

key to powerpoint

The Last September notes (f23)

In 1920, there is no nation of Ireland. Until 1922, Ireland was a British Colony. Not a member of a United Kingdom on an equal footing with Scotland and even Wales, but a possession with no say over its own people. People who lived there are British **subjects** (“West Britons”)

We see hints in *The Dead* of a nationalist desire for Irish freedom: to move from being British subjects to becoming Irish citizens.

The Easter Rising, 1916

On April 24, 1916, rebels occupied the General Post Office in O’Connell Street, Dublin, as well as other places where snipers could shoot at the 30,000 British troops who were sent in to put down the rebellion.

On the 5th day, Martial Law was declared over all of Ireland, not just in Dublin, and heavy artillery was brought in, and gunships sailed up the Liffey to bomb the GPO.

On the 6th day, April 29, the rebels surrendered.

On May 3, executions begin. The first group were the seven signers of the Proclamation. Executions grind on during May. These were so resented by the Irish that the relationship with Britain was irretrievably poisoned as a result.

The Easter Rising is probably the most important event in 20C Irish history, if not the most important event since the Famine. It overshadows Anglo-Irish relations. It introduces the idea of violence and bloodshed as political tactics, as well as the very strong argument that there is an unrealized dream that Irish nationalism must continue to pursue—a united Ireland—and that one of the means by which that dream can be achieved is through violence.

Ironically, the very act of the Rising made any union with Ulster even less likely. The Ulstermen were fighting in France in very large numbers and they saw the Rising as a traitorous stab in the back.

The First Troubles (1919–1921)

Results of the First Troubles

embittered Anglo-Irish relations

guerrilla war, ambushes, raids, assassinations / reprisals, destruction of towns, executions → terror by Volunteers (i.e., rebels) versus the Black and Tans and the British Auxiliaries.

Truce arranged in July 1921; treaty signed in December 1921 → partition between 6 counties of Ulster → Northern Ireland, and the 26 counties that formed the Irish Free State, which was given dominion status (a step up from colony; the same status that Canada and Australia have)

Many positives, but also many disappointments: no Gaelic League Irish-speaking nation, no literary-conscious people desired by Yeats and Lady Gregory, no workers’ republic desired by Connolly, all of which were mentioned in *The Dead*.

In the end:

The history of Ireland is a depressing series of disappointments and disasters.

The Irish have a problematic relationship with their history. On the one hand, it has made them what they are, and they would like it to explain the current situation; on the other, they would like to be able to get past that history so that changes could be made and they could become a confident and respected country.

Notes on *The Last September*

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS: The point of this information is twofold: (1) to fill you in on the history, so you'll know what was going on in 1920; (2) to suggest how these events might have been viewed in 1999.

The Ascendancy

The British colonized Ireland after William III, the Protestant king of England, crushed the Jacobite rebellion supporting the Catholic James II at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691. The land owned by Catholics was confiscated and distributed to members of the Protestant gentry loyal to the British Crown. These wealthy Protestant landlords came to be called the Ascendancy. Because the center of power in Ireland was in the rural areas, these rural landowners had great control over the colony's political and social life. That power was largely used to remove Catholics from land ownership and from access to higher-level positions in government.

After generations living in Ireland, the people of the Ascendancy came to be called Anglo-Irish. As hyphenates, they were caught in the middle during the civil war of 1919–1921, the conflict represented in *The Last September*.

The Big House genre

The general name for films set in the past is **Heritage Films**; the Big House film is a subgenre of the Heritage Film. Big House films have been made in the UK as well as in Australia, India, and other outposts of the British Empire. In Ireland, this is the name given to novels and films set in the past that center on the manor houses and the great estates of the Ascendancy. (*The Last September* is based on a novel that was published in 1929, just a few years after the events that it depicts.) Unlike the formal gardens that are a prominent feature in British Big House Films, Irish Big Houses are surrounded by wild, penetrative nature, as well as by walls.

The National "Romance"

The "national romance" is a consistent feature of Big House movies. An Irish person, usually a woman, is courted by a British person. The nature of their courtship and its resolution are meant to be decoded as a gloss on the historical situation between Ireland and Britain.

1990s Heritage Films

The Heritage Films of the 1980s, in view of the 1960s Troubles, were pessimistic that the conflict that began with the Anglo-Irish War would ever be resolved. But due to the social, economic, and political changes in the 1990s (a woman, Mary Robinson, elected President; a narrowly passed divorce referendum; a small but significant change to the abortion amendment; a surging economy; the 1998 Good Friday accords, ending the Second Troubles; the sex-abuse scandals in the Church) the Heritage Films of the 1990s were tinged with nostalgia and optimism.

Moreover, the end of the British Empire and the colonial-independence movements that resulted led postcolonial theorists to consider the effects of colonization on hyphenated colonial populations. Consider the compromises that the Naylor's make to sustain their life style as Anglo-Irish people.

Let's watch the film

Key issues

Ascendancy values and AV design

“colonial ambivalence” → resentment and admiration for the colonizers (cf. Homi Bhabha)

Anglo-Irish dual identity; can't be denied or resolved

The Naylor's are hyphenates with ties to both the British and the Irish
isolation as a theme of Big House movies.

See the ELS shots of the Big House: why are they there?

Like most of our Southern plantation houses, Irish Big Houses are located in the woods away from towns and other Big Houses → The Ascendancy's social isolation from the local Irish community, especially from Catholics.

self-sufficiency as a trait of the Ascendancy: the only person from outside is the mailman
hospitality: a feature of the design of the Big House: for example?

Ostrich behavior: ignoring politics and social realities doesn't make them go away.

the national romance:

Lois and Gerald: Britain has civilization and so is right.

Social class → Myra's rejection of Gerald

BUT Is \$\$ the only reason that Gerald is considered inappropriate for Lois?

the derelict mill as symbol → England's economic hold on Ireland. Britain destroyed the Irish industry via tariffs, taxes, and shipping laws

The Irish rebel opens Lois's eyes to political realities in Ireland's relationship to the British

Parse the title: the end of a world? of worlds? Why September?

motif: interrupted, broken communication

motif: Lois's spyglass, the hole in the floor

How would you describe the ending?

Lois's character arc: A versus Z?

Lois = Catholic Irish in relation to the Naylor's. She is thus a colonized and second-class subject

Gerald's occupation and desires: war versus marriage/procreation → two big themes; both are the operation of appropriation; of land and of the woman's body

BUT ALSO: Peter's same concerns

Thematics

History/the personal past: Lois's background; Hugo and Marda

Masculinities: Gerald, Peter, Sir Richard, Daventry

Social class: the Naylor (titled), Marda, Lois, Gerald, the Connollys (Peter, Livvy, Mr. Connolly

the Church: Lois as Catholic; calling someone Catholic; Lois's father?

Who is the moral center of the film? Francie?

Family: the Naylor have no children of their own. What do children in movies *always* represent?

Laurence and Lois

How the film is "not-Hollywood," and thus possibly challenging for us. Consider an important moment; how would a Hollywood film have handled it?

The Last September and Adaptation

Novel versus film:

Gerald captures Peter

Marda returns to England alone

Lois is sent to France to live with a friend of Lady Naylor [film: Lois tells Marda that that is the plan for her]

There is no attack on Lois

Gerald dies, but at whose hands is unclear. It is definitely *not* Peter.

Laurence, Lois, and the Montmorencys leave the Naylor

The house is burned down by the rebels.

from *The Morning Post*, 9 April 1923:

"Between 6 December 1921 and 22 March 1923, 192 Big Houses were burned by incendiaries"

Material added to the film, not in the novel:

Peter and Lois's sexual attraction

Lois leaves with Marda instead of being sent to France to live with a family friend of Lady Naylor

issues between Marda and Hugo: which one wasn't committed

Livvy is Peter's sister instead of the daughter of another Big House (which would have rationalized her friendship with Lois)

Lois's spyglass → intimacy *and* distance. Lois as possessor of the gaze, instead of its object