for the proper agony, finding a coat she could not live without ... Her arms slipped silkily through; her hands appeared, almost tiny, out of the huge cuffs. ‘Oh, the escape!’ she thought, pressing her chin down, fading, dying into the rich heaviness. ‘Oh, the escape in other people’s clothes!’ And she paced round the hall with new movements: a dark, rare, rather wistful woman, elusive with jasmine. ‘No?’ she said on an upward note: the voice startled her, experience was behind it. She touched the fur lightly, touched the edge of a cabinet – her finger-tips drummed with a foreign sensitiveness. And the blurred panes, the steaming changing trees, the lonely cave of the hall no longer had her consciousness in a clamp. (The Last September, 76-77)

From the above quote it is clear that Lois wants to escape from her roots and the constraints of society, as the reference to an “escape in other people’s clothes” makes clear. Furthermore, it also shows her desire for contact to
someone or some place she cannot “live without”. However, the ideal place she pictures is no longer Danielstown, which has rather become a prison or even a nightmare to her. She has been feeling lonely, and becomes acutely aware of it as she has become a girl of nineteen: “I like to be in a pattern. [...] I like to be related; to have to be what I am. Just to be is so intransitive, so lonely.” (The Last September, 98) This feeling of loneliness is also reflected earlier in the novel in the garden scene:

“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 [emphasis added], suspecting once more for herself a particular doom of exclusion. Something of the trees in their intimacy of shadow was shared by the husband and wife and their host in the tree-shadowed room. She thought of love with its gift of importance. ‘I must break in on all this,’ she thought as she looked round the room. (The Last September, 23)

In a sense, then, she is searching for connection in a hostile world. In her small world she is longing for meaning and the feeling that she does belong somewhere and to someone. This clearly indicates her desire to get married.

In a letter to V.S. Pritchett, Bowen explained Lois’ nightmarish perception of Danielstown as primarily a matter of “shape”. “Shape”, she said, “is possibly the important thing ... I shouldn’t wonder if it were the shape, essentially, that the reader, the mass, the public, goes to the story for. The idea of the possibility of shape is not only magnetic, it’s salutary. Shapelessness, lack of meaning, and being without direction is most people’s nightmare, once they begin to think.” (Bowen, Pritchett, 24) Thus, in order to escape from her nightmare, Lois

[...] wanted to go wherever the War hadn’t. She wanted to go somewhere nonchalant where politics bored them, where bands played out of doors in the hot nights and nobody wished to sleep. She wanted to go into cathedrals unadmonished and look up unprepared into the watery deep strangeness. [...] Could one travel alone? She didn’t mind being noticed because she was a female, she was tired of being not noticed because she was a lady. (The Last September, 99)

Therefore, the only way she could escape from her oppressed world of gender and ethnic distinction was to marry Gerald. Indeed “I must marry Gerald”, she
exclaims (*The Last September*, 98). According to Innes, the two roles that Lois played within the text are apparent:

One is from the past and is associated with Laura, her mother, who like her Petrarchan namesake, dies young and haunts the house and Hugo Montmorency as a memory of romance, a memory which is attached to the house (and its laurel trees) and prevents him from breaking away and establishing his own home. The other is associated with Marda, who fascinates both Hugo and Lois by her refusal of illusions and romance, and her refusal of traditional feminity; she is ironic, self-aware, but not self-conscious. Her choice of marriage and home in England has to do with her awareness of her own needs, rather than confused acceptance of traditional patterns.” (Innes, 177)

However, Lois never seems capable of choosing between these adopted roles and thus appears incapable of moving on with her life. Ironically, Lady Naylor, the person largely responsible for spooning the “cocoon” on Lois, depriving her from a carefree existence, continues insisting that she knows what is best for Lois – rejecting, for example, Lois’s plans to marry Gerald on the grounds that he is merely a soldier of obscure (non-aristocratic) descent. “You have no conception of love ...”, she says, When I was your age I never thought of marriage at all. I didn’t intend to marry. I remember, when I was nineteen I was reading Schiller. [...] Then you can have no conception... [...] Girls nowadays do nothing but lend each other these biological books. [...] But remember, you cannot hope to be always in love...”. But when Lois reminds her of what she has said she replies humorously that “[t]here you are, in my light again.” (*The Last September*, 167) Although Lady Naylor appears to represent an almost stereotypical representative of the staunchly conservative, imperious Anglo-Irish lady, she appears surprisingly modern when it comes to her opinions about Lois’s marriage to Gerald claiming that there is “... a future for girls nowadays outside marriage” (*The Last September*, 174). Lois, however, appears to be more worried about becoming a spinster (like the Hartigan sisters) than rushing headlong into marriage, and this question adds to her growing number of dilemmas.

However, like Lady Naylor, Lois also has some of the typical traits of Anglo-Irish hypocrisy. Her marriage to Gerald, for example, seems more one of convenience than love, for Lois does not entirely reciprocate Gerald’s love. This
is also noted by Innes when she says that “... in Bowen’s novel, the ‘innocence’
cultivated in the Big House is artificial, and all too difficult to sustain; it is a
refusal of knowledge and experience, not true innocence, which grows out of
custom and ceremony”. (Innes 171). Gerald’s innocence, by contrast, “... comes
not from custom and ceremony, but from belonging to a world which is not
marginalized, which conceives itself as civilized, central, and in control. It comes
from being young, English and male” (Innes, 171-172). Thus Lois represents
the Anglo-Irish features and attitudes:

You think we don’t understand your not being there in time and not doing
anything afterwards? We’re not all such idiots. We know it’s most terribly
difficult for you and you must obey orders. It’s bad luck the orders are
silly. It’s all this dreadful idea about self-control. When we do nothing it is
out of politeness, but England is so moral, so dreadfully keen on not
losing her temper, or being for half a moment not a great deal more noble
than anyone else. Can you wonder this country gets irritated? It’s as bad
for it as being a woman. I never can see why women shouldn’t be hit, or
should be saved from wrecks when everybody complains they’re
superfluous.” (The Last September, 49)

Moreover, Lois suffers from the fact of being a deprived child: she has
been an orphan raised by her uncle and aunt, and confined to the “Big House”,
whose heir she will be, while simultaneously having an Anglo-Irish identity in a
society with highly defined gender roles which conflict with her own ideals.
(Innes, 170) These dilemmas cause Lois to feel trapped and traumatized. Lois
worries more about her own future than that of her country or her home – the
Big House. Lois’s ambivalent attitude to love has led some critics to suggest
that she is not merely confused, but might exhibit lesbian tendencies. Weekes,
for example, calls Lois’s attitude “a sexual awakening to the male in herself”
(Weekes, 100). Corcoran argues that Lois appears to be erotically attracted to
Marda, a self-confident visitor at the Naylors’ estate, “in a way she can barely
formulate to herself, so unexpected and perturbing is the emotion” (Corcoran,
Enforced, 51). However controversial this view might appear, it seems to be
supported in the text by Lois’ reaction to the news of Marda’s plans to get
married:

Lois thought how in Marda’s bedroom, when she was married, there
might be a dark blue carpet with a bloom on it like a grape, and how this
room, this hour would be forgotten. Already the room seemed full of the dusk of oblivion. And she hoped that instead of fading to dust in summers of empty sunshine, the carpet would burn with the house in a scarlet night to make one flaming call upon Marda’s memory. Lois again realized that no one had come for her, after all. She thought, ‘I must marry Gerald’. (*The Last September*, 98)

Therefore it is possible that Lois’ decides to marry Gerald only because of an unconscious need to escape from the “cocoon” of confinement in both Anglo-Irish society and traditional gender roles. According to Hoogland ... “both the sexual overdetermination of the adolescent crisis and the wider cultural associations of sexual ambivalence surrounding the female adolescent place the prototypical value of the preadult Bowen heroine in a significant light.” (Hoogland, 44) Freud and Gallop share the same view by relating the potential development of homosexuality (or lesbian sexuality) to a stage before adulthood and heterosexuality:

In the present context, it is furthermore interesting to note that the only two – unresolved - cases of Freud’s involving female adolescents both center and founder on the operation of lesbian sexuality in his patients’ histories, a fact that Freud first fails to notice and then relegates to his (retrospectively added) footnotes.70 (Hoogland, 44)

Jane supports the view that the development of homosexuality may be linked to “an adolescent stage, a stage of development prior to adult reproductive heterosexuality“ (Gallop, Around 1981,186).

Depressed by this maelstrom of thoughts, Lois finds paradoxically solace in the burning of Danielstown. The Big House, the most conspicuous symbol of her traumatic life of enclosure, Lois considers the burning house as a symbol of her rebirth; like a phoenix she feels reborn from its ashes.

Apart from the Big House, the mill is used as a symbol of the decline of Anglo-Irish society as well; and the mill has also been read as a symbol of Lois’s sexuality. Corcoran claims that the words “crack” and “cleft” as well as the reference to Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* in the context of describing the mill (“Cracks ran down; she expected, now with detachment, to

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70 From [Freud’s] “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905), better known as the “Dora-case,” and “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920).
see them widen, to see the walls peel back from a cleft - like the House of Usher’s") (The Last September, 124) are deliberately sexually suggestive and “inevitably activates the sexual connotations of [those] words [...]”. But the mill is, on a different symbolic level,

 [...] the ruined scene of this conflicted history which then becomes the scene for the return of the historically repressed when the IRA man – it appears by accident – shoots and inflicts a minor injury on Marda. It is as though the Anglo-Ireland represented by Danielstown still contains or harbours the violence which will be its own disintegration. [...] The actual history- the story of England’s colonial relations with Ireland- which has produced its present ruinous condition is interrupted before it can be properly articulated; but the violence which is the contemporary product of that history of ‘grievances’ – the shedding of Anglo-Irish blood - is all too actually represented in the scene. (Corcoran, Enforced, 52-53)

Corcoran considers this scene as an example of Lois’s sexual dilemma, feeling both “terrified” and “gratified”: “This was her nightmare: brittle, staring ruins.” (The Last September, 123) According to Corcoran, “its opening erotic emotions are transposed to Lois’s feelings about the mill too – ‘It was a fear she didn’t want to get over, a kind of deliciousness’”. This unconscious fear has been understood to derive from a haunting memory of Lois’s dead mother Laura, who is thus a manifestation of the influence of the “undead” on the life of their offspring. (Moynahan, 244)

The scenes of calamity and nightmare in the novel have inflicted a trauma on Lois and other characters. Most notably, one traumatized victim is Mr. Daventry, a British soldier, who is apparently shell-shocked and, as a consequence, on the verge of insanity (Weekes, 93): “He walked up the avenue lightly and rapidly: nothing, at the stage things had reached for him, mattered. And superciliously he returned the stare of the house.” (The Last September, 200) Thus both males and females, Anglo-Irish and British, Irish or Anglo-Irish, suffer from the chaos and acts of violence. This includes the peasant family of the Connors, a Catholic Irish family, tenant farmers on the premises of the Naylors. The son of the Connors, Peter, was captured by the British soldiers but escaped and is on the run. Michael Connor expresses the deep sorrow and sufferings of the family at the future destiny of their son. He tells Lois and Mr.
Montmorency how he feels, and that his wife has gone insane from too much affliction:

‘[...] she is destroyed [sic] with it all and disheartened. [...] she is in great distress; and she [is] always looking and starting and craning up the boreen. It is torn in herself she is; distracted for Peter and dreading [sic] he'll come. It would dishearten you [sic] to be with her daily and nightly the way she is, the poor woman. [...] Isn't it great pity they didn't finish their German war once they had it started?’ (The Last September, 65)

Connor is desperate and cannot see what the outcome of all these atrocities could be. “And I don’t know what is to be the end of it, [...] I couldn’t tell you what will be the outcome at all. These surely are the times that would take the heart from you.” (The Last September, 65)

Another Catholic Irish acquaintance of the Naylors, Mrs Fogarty, is still traumatized by the aftermath of “that dreadful War”, which caused the deaths of several of her “dear boys”:

Mrs. Fogarty’s drawing-room was thronged with photographs; all the dear boys who for years back had been garrisoned at Clonmore, many of whom, alas! had been killed in that dreadful War. You could not stoop to put down a cup on one of the little tables without a twinge of regret and embarrassment, meeting the candid eyes of some dead young man. (The Last September, 71)

Finally, with the death of Gerald near the end of the book, the encounters with the dead, and with their ghosts and nightmares give evidence of the deep-set trauma caused by the war and its aftermath, and a final elegiac note is struck.

“The pink butterfly flowers, transparently balancing, were shadowed faintly with blue as by an intuition of death.” (The Last September, 163) Foster likens Gerald to the tragic figure of an English soldier killed “at the hands of the IRA but as if at the behest of Lady Naylor. Although she must once have embodied the wholeness of life – the social idea – at Danielstown, Lady Naylor is snobbish, hypocritical, and tyrannical, embodying instead the rancid afterlife of the Big House.” She “may have had her day”, Foster continues, “... but Lois, though love is at present impossible, may yet have hers after this last September of girlhood” (Foster, New Bearings, 465). Lois is “a true dandy ... suspended between codes and worlds” (Kiberd, 378). Lois’s world – free from the burdens of being an aristocratic daughter trapped between gender roles – can only begin
after the burning of Danielstown and after her departure from the Naylors. However, Lois is, on the one hand, torn between “... the past and ... associated with Laura, her mother, who like her Petrarchan namesake dies young and haunts the house, after her tragic romance with Hugo Montmorency, a memory which is attached to the house (and its laurel trees) and prevents Hugo from breaking away and establishing his own home. On the other hand, Lois is confronted with reality through Marda, who fascinates both Hugo and Lois by her refusal to yield to illusion and romance, and her rejection of traditional femininity. Marda is a cynic, full of self-assurance. “Her choice of marriage and home in England has to do with her awareness of her own needs rather than confused acceptance of traditional patterns.” (Innes,177) At the end of the novel, however, Lois is confronted to another intense agonizing encounter with the enemy in the woods, but she escapes unharmed and is now free to move on:

Although Lois herself leaves the novel a few pages before it ends, the fire is the consummation she has been seeking, and the appropriate conclusion to this story of her restless craving for experience. Her only intense encounters have been with those who are to kindle that fire, and are set against her less exciting encounters with Gerald, who would prevent such fires from breaking out, and who cannot understand or arouse Lois. By emphasizing the intensity of that encounter in the woods, with its overtones of sexual anxiety, Bowen once again enters that dangerous forbidden area of intermarriage between Anglo-Irish and Irish, at once penitential and pleasurable, punishing and satisfying. Lois’s encounter is brief, but it is charged with her youth and excitement, and with the long history of mutual and self-conscious exclusion by Anglo-Irish and Irish, a mutual mixture of nervous disdain and prurient curiosity [...]. (Tracy, 217)

The final burning of Danielstown frees the characters of the barriers of class, descent and enables them to pursue the path towards a new identity. Unlike the female characters in The Ladies’ Road who look back mournfully on the traumatic experiences inflicted by World War I, and in particular, the painful losses of family members, the characters in The Last September are faced with a catastrophe, which is at the same time a path to purgation and salvation. Lois’s path towards salvation is a way of coping with trauma. Here the insight of Horvitz into the healing power of trauma applies, when he says that “the greater one’s ability to ‘make story’ out of trauma, which is defined differently for each
protagonist, the more likely she/he can regain control of her or his life after that trauma." (Horvitz, 6)

6.3 Comparing the Representation of Gender Issues in the *The Ladies’ Road* and *The Last September*

This thesis has attempted to compare the fates of women portrayed in *The Last September* and *The Ladies’ Road*, novels both set during and after the time of World War I and the Irish War of Independence. In particular, the focus has been put on the way the leading characters cope with traumatic situations and the traumatic after-effects of warfare. The two novels present female characters with diverse attitudes to their milieu and social or political situation. Most of the upper-calls Anglo-Irish women in *The Last September* show great ignorance of or indifference to the events of the Irish War of Independence and the potential dangers linked to it. They are more concerned with domestic or private causes of trauma, such as the early loss of the mother, the death of the suitor, and the constraints imposed by the life with staunchly conservative Anglo-Irish guardian parents on a remote “Big House” in Ireland. In *The Ladies’ Road* by contrast, the traumas described are primarily inflicted by the public sphere – the traumatic after-effects of World War I on two English and Anglo-Irish aristocratic families. They are faced with the loss of brothers, husbands and lovers. The heroine, and other female characters in *The Ladies’ Road* support each other in their grief and afflictions, and take part in the communal suffering of those who have lost loved ones in the War, defending their country. Both novels can be said to provide a realistic portrayal of the events of that time.

The Irish nation was greatly affected by the Irish War of Independence in 1920, which followed shortly after the trauma of the First World War. During this turbulent period the Irish people experienced great uncertainty about their future and pursued the path of national liberation by violent means. However, whereas the heroine and most of the major female characters in *The Last September* worry primarily about their personal future and the future of their private lives, when trapped between tradition and an uncertain future and a stifling present. The heroine and some other female characters in the novel see as their only
chance in finding love and getting married. The women in *The Ladies’ Road*, have either found private happiness, or are about to find it, when their idyllic and joyful existence is shattered by the outbreak of World War I, in which their sons, brothers, husbands are called to arms. All except for Francis, the husband of the heroine’s sister Cynthia, are killed in warfare. Francis, has been taken prisoner but returns a changed and broken man.

Both books address, albeit in greatly different length and detail, the “troubles” in Ireland of the early 1920s. In *The Ladies’ Road* this is a marginal issue but the violent attacks by the partisans of the IRA and the burning of the “Big Houses” is, like in *The Last September*, the climactic ending of the novel. In both novels the burning of the Anglo-Irish country estates is envisaged also as the painful end of an era to the Anglo-Irish gentry in Ireland, inflicting displacement and thus the challenge of a new beginning:

That night Cappagh lit a torch for the countryside. And how it burnt against the darkness of the woods, the firelight creeping into every glade where small living things fled before it. It burnt easily, as though there had not been long wet winters followed by long wet summers to drench the walls through. The flames leaping up, when it was too late to save anything more [...] They watched from Cooperstown (because it was too far and too late to help and useless anyhow to try and put out their fire) until the watching hurt their eyes and they looked away, waiting for tomorrow night or the next night when it would be their turn. (*The Ladies’ Road*, 319-320)

The two [Mrs.Trent and Mrs.Naylor] did not, however, again see Danielstown at such a moment, such a particular happy point of decline in the short curve of the day, the long curve of the season. Here, there were no more autumns, except for the trees. [...] For in February, before those leaves had visibly budded, the death - execution, rather - of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night. A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness [...] It seemed, looking from east to west at the sky tall with scarlet, that the country itself was burning; while to the north the neck of mountains before Mount Isabel was frightfully outlined. The roads in unnatural dusk ran dark with movement, secretive or terrified; not a cabin pressed in despair to the bosom of night, not a gate too starkly visible but had its place in the design of order and panic. (*The Last September*, 205-206)

By way of conclusion it can be said that *The Last September* and *The Ladies’ Road* are rich in traumatic situations and, the latter in particular, in several traumatized characters. Stella’s traumas in *The Ladies’ Road* are
caused by the death of her brother David, as well as by the afflictions suffered by her beloved sister Cynthia at the imprisonment and of her husband during the war, and, subsequently by his return as a shell-shocked man, resulting in the deep emotional estrangement between Stella and Cynthia as well as Cynthia and her husband Francis. Lois, by contrast, does not appear to be traumatized in a similar way by the violent death of her suitor Gerald in the Anglo-Irish War of Independence, because this relationship was, unlike that of Cynthia and Francis, not really based on mutual love. Thus it is not so much the loss of Gerald that traumatizes Lois but her disappointment at losing the chance of a happy relationship and of escaping the oppressive confinement of the “Big House” and the social strictures imposed by her staunchly conservative guardians. Stella in *The Ladies’ Road* and Lois in *The Last September* are entirely different personalities, with different values, desires, hopes and fears, and both of them can be said to be different varieties of traumatized women: Stella is heavily traumatized by the loss of her brother and other relatives in World War I at a crucial stage in her development from adolescence to adulthood, and leaving her with a bleak prospect for the future. Lois is much more absorbed with her private life and the discovery of her own self rather than by worries about the impact of the Anglo-Irish War of Independence and the political development in Ireland in the early 1920s.
7 Conclusion

In the introduction it has been stated that this thesis tries to provide a contextualized reading of the two novels, i.e. a reading relating the work-immanent account of historical events to the actual historical context as a frame of reference. The thesis has shown that both novels are essentially to be placed in the realist tradition, focusing on the role of women in Anglo-Irish and English upper-class society at the time of World War I and the Irish War of Independence. According to Sawyer:

"[...] The distinction between fact and fiction is of minor importance. What is of value is the perception of Irish womanhood that led to the creation or exaggeration of the legendary figures and, conversely, the perception that real people derived from larger than life heroines whose supposed deeds generated so much inspiration." (Sawyer, 2)

Published within three years of each other, Elizabeth Bowen’s The Last September (1929) and Pamela Hinkson’s The Ladies Road (1932) are two novels that both focus on the period of World War I and the history of Ireland in the 1920s, featuring female protagonists and in the role of women in the social milieu of the landed gentry. The female characters and their traumatic experiences in the social and political turmoil of Ireland (and England) between 1914 and the early 1920s are analysed in some detail.

Of the two novels The Ladies’ Road is the one with a markedly larger number of descriptions of traumatic events and situations and their devastating impact on the female (as well as male) characters. The Last September, by contrast explicit descriptions of traumatic experiences are sparse, in that the characters try to suppress their fears and sorrows and are reluctant to disclose their fears and afflictions to others openly. Lois appears to be traumatized by the long-term effect of the early loss of her mother and the strictures imposed by her guardians and the milieu of the “Big House” in rural Ireland, and eventually, she is to some extent traumatized by the violent death of her suitor in the Anglo-Irish War of Independence. Both heroines are confronted with ill-fated circumstances and placed in a community suffering from the collective trauma of warfare caused by World War I (particularly in The Ladies Road) and
the traumas inflicted by acts of violence committed by both the rebels of the IRA and the notorious British paramilitary unit of the “Blacks and Tans” in the Irish War of Independence, culminating in their displacement of Anglo-Irish landlords from the “Big Houses” in Ireland.

Unlike the female characters in *The Ladies’ Road* with their altruistic attitude and deep emotional support of the family’s male victims of the War, the upper-class women in *The Last September* are detached from the public sphere and so much engrossed in a life of romance and pleasure that they are unable to realize the bitter realities of political change and the impending outbreak of violence in Ireland. By contrast, Stella in Hinkson’s novel is always clearly aware of both the dangers of warfare, and the futile waste of human lives, destroying also the happiness and peace of mind of those left behind. Stella is deeply worried at the fate of the young men of the family when called to arms: She asks herself “[...] why had Phillip been killed and Hubert? Such a holocaust, she said simply, of one family.” (*The Ladies’ Road*, 294) Lois, in *The Last September*, on the other hand, rather tries to take advantage of the political chaos. After the death of her “lover” Gerald he is apparently able to cope and eager to leave Danielstown and start a new life abroad. She goes to France to improve her French and to overcome the loss of her suitor: “[...] 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 ... I don’t know; perhaps that is all for the best. And of course she has so many interests.” (*The Last September*, 205) The female characters in *The Ladies’ Road* are devastated and remain traumatized by the deaths of the family members during World War I, and end up depressed, passive or desperate. In *The Last September* Lois (as well as the other women in Anglo-Irish aristocracy) can be said to be traumatized rather by the sudden loss of cultural identity, the awareness of “the dichotomy between political allegiance to Britain and emotional allegiance to Ireland [which] shadowed her all her life” (Genet, 151). The portrayal of (upper-class) Anglo-Irish women in early 20th century Ireland in both novels can be said to reflect the historical situation realistically, and hence, both novels can be read in terms of an elegy of the tradition of the “Big House” and Anglo-Irish society:
[...] The insulation of the characters’ lives, the emotional reticence of their class, the subjective, Woolfian blurring of sharp distinctions between the recent and more distant past in the memories of the characters, and the divided loyalty of the novelist herself about the Troubles that she [Hinkson] shares with Bowen (though Hinkson was a Catholic) – these fuse into elegy, touched with that pathos and sentimentality that the Great War sanctioned and that the highly politicized Troubles were reluctant to sanction. It seems that staging the Great War at the centre (even though it is seen obliquely through Stella Mannering) precluded the witty malice we find in the novels of Bowen [...] In the end, the pathos in both *The Last September* and *The Ladies’ Road* is the irrelevance of the attitudes of the big house inhabitants to their tenants, to Ireland, to politics: history was overtaking them and they were powerless. (Foster, *New Bearings*, 470-471)
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8.4 Illustrations

**Figure1:** Land owned by Catholics from 1641-1778. (Liechty, 22)

**Figure2:** Easter Proclamation, read by Pádraig Pearse outside the GPO at the start of the Easter Rising, 1916.  http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/easter_rise1.html. 28.09.2012.

**Figure3:** Bowen’s Court, Elizabeth Bowen’ Irish family estate. http://thisrecording.com/today/2010/9/2/in-which-elizabeth-bowen-lives-in-windowless-rooms.html. September 2, 2010.
9 Appendix: Concise Biographies of the Authors

It is helpful to provide the brief biographies of the two writers in an appendix to provide readers not sufficiently familiar with the two authors with some aspects of their lives, not least because both novels are to some extent informed by their author’s personal experience.

9.1 Elizabeth Bowen (1899 – 1973)

Elizabeth Bowen was born in Herbert Place, Dublin on June 7, 1899. In the summer of the same year, she was taken to Bowen’s Court. However, she did not live there throughout the rest of her life. In her childhood she spent her winters in Herbert Place, and the summers primarily at Bowen’s Court. She had a “traumatic time in her early girlhood” because of her father’s serious illness and the early loss of her mother due to cancer (Walshe, 3). These experiences are reflected in her novels and stories, who often feature a young orphaned girl or adolescent. Bowen discovered her interest in writing at Downe House School, and further developed when she attended an arts college in London. She started her career as a writer in her twenties. In 1923, she married Alan Charles Cameron, an army officer during the Anglo-Irish War of Independence, and in 1930 inherited Bowen’s Court. After her husband’s death in 1952, she lived partly in Bowen’s Court but remained primarily based in London. In 1960 she was forced to sell Bowen’s Court for financial reasons (Walshe, 5-7).

Besides her early historical novels The Last September (1929) and The Heat of the Day (1949), Bowen wrote two autobiographical works entitled Bowen’s Court (1942), which describes her family history, and Seven Winters as her childhood memoir, was published on the same year (Harte, 125). She wrote numerous novels, including The Hotel (1927), Friends and Relations (1931), To the North (1932), The House in Paris (1935), The Death of the Heart (1935), A World of Love (1955), The Little Girls (1964), Eva Trout (1968) and collections of short fiction, such as Encounters (1923), Joining Charles and Other Stories (1929) and The Cat Jumps and Other Stories (1934), The Demon Lover and

71 See Walshe, 19.
Other Stories (1945).\textsuperscript{72} Being inspired by the war conditions and the traumatic experience of those years, her writing was marked by the “sense of cracks beneath the surface, of fissures deep within the experiences of her protagonists”.\textsuperscript{73} Elizabeth Bowen died in 1973 and was buried in the graveyard of St. Colman's Church, Farahy, County Cork, close to Bowen’s Court.

9.2 Pamela Hinkson (1900 – 1982)

The daughter of the Irish poet Katharine Tynan and the English barrister Henry Albert Hinkson. Pamela Hinkson was born in London in 1900. Though she moved to county Mayo when her father was appointed a magistrate there, she returned to London after her father’s death in 1919, and lived there for the rest of her life. In Ireland she was privately educated. She achieved a big success with her novel The Ladies’ Road (1932), which sold 100,000 copies with Penguin. Some of her other works are The End of All Dreams (1923), The Girls at Redlands (1923), Patsy at School (1925), St. Mary’s (1927), Schooldays at Meadowfield (1930), The Deeply Rooted (1935), Ireland (1935), Irish Gold (1939). Examples of her sketches are Indian Harvest (1941), Golden Rose (1951) and The Lonely Bride (1951). She gave lectures in Europe, the US and India. She died in 1982.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} See McHugh, 271-272.
\textsuperscript{73} See Poplawski, 27.
\textsuperscript{74} http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/h/Hinkson_P/life.htm
10 ABSTRACT


War is one of the most terrifying experiences that humankind can inflict upon any generation. Behind the front lines, women and children carry the emotional scars of the loss and dislocation caused by war. Such trauma is borne down through the generations, marking and colouring the actions and experiences of future generations. This was especially true of Ireland during World War I and the early 1920s, the time of the Anglo-Irish War, when Irish and Anglo-Irish women struggled not only to challenge the artificial barriers placed upon them by a male-dominated society, but also to cope with the trauma of a life during warfare. Women were particularly afflicted by the losses of husbands, sons and brother in World War I and the atrocities committed during the Irish War of Independence, and they also suffered from the loss of cultural identity, the stigma of being neither English nor Irish.

This study is divided into five main chapters. The opening chapter outlines the aim of this thesis and the structure of this study. It also offers a definition of “trauma” and comments on the different uses of the concept in psychology and literature. The second chapter provides the socio-political and historical context of the Irish struggle for independence in the early 20th century. The third chapter examines the socio-political status of Irish women and places them within the hierarchy of early-20th century Irish society. The fourth chapter analyses the emotional condition and states of consciousness of the heroines and other female characters of the two selected novels, and their way of coping with loss, affliction, frustrated hopes and despair. The conclusion summarises the impact of trauma on the female protagonists of the two novels, and places them within the framework of the historical content and the gender roles of women in early 20th century. It is argued that the portrayal of female characters is fairly authentic and representative of the situation of female Anglo-Irish aristocracy.
living in “Big Houses” in rural Ireland during World War I and the Irish War of Independence.

**Key Words:**

Elizabeth Bowen, Pamela Hinkson, *The Last September, The Ladies’ Road*, trauma, women in Irish history, 1920s Ireland, Big House.

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Schlüsselbegriffe:

Elizabeth Bowen, Pamela Hinkson, *The Last September*, *The Ladies’ Road*, trauma, women in Irish history, 1920s Ireland, Big House.
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