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“*Now the Day is Over*”, Bourgeois education, effeminacy and the fall of Temple Alice.

Molly Keane’s great achievement as a novelist was to reject the nostalgia that is a major cultural production of a declining imperial state...Molly Keane’s last three novels, however, insistently reject the formulations of a lost organic cultural tradition and ruthlessly expose the fictitiousness of personal memory. Vera Kreilkamp. (174)

”Now the Day is Over”... the hymn I had chosen for Hubert’s funeral. Mrs Brock’s hymn... ‘(*Good Behaviour* 131)

Cool ruthlessness, an antipathy towards nostalgia, and a clear-eyed exposition of the “fictitiousness of personal memory” are Molly Keane’s strongest characteristics as a Big House novelist, and these characteristics are most evident in her 1981 novel, *Good Behaviour*. In this essay I want to suggest that Keane’s fictive writings, both as M.J. Farrell and latterly under her own name, overturn the dominant literary and cultural tropes of previous Ascendancy novels, particularly in her depiction of bourgeois education and a consequent destabilising ‘effeminacy’ for the heirs to the Irish Big House. *Good Behaviour* is her swan song for the Ascendancy novel, a novel of termination where the narrative begins with the end, the end of the Big House, Temple Alice, voluntarily abandoned by the childless Aroon St Charles, the last of her family.

Writing in her late seventies, Keane is marking out a kind of imaginative closure for her class and for the literary genre produced by them but this is a closure without any sense of lyricism or elegiac regret. Now that the day of the Irish Big house is over, Keane suggests that collapse and final annihilation was self-fulfilling, that the Anglo-Irish Raj fell because it was a cruel, emotionally redundant world and that its day is properly over.

Keane's starkness as authorial presence and as practitioner of the genre of the Ascendancy novel cannot simply be accounted for by the fact that she was writing towards the end of the twentieth century. Other contemporary Irish novelists like William Trevor and Jennifer Johnson still locate a kind of distinguished pathos in the fall of the Big House and a graceful (if limited) future in Ireland. Keane's writing is the nail in the coffin for the Anglo-Irish Big House, and by, implication, for the literary form of the big House novel. What sets Keane apart from other late 20th century Irish writers within this literary genre is that she ends the Big House tradition from within, imploding the fictive world of the novel by undermining the notions of family, of heterosexual identity, of all the modes of education, of Ascendancy 'Good Behaviour'. Critics of Keane like Mary Breen argue that "Keane does not romanticise her world or treat it nostalgically. She ruthlessly satirises it. Her Big Houses are not the centres of dignity that Yeats presents in *Ancestral Houses*" (206). In addition, Rachael Jane Lynch comments that, "Keane herself is bringing down her house, killing and burying a decaying microcosm with an overwhelming sense of relief" (74). In all of this, Molly Keane is determined to bring down the house and end the family and somehow she manages to lay the blame right within the power structures of the Anglo-Irish family.

As M.J.Farrell, Keane published a series of popular comic novels of the Irish Ascendancy in the late 1920s and 1930s, including *Mad Puppetstown* (1931), *Devoted Ladies* (1934) and *Full House* (1935). In 1961, Keane retired to Ardmore, Waterford in Ireland and stopped writing for nearly twenty years. Then in 1981, at the age of seventy-seven, she published *Good Behaviour* and found a new voice as a writer with two further novels, *Time After Time* (1983) and *Loving and Giving* (1988). Writing as Molly Keane, she proceeded to overturn the codes of Ascendancy behaviour and identity already interrogated by M.J. Farrell. Perhaps she felt free to do so because so many of her own contemporaries from her own class were now dead.

It is striking that the social and cultural backdrop in Keane's later work is ahistorical - in particular all reference to the key events that went into the making of the new Irish state.

As V.S.Pritchett notes

After the Treaty in the Twenties, the Anglo-Irish gentry – the Ascendancy as they were called – rapidly became a remnant. Some stormed out shouting insults at the receding Wicklow Hills. Those who stayed resorted to irony...As one who knew something of the period of Molly Keane's *Good Behavior*, I was astonished to find there was no hint of the Irish Troubles, the Rising of 1916, the later Civil War or the toll of burned down houses. (89)

Many of her predecessors within this genre incorporated discourses of Irish Republicanism, rebellion and land agitation into their Big House narratives - even in

Keane's own earlier novel *Two Days in Aragon* she integrates the precise social and political conditions of the Irish War of Independence into the narrative. However, in *Good Behaviour* she focuses her narrative away from the historical and concentrates on the fall of the Anglo-Irish house in utter imaginative isolation. This stripping away of the political context renders the Ascendancy class and their beleaguered houses socially isolated and place her protagonists into even more liminal positions. By banished history to the periphery, Keane licenses a greater predominance of comic grotesquery in her later fictions, creating an imaginative world stranded on the outer margins of twentieth-century Ireland and at the edge of its own history.

Irish history disappears from Keane's later fictions but the dark comedy of her last novels, particularly *Good Behaviour*, does have an implicit political context in the juxtaposition of class with categories of sexual identity. In this relentlessly unsentimental novel all of the social norms of the *Big House* novel are under attack. As Keane presents it, the codes of politeness and noblesse oblige that go to make up Anglo-Irish 'good' behaviour are all predicated on a denial of emotion and a consequent impotence in the face of destruction. In Keane's remorselessly cruel fictive world, heterosexuality (and more subtly, homosexuality) is either duplicitous or bankrupt, Ascendancy families die out, and houses crumble or slip away. The ethos of hunting and of the outdoor life, hitherto valourised by Ascendancy writers like Somerville and Ross, is, in *Good Behaviour*, represented as a symptom of the destructive denial of the emotional. The courage of Bowen's Anglo-Irish is now transformed into a willful blindness in the face of obliteration. Within Keane's imaginative world, it is this denial that cannot be sustained

and so the Big House is at risk. But I would contend that it is bourgeois education and effeminacy, and not the more usual Irish Republican violence, that brings down the Big House.

In all of her fictions, early and late, duplicitous sexual intrigue is one of the key impulses driving her protagonists. Keane entangles her representations of the erotic with other discourses around authority and money. There is nothing radical at all about the deployment of non-heterosexual eroticism within the tradition of the Irish Big House novel. Most of the Ascendancy novels before Keane also deal with sexual ambiguities, interrogating normative gender roles. In George Moore's 1886 novel, *A Drama in Muslin*, one of the central female protagonists, Cecilia, is clearly figured as both lesbian and man-hating, finding a refuge and an escape from heterosexuality by turning Catholic and entering a convent. Charlotte Mullin, the main protagonist in *The Real Charlotte* (1894) by Somerville and Ross is, I would argue, figured as cross-gendered and occupies a representational space somewhere between male and female, between Irish and Anglo-Irish. Also, in Elizabeth Bowen's 1929 novel *The Last September*, the relationship between the young Anglo-Irish protagonist, Lois and the older, sophisticated Marda suggests an unspoken homoerotic attraction between the two women, undermining the dominant heterosexual romance between Lois and the young British officer, Gerard. Keane's fictions clearly draw inspiration from these novels. Most importantly, Keane's own 1934 *Devoted Ladies* brings to the fore same sex desire and homoerotic entanglements.

What makes *Good Behaviour* distinctive is the fact that she uses these tropes only to subvert them. She suggests that the destruction of her particular Big House, Temple Alice, is a kind of implosion, a corruption of the code of good behavior from within by the middle-class governess, Mrs Brock. Usually the middle class characters in the Big House novels operate as the secretive mechanism for deceitful usurpation of land, house and heirs. For example, the Irish land agent or lawyer is often the scheming usurper, using his new found wealth and his innate Catholic cunning to buy out the impoverished ascendancy family and thereby take unlawful possession of the house. Jason Quirke in *Castle Rackrent* is one example (1800) and the Whelans in *The Big House at Inver* (1925) are another, with eventual possession of Ascendancy land as their avowed aim. Likewise, middle-class English visitors like Captain Hibbert in *A Drama in Muslin* or the unfortunate Gerard Lesworth in *The Last September*, are seen as unwelcome suitors for the daughters of the big houses and must be rebuffed to keep the caste of the Anglo-Irish pure. The encroachments of the middle class, both English and Irish, are resisted by the Anglo-Irish, even if the houses are sold, lost or burned down.

In Keane, the corruption of the heirs of the Anglo-Irish Big House comes about accidentally from the ‘corrupting’ domesticity of the bourgeois, the middle-class English governess character Mrs Brock. When these bourgeois values come into contact with the sterile Big House code of good behaviour, calamity is brought down on the house. Although the middle class protagonist is a figure of threat within this genre, the interloper neither servant nor master, unusually Keane makes Mrs Brock uncanny as she brings unwitting destruction by nurturing and mothering. The house falls because Mrs Brock is

an influence towards humanising and self-actualising for her pupils. Mrs Brock's middle-class decency, her quasi-maternal nurturing abilities, brings disaster into a house where the Anglo-Irish women have somehow been alienated from these qualities and these emotional capabilities.

Earlier Keane governesses had been powerless figures for comic satire or pathos, but this is not the case here. I take my title for this essay from the nursery song taught by the governess Mrs Brock to the children of the Ascendancy, *Now The Day is Over*, a children's devotional hymn written by Sabine Baring Gould (1834-1924), a standard in late Victorian and Edwardian schoolrooms. The words of the hymn are elegiac and mournful, denoting ending and the drawing to the close of a twilight world 'Now the Day is Over/ Night is drawing nigh; Shadows of the evening/ Steal across the sky'. As ever with the Irish Big House novel, the middle class character brings closure to the house and to the family and Mrs Brock fulfils this role in *Good Behaviour* with her (inadvertently) effeminising system of education. To make my argument specific, I want to look at Keane's structuring of the novel and, in particular, at her figuring of the English governess, Mrs Brock and her system of education.

Joseph Bristow's cultural history of male education of Britain in the late 19th century is useful in this context, particularly his 1991 *Empire Boys*, and his 1995 study *Effeminate England*. In *Empire Boys*, Bristow describes the ideal of a manly education for the empire building young gentleman of the upper classes.

There is no doubt that the sexual style that caused the greatest confusion and anxiety about homosexual identity in the late nineteenth-century was its perceived attachment to femininity – and thus by extension, to effeminacy’.

(10)

Bristow considers the kinds of adventure stories aimed at young boys and men of all classes in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, by writers such as Kipling, Conrad Haggard and even Baden Powell (with his Boy Scouts manual, the wonderfully titled 1908 *Scouting for Boys*). He argues that writers like Baden Powell promulgated a version of imperialist manliness to “uphold a highly reactionary form of patriotism in an effort to defend a demoralized empire at a time of crisis after the pyrrhic victories of the second Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902” (61). The hunting, manly outdoor ethos of the Anglo-Irish was perfectly attuned to this mainstream imperialising education and Keane registers her quiet rebellion against this dominant ethos in her subtle countering of an idea of art, effeminising, indoor, poetic art. Thus, the discourse of imperial manhood is threatened by the counter education and degenerating influence of effeminate art.

I would suggest that Keane exploits this crisis, the clash between these two opposing traditions of Edwardian education, to introduce the undermining influence of bourgeois effeminacy. Thus, in *Good Behaviour*, the middle class governess bring about a crisis in masculinity and precipitates the fall of the house. It is Mrs Brock’s system of education which subverts the big house, rather than the greed of the emergent Irish Catholic middle class or the anger of Irish republican militants.

.Mrs Brock's encoding within the narrative is carefully prepared by Keane right from the start. She is English, middle-class and adrift emotionally and economically,

She was the widow of an organist who had saved very little money before he died at a medium sort of age, leaving her, (fortunately childless, though she longed for kiddies of her own) to drag a living from a world out of which she had been cozily embedded in a nice little house with a nice little man who had a nice and not so little job in a large London parish. (18)

Into the relentlessly undomesticated world of the Anglo-Irish, Mrs Brock brings personal affection, domestic order, poetry and of music. Yet she is destroyed by her emotional encounters with the world of the Big House. Firstly, she is the governess in England to the Massingham family at Stoke Charity, and there she 'corrupts' the eldest son, simply by her sincere love and her maternal nurturing,

Richard was Mrs Brock's favourite and years afterwards she was to be my first intimate link with him...Richard was a beautiful child and, despite a proper interest in and all the aptitudes for all the importances of outdoor life, there were times when he would lean in silence against Mrs Brock as she played the piano or even join her in singing...He liked dressing up, too, but Mrs Brock felt that such games were not quite the thing for little boys. Sometimes she allowed herself to read him her favourite pieces from the Children's Golden Treasury of Verse, when they would charge with the light brigade or even lean from the golden bar of heaven with the Blessed Demozel. (19)

Keane deploys a series of discourses around education to link the loss of economic and political power in Ascendancy Ireland with a re-ordering of the notion of masculinity and heterosexual fixities. As Vera Kreilkamp observes “Anglo-Irish novelists writing about the Big House have registered the unmanning of the colonizer...Keane’s fictions suggest that as Anglo-Irish power erodes, gender identities shift” (184). In *Good Behaviour*, Keane is knowing and slyly comic in her representation of Richard’s education, her signalling of his homosexuality. Mrs Brock’s efficiency as a teacher, and her enabling qualities of affection and empathy with the young child of the English Big House, allow the boy Richard to become the adult outsider - her good education simply allows his ‘singularity’ to flower. As Keane presents it, the notion of a developing sexuality is something innate, essentialist even, and so Richard is already interested in the non-masculinist discourses that will connect with his adult sexuality. Mrs Brock’s system of education, and indeed Richard’s own qualities and sensibilities, are all qualities that jar with the dominant ethos of hunting, the outdoor life of the gentry. Mrs. Brock is dismissed, partly because she falls in love with the lady of the house and more because she dared to educate her charges in poetry, in music, in feeling. By implication, she has sown the seeds of nurturing and of ‘decadent’ literary tastes by which the eldest son and heir, her favourite Richard, will be empowered to reject the pretense of heterosexuality. Witness the description of the measures taken by Nannie, the longstanding servant and upholder of proper feudal relations, in the English house against Mrs Brock’s literary nurturing of Richard.

Nannie took the book of poetry straight to Lady Grizel, who talked it over unhappily with the Captain. His response was a genuinely worried yes, we’ll

have to put a stop to this book worming. No future in that. And he was having a music lesson yesterday when old Sholto was schooling his pony’.

‘That’s hardly the point, is it? The awful thing is, he told me quite a big fib.

That’s more natural – it’s this poetry that bothers me. What’s the book called?

The Children’s Golden Treasury of Verse

Unhealthy-sounding stuff’. (30-1)

Keane is unrelenting in her ironising of the philistinism of the Edwardian upper classes, where the strict control of male education was seen as a crucial safeguard against the dangers of art and effeminacy. These dangers were most keenly felt by this class in the wake of the Oscar Wilde Trials of 1895, where effeminacy, literature and homosexuality were dangerously co-joined in the public eye. As a result of her transgressive system of education in England, Mrs Brock is sent off to Ireland, a dumping ground for rejected servants. There she is employed at Temple Alice, where she takes care of the St Charles children, Aroon and Hubert. “Mummie”, Mrs St Charles, the Anglo-Irish chatelaine, is represented as cold, unfeeling and unmaternal. At one point Mummie is disgusted when her young son’s near fatal bout of appendicitis interrupts her private dinner with her husband. Earlier, Elizabeth Bowen, in her Irish War of Independence novel, *The Last September* presents a heroic chatelaine of the Big House, Lady Naylor of Danielstown, heroic in her insistence of living her everyday life in the face of death and violence, with her policy of not noticing the Irish rebels lurking out in the fields seen as a positive virtue. Now, for Keane, not noticing is no longer a virtue but a cruelty, and the children love the governess Mrs Brock because she provides the maternal attention lacking from Mummie. “With her in the schoolroom, there came to us a daily security in happiness and

with it the delightful prospect of such a state continuing into an untimed future” (17). During her time in Temple Alice, Mrs Brock uses her bourgeois skills as a teacher in swimming lessons, horse riding and even her mending of clothes and linen to win the children’s love, “Sorting and piecing and darning, her hands never ran out of skill or tired of work”(48). In her countering system of education, she embodies the virtues of care and concern, all of the bourgeois qualities despised by the spendthrift, Ascendancy family.

Mrs Brock’s downfall comes with her seduction by Aroon’s father. Pregnant and abandoned, she gives the young Aroon a terrible lesson into the dangers and the cruelties of heterosexual relationships for women. She tells Aroon about the nursery mice and their mating

You’re always asking me how they do It.’Mrs Brock went on.’ Well, I’ll tell you’. It’s that horrible Moses; he sticks that thing of his, you must have seen it – Hubert has one, too – into the hole she pees out of, and he sows the seed like that.’ ‘Oh’. I felt myself become heated; horrified and excited.’ That’s how it happens’, Mrs. Brock went on, that’s how it happens with people, too.

It’s a thing men do, it’s all they want to do, and you won’t like it’. (61)

Perhaps the most chilling element within this cruel and unpleasant final scene between governess and child is that Mrs Brock has been ‘converted’ to Big House values of maternal cruelty. Desperate and at the point of suicide, the nurturing bourgeois governess becomes vindictive and relentlessly truthful. In fact, Mrs Brock has come to behave like Mummie.

Aroon's adult sexuality is stunted by this last cruel scene between herself and Mrs Brock, the only negative lesson taught by an otherwise enlightened and caring governess. Thus Aroon's subsequent cherishing of Richard as a pretend lover and suitor comes as a saving illusion in the face of Mrs Brock's final harsh words. Mrs. Brock's memory and the resultant legacy of her system of education haunt the rest of the novel. Keane makes it clear that the consequence of Mrs Brock's instinctual nurturing is linked to the downfall of Big Houses, English and Irish, and she invokes her ghost at moments of danger and crisis in the rest of the novel. When the adult Anglo-Irish Aroon and Hubert finally meet with the adult Richard, the memory of Mrs Brock is the bond between them all, a bond they are unwilling to acknowledge. Keane invests the ghost of Mrs Brock with the only lyricism, the only sense of grief and loss in the whole novel.

We can see this lyricism, this haunting when Keane re-unites the adult Aroon with the grown up Richard. In the interval, apparently 'cured' into heterosexuality, Richard has become the empire boy, to all appearances. As Aroon recalls,

I was appalled when I met the present Richard...Long legs I saw (I had expected that), eyes discriminating and critical as a bird's small ears, crisp hair; rolled umbrella, swinging stylishly as a sword, he came straight from the middle pages of the Tatler and Bystander. The right family, the right school, the right regiment had all been his. I was stunned between fear and admiration. He was brown (from Cowes week), lean and hard (polo at Hurlingham); he had ridden the winner of a Grand military (Sandown should have been written on his forehead). (85)

Yet this is all appearance, as Aroon is unwittingly aware, the outward codifying of imperialist masculinity, the brand names of Cowes, Sandown and others all providing the outward semblance. In addition, a reference to a key incident in the history of late Victorian homosexuality, the trials of Oscar Wilde, is made by Keane when she names Richard's younger brother Sholto. This was a family name for the infamous Black Douglasses, the Scottish aristocrats that included the Marquis of Queensbury, the man sued for libel by Oscar Wilde and his son, Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's lover. Keane was a close friend to several gay men during her career as a West End London dramatist, and drops this reference into her text as a deliberate encoding, a knowing 'insider' reference for those familiar with gay history and urban subculture. Keane thus deploys the discourse of homosexuality both as a code for deconstruction, but also as a code for disclosure and for eventual sexual honesty. It is implied that the two families are brought to an end by the sexual relations between the two heirs and Mrs Brock is the link between the two male lovers. The memory of Mrs. Brock, Richard's most beloved childhood memory, is now used as part of this adult game of sexual deceit between the two men,

We had all forgotten Mrs. Brock; we never gave her a thought in those days – just a dead governess...We had forgotten Mrs. Brock, but it was by her methods that we deceived and defeated fear....That was the start of the Mrs. Brock cult. It grew into a game that Richard loved playing. He drew Hubert and me into it. First remembering things about her; then inventions, sad, funny, intimate details. It was a charade...They took to dressing and undressing her like a doll, like an effigy. Hubert screamed at some of the disgusting things he thought up. I laughed, not always hearing, not always or

quite getting the point but determined not to be left out, frightened yet longing to be party to this violation...Everything I remembered was a betrayal and a denial of the other things she was. But between us we almost called her into being. It was such fun sharing in her persecution. (90)

This childish, nasty cult of Mrs Brock, the adult mockery of a beloved childhood figure by Richard and Hubert, is linked to their emotional dishonesty towards Aroon. As the novel progresses, all of the Ascendancy men betray the women around them. Aroon is the victim of duplicity both from her father, her brother and her pretend lover Richard and, throughout the novel it is the women who must bear the consequence of male sexual dishonesty. Aroon becomes the dupe of her brother, Hubert, who masks his sexual relationship with Richard by pretending that his overweight sister is the object of sexual desire for Richard. The two male lovers are a kind of mirage for Aroon, a vision of physical beauty and confident erotic selfhood beyond her own sense of self, and their beauty betrays her.

I liked to watch the boys as they finished dressing. There was a quick, hard grace about their movements, in the way they put links quickly into the cuffs of their evening shirts, and such a different tempo from a girl's considered gesture. They wore narrow red braces and their black trousers were taut around waists and bottoms. ...How dear they were. Spoilers of girls. (90)

Men are the objects of desire or agency in this novel, women either victims or passive observers but, as the narrative unfolds, the men die or are exiled. As part of this process, Mrs Brock's name becomes a talisman for destruction, and, as the novel progresses, Temple Alice never burns, unlike Danielstown in *the Last September*, or Aragon in *Two*

Days in Aragon or indeed like Keane's own family home, Ballyrankin. Instead, Hubert, the heir to Temple Alice, is killed in a car crash, leaving the future of the Big House bleak and the family line at an end. Here, at this moment of grief at the loss of the brother, the spectre of the drowned Mrs Brock is invoked in Aroon's description of Hubert's funeral, "Praise elated me, grief was a spasm.. 'Now the Day is Over'... the hymn I had chosen for Hubert's funeral. Mrs Brock's hymn..." (131).

The day is indeed over for both the Anglo-Irish family and the house and Mrs Brock is the touchstone for this demise, the lost chord of emotional connection and nurturing.

Mrs Brock has also 'queered' the other heir to the English house. Richard is sent off to Africa on safari after Hubert's death, to quell any potential scandal. This contains the threat of homosexual exposure by placing Richard beyond the pale of the Imperial mainland. This strategy of denial and containment rebounds when Richard places himself outside the pale of heterosexuality. Richard's homosexuality is overtly revealed in his final decision to 'out' himself by running away with an old school friend, now his new lover and living openly with him in Kenya. Here Keane suggests that the colonies offer possibilities for self expression, unavailable in Britain or even in Ireland. Keane uses the male tropes of English public school and the Colonies as shifting fault lines to unsettle the heterosexual consensus of imperial manhood. As Richard's father tells Aroon at the end of the novel, again invoking Mrs Brock,

"Wrong from the start...Reading books in trees. Nannie was right, unhealthy stuff. Then there was that governess – we sacked her. She was in it, too. Queer person [...] Trouble at school. Who hasn't, after all? Forget it, I always think

[...]”. He looked like an angry blue-eyed baby with a pain it can’t explain.

“Broken off his engagement, broken up the entail, upset his mother and taken himself off to farm in Kenya with Baby Kintoull”(226-7).

Ironically, in running away and breaking the entail, Richard behaves with an honesty and directness around sexuality that is unique in the novel, and it’s Mrs Brock who, it is implied, has facilitated this honesty. Ironically, or maybe not, Keane’s only honest man is an openly gay one. It is possible Keane was drawing on her own knowledge of gay theatre life in London to suggest out-ness, openness and sexual identification, but only away from family, the Big House and the Imperial mainland.

For Anglo-Ireland, the early death of the heir to Temple Alice renders the father old before his time and when he too falls gravely ill, Mrs Brock again is invoked, unconsciously:

In the dog shaped shadow cast by the stolid little church on grasses and graves I found him. Rose was sitting on the grass, her knees spread, holding him in her arms...Her flowered hat was lying on the grass. There was mushroom dew on it and on the graves. I remembered Mrs Brock’s hat, dripping from the wet grass, one silly hat recalled the other, clear and meaningless, conjuring together that night with this evening’ .(145)

The conjuring together of these two evenings is deliberate. The dew on the grass where Mrs Brock made love with Papa, a lovemaking that left her pregnant, abandoned and then suicidal, is now his own death knell, the moment where he is paralysed. The Captain wills the house to his daughter, Aroon, but Temple Alice is

then abandoned by Aroon, who, most tellingly, had been rendered middle-class and bourgeois by Mrs Brock's education.

In conclusion, in *The Last September* Gerard is killed and Danielstown burns, and in Somerville and Ross *The Big House at Inver* sold. Uniquely, Keane allows for the voluntary surrender of the Big House to the invading middle class when Aroon gives up her home and creates another home in the ideal mold of bourgeois domesticity. Thus the novel ends with the successful infiltration of Ascendancy codes of behaviour by Mrs Brock, with the St Charles family at an end in *Gull's Cry*, and with a voluntary surrender of the Ascendancy to middle class comfort and respectability.

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