

# Censorship in Twentieth Century Irish Literature

---

**Franjčec, Sara**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2019**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zadar / Sveučilište u Zadru**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:162:171572>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-14**



**Sveučilište u Zadru**  
Universitas Studiorum  
Jadertina | 1396 | 2002 |

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[University of Zadar Institutional Repository](#)



zir.nsk.hr



DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

**Sara Franjčec**

**Censorship in Twentieth Century Irish Literature**

**Završni rad**

Zadar, 2019.

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

Censorship in Twentieth Century Irish Literature

Završni rad

Student/ica:

Sara Franjčec

Mentor/ica:

Doc.dr.sc. Vesna Ukić Košta

Zadar, 2019.



## Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Sara Franjčec**, ovime izjavljujem da je moj **završni** rad pod naslovom **Censorship in Twentieth Century Irish Literature** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 8. ožujak 2019.

**Table of Contents:**

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. <i>The Dark</i> by John McGahern.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne by Brian Moore .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4. <i>Mary Lavelle</i> by Kate O'Brien.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>6. Bibliography .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7. CENSORSHIP IN TWENTIETH CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE: Summary and Key Words .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>8. CENZURA U IRSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI DVADESETOG STOLJEĆA: Sažetak i ključne riječi .....</b>	<b>26</b>

## 1. Introduction

Censorship in Ireland developed as a consequence of the political and social situation and the rising power of the Church following the Anglo-Irish War (1919 – 1921) and the Civil War (1922 – 1923). Although both conflicts were over, there were still tensions between the Irish people, as some opposed the terms agreed with Britain while others accepted them. This disagreement caused the partition of Ireland between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. The Church involved itself in the creation of a new democracy and became intertwined with the governing power, instilling a strong Christian tradition into the Free Irish State. The Catholic Church in Ireland strived to purify the Irish people from the corruption and sins of the rest of the world and to create a Catholic nation with unquestioning faith in the Church. Therefore, in the years following the creation of the Free State, the Catholic Church pressured the state into censoring films, newspapers, periodicals and novels. In 1929 the Publications Act came to be as a result of campaigns by various Catholic action groups. The goal of this legislation was to protect the Irish people from sinful content, which was considered to be indecent or obscene, found in newspapers, periodicals and novels. Donal Ó Drisceoil defined *indecent* as content that incited sexual misconduct whereas *obscene* was open to interpretation (147). Although censoring was limited to issues regarding sex, sexual misconduct, contraception and abortion and not matters related to religion, the Catholic Church often pushed for the banning and censoring of blasphemous content and attacks on the Church and the Catholic faith.

Custom authorities were an important part of the censoring process as they would block banned books from entering the country and they would often confiscate novels so they

could read them and see whether they contain any indecent or obscene content (Ó Drisceoil 147). Alongside them, certain organised groups would mark up inappropriate passages in books and send them to the board so they could ascertain whether or not to ban them. The literary merit of the novels was not taken into account by the censors which led to the censoring of novels by some of the most influential authors of the 20th century, both Irish and foreign. Some of the banned foreign authors include John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, H. G. Wells, Vladimir Nabokov, Aldus Huxley and Graham Greene among others. According to Ó Drisceoil, the Irish literary production during that time was not very big so Irish authors make up a very small percentage of all the authors whose works have been banned, although they were targeted by the censors (147). A great majority of the most significant Irish authors of that time were censored at one point or another, from James Joyce, Liam O'Flaherty, Samuel Beckett to George Moore, Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien, with the significant exception of Elizabeth Bowen, Flann O'Brien, Mervyn Wall, Michael McLaverty and Peadar O'Donnell who managed to avoid it (Ó Drisceoil 147). In many instances after an author's book was banned the rest of their works would be boycotted. They would not be reviewed or displayed anywhere, despite not being censored. Due to increasing pressure from the Catholic Church the amount of banned books rose every year, which resulted in an all-time-high of 1034 books being banned in 1954. Censorship laws changed through the years and the last Irish book on the register was unbanned in 1999. The censorship board still exists, however it does not function at the same level as in the past as, according to the *Irish Times*, they have only banned one book since 1998 (Barry).

The aim of this paper is to analyse three banned novels and explore the issues they articulate and finally, the reasons they were censored. The novels under discussion here are the following: *The Dark* (1965) by John McGahern, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) by Brian Moore, and *Mary Lavelle* (1936) by Kate O'Brien. The first section focuses

on McGahern's novel *The Dark* and the portrayal of teenage sexuality, profanity, and sexual abuse. The second section deals with Moore's *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and its criticism of the Church, whereas the part in which I write about Kate O'Brien's banned novel *Mary Lavelle* is concerned with the issues of female sexuality and homosexuality.

## **2. *The Dark* by John McGahern**

The banning of *The Dark* in 1965 was a key component in the overhaul of the Irish censorship laws. The censoring of the novel caused McGahern to be fired from his job as a schoolteacher, which caused a scandal that culminated with new amendments being proposed to the censorship law. The result of the new passed bill stated that books censored for their indecency or obscenity could only be banned for a period of 12 years after which they would be automatically removed from the Register of Prohibited Publications (Ó Drisceoil 155). This proved to be a turning point for the censorship laws in Ireland as they slowly started changing from that point onwards. The controversy surrounding *The Dark* was considered by some to be positive as it created free publicity and a rise in sales. McGahern, however, did not share the same sentiment. He believed it to be shameful as he did not wish for his work to be considered erotic or obscene. According to James M. Calahan, *The Dark* is considered to be McGahern's most autobiographical novel as it tells the story of a young boy's coming of age in rural Ireland (57). The protagonist of the story is a boy growing up in a family with an abusive and alcoholic father where the relationship between the father and the boy is at the centre of the narrative. An essential aspect of the novel is the unique narrative structure. Narrative voices change in the course of the novel between first, second and third person narration. The main protagonist retells particularly traumatic and violent events in second or



even third person, presumably as a way of distancing himself from them.

McGahern's writing style was greatly influenced by James Joyce's. Up until the 1960s Joyce's influence was not often seen because of the limitations of the strict censorship laws. According to Terence Brown, it was McGahern's "uncompromising realism" (160) that allowed him to broach subjects which were considered indecent and obscene. Many of which would often be censored by the Censorship of Publications Board, such as masturbation, homosexuality, abortion, sexual abuse and others (Keating 67). It was the presence of these 'taboo' subjects in the novel that caused its banning. The main reason for the banning of the book was the detailed description of the boy's awakening sexuality. McGahern describes in detail teenage lust as well as masturbation, which the Catholic Church, and therefore the majority of Irish people, considered a sin. This is, in fact, one of the principal conflicts in the book, as the boy wishes to become a priest, but he cannot stop committing 'sins', which, in turn, leads to self-loathing: "Five sins already today, filthiness spilling five times, but did it matter, the first sin was as damning as a hundred and one, but five sins a day made thirty-five in a week, they'd not be easy to confess" (McGahern 30).

In order to fulfil his lust the boy uses everything, from ads in the *Independent* to his own fantasies about women he knows. The choice of the *Independent* was deliberate on McGahern's part as it was the most widely read newspaper in Ireland and "no convent was without the *Independent*" (Cahalan 63). According to James M. Cahalan, he is only able to commit his 'sins' when the object of his affection is confined to his imagination (64). This, alongside the sense of guilt he experiences after every act of 'sin', shows the influence of Irish society and the Catholic Church on him. This is exemplified by his attraction to a girl named Mary Moran: "You couldn't have Mary Moran if you went to be a priest and you couldn't be a priest as you were. The only way you could have her anyhow was as an old whore of your mind, and everything was growing fouled" (McGahern 57-58). Despite his lust, the

protagonist is unable to form meaningful connections with women. He believes his attraction to them is shameful and that it makes him unfit to be a priest. His attitude towards women does not change in the course of the novel. The only female character he interacts with aside from Mary is his sister. Later on in the novel he gets invited to a dance but upon seeing the girls he leaves without even attempting to make contact with any of them:

This was the dream you'd left the stern and certain road of the priesthood to follow after, that road so attractive now since you hadn't to face walking it any more, and this world of sensuality from which you were ready to lose your soul not so easy to drag to your mouth either for that one destructive kiss, as hard to lose your soul as save it. Only in mind was it clear. (McGahern 177-178)

One of the guiding forces of the main character is religion and the guilt he feels in relation to it. After the loss of his mother when he was a small child he decides to become a priest so that he can hold Mass in her honour. However, as he grows up he finds it increasingly difficult to abide by the Church's 'rules'. He keeps committing 'sins', which makes him feel unworthy of becoming a priest and makes him despair as it removes the sense of security he had when he knew what he wanted to become. He feels lost, as he does not know what he wants to do in the future: "I'd never be a priest. I was as well to be honest. I'd never be anything. It was certain" (McGahern 33). Even after this decision religion remains very important to him and he even asks a priest at the end of the novel to help him make a decision about his future, as he cannot do it himself.

Another reason for the banning of the novel was the usage of the word 'fuck' which appears already on the first page of the novel. Mahoney, the father, accuses the boy of saying it and proceeds to punish him for it, "F-U-C-K is what you said, isn't it? That profane and ugly word. Now do you think you can bluff your way out of it?" (McGahern 7). Mahoney's attitude towards profanity mirrors that of Irish society. They would condemn and censor

everything they deemed obscene or indecent, including the mention of the word 'fuck'. This situation also clearly demonstrates the nature of family relationships. The family in this novel is far from ideal; it differs significantly from the typical Irish family idealized by the state and church. There is no mother and the patriarch of the family, the father, is an abusive alcoholic.

After accusing the son of swearing the father terrifies and humiliates him in front of his sisters. Although there is no physical violence in that particular scene it perfectly illustrates the dynamic between the characters, mainly the boy and his father. The violence is not aimed only at the main protagonist as all of his siblings receive the same treatment. The abuse causes a divide between the children and their father: "They all got beatings, often for no reason, because they laughed when he was in foul humour, but they learned to make him suffer – to close their life against him and leave him to himself" (McGahern 11). The relationship between father and son is a complex one. Already at the beginning of the novel it is obvious that the protagonist hates his father. However, this feeling is often followed by guilt as the protagonist believes that he "had no right to hate him, he was there to be loved too" (McGahern 43). Their relationship remains like this until the end of the novel when the main protagonist goes away to university. It is only when he leaves and is able to physically and emotionally distance himself from his father that they reconcile.

Aside from the physical abuse, the novel also portrays scenes of sexual abuse. In twentieth century Ireland sexual abuse within the family as well sexual abuse by the clergy were considered taboo topics. Although they were considered a public secret and many knew about it, they were rarely discussed. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that the issue of sexual assault, especially towards children, was introduced into public discourse and affected the reputation and image of the Catholic Church. In the novel there are three distinct situations involving sexual abuse. The first involves the protagonist and his father. The father would often sneak into his room at night and sleep with him: "The worst was to have to sleep

with him the nights he wanted love, strain of waiting for him to come to bed, no hope of sleep in the waiting..." (McGahern 17). The boy is terrified and refers to it as "the old horror" during which his father would "put [his hands] about him", kiss him, and force the protagonist to tell him he loves him (McGahern 20). The second instance of sexual abuse occurs while the boy is visiting his uncle. He makes advances towards him by coming into his room in the middle of the night and his behaviour reminds the boy of his father's actions: "...you stiffened when his arm went about your shoulder, was this to be another of the midnight horrors with your father" (McGahern 70). Through these two scenes McGahern not only confronts the issue of child abuse but homosexuality as well, which was another taboo subject in Irish society. The Catholic Church considered homosexuality a sin and McGahern's decision to portray a Catholic priest with homosexual tendencies can be seen as heavy criticism of the Church. Afterwards the boy goes to visit his sister and he finds out that her employer has been touching her inappropriately as well as cornering her when they were alone. Through Joan's molestation John McGahern portrays a situation that was, unfortunately, very common not just in Ireland, but in the rest of the world. Like many other subjects, workplace harassment was rarely mentioned or talked about although it was a serious problem for many women at the time. Despite the fact that she hates her job, Joan cannot simply quit as she has to earn money for herself and to help her family.

According to Cahalan, *The Dark* can be interpreted as a warning to young Irish readers (65). If they are not careful, they could follow in the protagonist's footsteps. The boy's decision to leave university and become a civil servant is a conflicting one as, on the one hand, it allows him to start earning money right away and contribute to his family. However, on the other hand, the decision to abandon university for what has been described by Shaun O'Connell as "an Irish purgatory" at such a young age seems to be anticlimactic and it conflicts with the coming of age aspect of the novel as there is doubt whether true coming of

age could be achieved in this manner (qtd. in Cahalan 65).

### **3. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* by Brian Moore**

Up until the publishing of *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* Brian Moore only wrote thrillers. This novel marks the first of his 'serious' novels. According to Robert Green Moore admitted that Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* influenced the novel. He referenced Flaubert's quote in which he mentioned the impersonal quality of the book in particular. By this Flaubert referred to the separation of the author's opinions and beliefs from their work. In other words, the novel does not share any of the author's opinions and it is strictly a work of fiction. Green also stated that this approach appealed to Moore, as he did not wish to include autobiographical elements in his first novel (29). Moore uses free indirect speech (which was also used by Flaubert) to emphasise the impersonality of the novel, which allowed him to avoid the limitation and subjectivity of first-person narration. Through the use of such a narration style Moore is able to portray all of the protagonists' faults while still providing an insight into the character's thoughts and emotions. This allows the reader to sympathize with her. Many of Moore's other novels focus on faith and religion, including *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*.

When writing the novel he wanted to write about his loss of faith, however, in order to avoid being compared to Joyce, whose novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* follows an Irish intellectual's religious awakening, Moore decided to create a protagonist who was the complete opposite of the author (Maher 389). He therefore decided to write about the crisis of faith of a middle-aged spinster named Judith Hearne. She is a pitiful character with no family or friends whose only joy in life are alcohol and her Sunday visits to the O'Neills, who only entertain her out of a sense of Catholic obligation. The story opens with Judith moving to a

new boarding house where she meets her landlady and her son whom she does not like much. Her life continues as usual until she meets her landlady's brother, Mr Madden. He is an Irishman who spent most of his life in the United States and only recently returned. Judith mistakenly assumes that he is interested in marrying her while he believes she is rich and is only after her money. Their eventual fallout serves as a catalyst for Judith's breakdown and loss of faith.

The official reason for the censoring of *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* was indecency. Some consider it to be ironic, as the novel's accurate description of the "repressive climate of Catholic, nationalist Belfast" (Maher 392) was the exact climate that the Censorship Board tried to maintain. The protagonist of the novel, Judith, is the product of such a society. Moore describes Judith's character as "the sort of woman [his] mother would have known" (qtd. in Maher 389). She is the personification of an ordinary Irish woman, conservative, devout, proper, and follows the rules of the Catholic Church. Despite all this, she is a flawed woman living in a world where women were expected to be perfect. Judith spent her youth taking care of her ill aunt and as a result she ended up a middle-aged spinster without beauty, money, a husband, or professional skills.

Judith is a very lonely woman, a fact which makes her cling to any person who shows interest in her, such as Mr Madden, and she often uses alcohol to cope with her loneliness and sadness: "She swallowed it, feeling it warm the pit of her stomach, slowly spreading through her body, steadying her hands, filling her with its secret power. Warmed, relaxed, her own and only mistress, she reached for and poured a tumbler full of drink" (Moore 99). The only time when Judith seems to relax and in control of her own life is when she drinks, especially since her whole life is marked by oppressive religious and social rules. Moore's decision to write about an alcoholic protagonist was also a controversial one. Alcoholism was, like many other topics, a public secret in twentieth century Ireland. Everyone knew about it but no one

spoke of it. It was especially controversial having the heroine who is an alcoholic as women were expected to be embodiments of virtue and perfection, both by the society and the Church. For a long time, women in Ireland had only two choices, either to become a nun or to marry and turn into a mother, wife and housewife. Having a vice, such as alcoholism, was deemed improper for a lady. Through his portrayal of Judith Moore showed his thorough understanding of the human psyche, as the struggle of people with their personal 'demons' is something everyone can relate to.

Judith is an immensely complex and flawed character and Moore's decision to make her the main protagonist of the novel was a controversial one. Judith's character opposes Irish ideals of the time. She may be a character who tries very hard to adapt and follow the rules of proper behaviour, however, she ends up as a lonely spinster with substance abuse problems. Her alcoholism and loss of faith in particular were considered taboo topics in Irish society. Considering the importance of the church and religion in general in twentieth century Ireland Moore's portrayal of a character who is disillusioned with life and ultimately starts doubting not only society as a whole but her faith as well functions as heavy social criticism. This served to show that, despite a person's best efforts, reaching those Irish ideals was practically impossible as humans are essentially flawed.

Another reason for the banning of the book was the portrayal of the Catholic religion and faith. According to Jo O'Donoghue, Judith's religion is just a part of her everyday life (18). Her faith is not based on belief but on habit which makes it very superficial. Religion does not inspire or comfort Judith:

Religion was there: it was not something you thought about, and if, occasionally, you had a small doubt about something in the way church affairs were carried on, or something that seemed wrong or silly, well, that was the Devil at work and God's ways were not our ways (Moore 59)

Judith herself states that she is “not a particularly religious person” (Moore 58) and that her devotion laid in her family and the Sacred Heart. The only fixtures in her life are the photograph of her aunt and the coloured oleograph of the Sacred Heart, which are always placed in their permanent positions on the mantelpiece and at the head of the bed respectively. Judith develops a personal attachment to the Secret Heart, which serves as a talisman that she relies on in hard times: “Miss Hearne had her lifelong devotion to the Sacred Heart. He was her guide and comforter. And her terrible judge” (Moore 58-59). However, the Sacred Heart is not omnipotent, and it fails Judith at the most critical time. After the fallout with Mr Madden Judith becomes more unbalanced and her drinking gets out of hand. The symbol of the Sacred Heart cannot offer her the comfort she needs anymore and neither can God and religion. She feels abandoned, and this leads her to abandon her faith:

Was it? Was there nothing to pray to? Was the confession she had just made a form, something you went through to ease your conscience? If it was, then how easy to explain all the miseries, the follies, all the useless novenas, the prayers that never got an answer. And it was true, then all priests, all the bishops, all the cardinals are wrong. Deluded men, believing that they are being helped by a God who is not there. An unhelpful God. Why does he make men suffer? Bernard had said. Why should my sins hurt him? (Moore 173-174)

Once Judith realises that there is no ‘higher power’ that cares for her troubles or is willing to help her she loses her faith in God.

Moore also uses the character of Father Quingley as a way to criticise not only the Church but the clergy as well. Although his main goal is to criticise Catholicism, Moore does not rely on stereotypes in the depiction of Father Quingley. He proves to be a very hypocritical character. In an earlier scene in the novel he chastises the parishioners for not having enough time for God and being late to Church: “If you don’t have time for God, God



will have no time for you” (Moore 64). This quote resonates with Judith, and she recalls it during her confession later on in the novel when he brushes off her problems and worries because he is late for golf. He interprets the ‘parishioners’ tardiness as a loss of faith while completely disregarding Judith’s struggle with faith. It is only at the end of the novel, when she has already completely given up on God, that he realises the extent of her troubles and attempts to reaffirm her faith in God and the Church, albeit unsuccessfully.

The effects of conservative and strict rules of twentieth century Irish society on the individual is a topic broached in both Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and McGahern’s *The Dark*. Through the coming-of-age story of his protagonist, McGahern represents how Irish society influences young people. By following the boy from his early childhood to adulthood the reader can see how, not only Irish society but also religion, were essential in his development as a character. Moore’s approach is different. He portrays the consequences of such a society through Judith’s character. Her whole life Judith has followed these unspoken rules. She was a good niece who put her family first and took care of her aunt, she was devoted to God, her behaviour was proper, however, in the end, this all led to the life of loneliness and poverty. Both Judith Hearne and McGahern’s protagonist are victims of their surroundings and their upbringing, and, although they might be fictional characters, their experiences are all too real. This is, however, not the only similarity between these two novels. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, just like McGahern’s *The Dark*, includes an instance of sexual abuse. The sexual abuse in *The Dark* is one of the main focuses of the novel and it directly affects the main character. However, although the nature of the abuse is sexual, it never seems to cross the line between molestation and rape. The protagonist is touched inappropriately and forced to kiss his father, but that is as far as it ever gets. Unfortunately, in Moore’s case the sexual abuse portrayed in the novel falls firmly in the category of rape. Unlike in *The Dark*, the sexual abuse in *The Lonely Passion of Judith*

*Hearne* is not at the centre of the plot, nor does it directly affect the protagonist. Although this incident is not the focus of the story, we as readers have a glimpse into the darker aspects of Irish society. After assaulting Mary, the servant girl, Mr Madden does not face any serious repercussions. When the truth comes out he is forced to leave his sister's house, but the law does not punish him. Mary, on the other hand, decides to keep the assault a secret because she is afraid of the consequences:

She couldn't even tell Bernie what had happened because Bernie would want to know why she didn't let a yell out of her. An' ruin myself, she answered the question, easier to let him feel away for a bit, an ould gaum like him, it was all over in a minute an' besides, if my da ever found out, he'd kill me an' if I yelled, Mrs Rice would come and then I would be sent home (Moore 106).

When the truth eventually comes out Mary does not receive help or sympathy. She is instead fired and thrown out. In both *The Dark* and *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* the victims of sexual assault do not reveal it to the public, nor do they fight back too strongly because they are both afraid and aware of the consequences. It is easier for them to hide it and pretend it never happened than to risk being scorned by society.

#### **4. *Mary Lavelle* by Kate O'Brien**

Kate O'Brien was one of the most prominent Irish female writers of the twentieth century. Initially, critics considered her a romance author because of her focus on topics considered typically 'female', such as romance and family relationships (Mentxaka 2). Many of O'Brien's novels were focused on the family life of the characters. *Mary Lavelle*, however, is the exception. The focus is not on the family as a whole but on Mary as an individual. The

story follows the eponymous character, an Irish girl who goes to Spain to be a governess. She uses this opportunity to experience the last moment of freedom before getting married to her fiancé back in Ireland:

To go to Spain. To be alone for a little space, a tiny hiatus between her life's two accepted phases. To cease being a daughter without immediately becoming a wife. To be a free lance, to belong to no one place or family or person — to achieve that silly longing of childhood, only for one year, before she flung it with all other childish things upon the scrapheap (O'Brien 30).

During her stay in Spain Mary strikes up a friendship with a group of fellow governesses and she eventually initiates an affair with her employer's son, Juanito. The novel ends with Mary and Juanito parting, after which she decides to break her engagement with her fiancé, as her experience in Spain has changed her.

Two of O'Brien's novels have been banned, *Mary Lavelle* and *Land of Spices*. (*Land of Spices* was, interestingly, banned due to only one single sentence referring to a homosexual relationship). The banning of her novels had a negative effect not just on the sales of the censored novel, but on O'Brien's entire body of works. According to Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka, in the years following the banning of *Mary Lavelle* and *Land of Spices* publishers would refuse to publish O'Brien's work or the printing and reprinting of her novels would get delayed (9). Like with many other Irish authors whose books were banned, this type of situation was, in a way, an extension of the original ban that could potentially affect a writer's whole career. Another consequence of the banning of her novels was that critical work on Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* only started in the 1970s, after the lifting of the ban (Kent 47). Ireland was not, however, the only country in which O'Brien's books were banned. Her books were banned in Spain and O'Brien herself was banned from entering Spain (Mentxaka 9).

Twentieth century Spain and Ireland were both countries where the Church held great power. The protagonist is transported from one Catholic country to another and she faces the same problems that she would have faced in Ireland. The only things that change are the language and the scenery; the social rules are still predominantly the same. Despite still being in a similar social situation as that of Ireland, Mary's trip to Spain allows her a degree of freedom she did not have back home in Ireland. She could do as she wished without suffering serious consequences, as she knew that her family and friends would most likely never discover it. This distance Mary put between herself and her home wasn't just physical, it was also a way of emotionally distancing herself from her family and the person she was expected to be. It was the first instance in her life where she could allow herself the freedom of doing as she wished without having to worry about her or her family's reputation. This, in turn, led her to liberate herself and explore her own desires and sexuality, something that, up until that point, she was unable to do.

Mary herself is very subversive. As mentioned above, the distance Mary puts between herself and Ireland allows her a modicum of freedom previously unavailable to her. This leads to her disregarding social and religious rules and doing things she knows are frowned upon. She not only embraces and explores her own sexual desires, but she also starts an affair with a married man. All of these things were considered inappropriate and unseemly for a young Christian woman during that time period. Women were expected to be virginal and pure until marriage and Mary's decision to, not only lose her innocence, but to also cheat on her fiancé back in Ireland went completely against the standards for women in those days. Her actions were also considered immoral and as sins by the Catholic Church, which further pushes Mary away from her old life and her old constrictions. It is partly because of guilt and partly because her experiences in Spain changed her so that she decided to admit her wrongs to her family upon her return. Once she let herself experience freedom and act upon her desires, and

once she effectively committed unforgivable sins, she would be unable to go back to her constrictive and conservative life in Ireland.

*Mary Lavelle* was, like most other novels at the time, banned because it was deemed indecent, or in other words, it incited sexual misconduct. There are two elements of the novel that are thought to be the cause for censorship, the first being O'Brien's focus on the protagonist's sexuality. Mary is a unique character in the sense that she is the one who initiates intimacy and sexual intercourse, and she is not forced into it. This portrayal of sexuality provides a contrast to McGahern's. Sexuality is one of the main themes of *The Dark* as well, however, the way in which it is depicted differs greatly from O'Brien's. McGahern's protagonist considers his sexuality to be a sin. Throughout the novel we witness his being ashamed of it and trying to suppress it. On the other hand, Mary Lavelle behaves in a completely different manner. She is not ashamed of her sexuality and is, in fact, the one who initiates the sexual act with a man who is not her fiancé and who is married to another woman. She is aware of the consequences of her actions, but she does not let them stop her and she faces them head on. Although Mary's affair with Juanito is the focal point of the novel, it is, according to Brad Kent, just a way for Mary to realise and free herself (51). It is precisely Mary's self-realisation that dictates the final scenes of the novel. Mary and Juanito's affair is futureless, as Juanito is married, and in Spain, much like in Ireland, divorce was not allowed by the Catholic Church. Therefore, the only way for Mary and Juanito to be together is to live in sin. This culminates in Mary and Juanito separating and her deciding to confess her affair to John, her fiancé, although she could probably keep it a secret and marry him. The decision to confess to him is, however, not a way to absolve herself of guilt. It is, in fact, a way for Mary to separate from him and, consequently, from Ireland, as she is fully aware that she would have to live abroad after committing such a 'shameful' act.

If we compare the ending of *Mary Lavelle* and O'Brien's previous novel, *The Anteroom* we can see certain similarities between the main protagonists of both stories. Both characters are faced with a similar situation where they are forced to decide between fulfilling their desires and staying loyal to their families. Despite this they both end up taking different paths. Agnes, the protagonist of *The Anteroom*, remains loyal to her family and religion and in the end she ends up miserable. Mary, conversely, does what she wants and follows her passion, however, at the end of the novel she is still left uncertain. It is for this reason Mary is not considered a character who should act as a role model for young women. Kent states that the banning of the novel is, in a way, justified precisely because of Mary's inadequacy to provide a proper model of behaviour for young readers of the novel, especially young Irish women who might relate to her (51). O'Brien's characterisation of Mary resembles Moore's Judith Hearne. Both of them are characters who do not embody the ideal image of an Irish woman. Judith's divergence from the role is subtler. She is not a rebel or a rule breaker outwardly; in fact, her behaviour in public is mostly in line with the social norms. It is her inner self that defies the Irish ideal, particularly her alcoholism and loss of faith. Mary, however, opposes the Irish ideal of the asexual virgin. Since women in Ireland were not seen as sexual creatures, O'Brien's portrayal of Mary as a character who embraces her sexuality was deemed highly controversial.

Another reason why the novel was banned was the fact that she introduced a homosexual character. It is no wonder that in twentieth century Ireland homosexuality was considered a taboo and, according to the Catholic Church, a sin, and even slight allusions to homosexuality were censored. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Agatha's lesbianism was one of the reasons for the banning of the novel. Agatha is another Irish woman working as a governess in Spain with whom Mary has a close relationship. Agatha's homosexual tendencies are subtly implied in the text, although she herself does not seem to be aware of it

until she meets Mary. The unrequited love remains quite innocent, as she only expresses her feelings in words without any physical intimacy:

“I told you a lie that day. You asked me if I’d ever had a crush.... And I said I’d never had a crush on a living creature. That would have been true up to the first day I saw you. It’s not true anymore. ... I like you the way a man would, you see. I never can see you without—without wanting to touch you. I could look at your face forever” (O'Brien 248).

Despite her unrealised love for Mary, Agatha’s sexuality was just as controversial a topic in 1930s Ireland as was Mary’s sexuality. Although Agatha and Mary were attracted to different sexes, they both diverged from what was considered the norm. Mary with her sexual desire and Agatha with her attraction to another woman.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed three selected novels in the context of censorship in twentieth century Irish literature. John McGahern’s *The Dark* is a coming-of-age novel banned for its explicit portrayal of a teen’s awakening sexuality, profanity, and sexual assault. The banning of the novel was intended as a warning for young Irish readers not to follow in the protagonist’s footsteps. McGahern’s novel is important in this regard, as the controversy sparked by its banning was one of the turning points in the history of Irish censorship and it served as a catalyst for the change of censorship laws. Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* is a novel that portrays the loss of faith of a middle-aged spinster. The main reason for the banning of the book was the author’s criticism of both the Catholic faith and the clergy. Finally, Kate O’Brien’s *Mary Lavelle* is a story that follows the sexual liberation of a

woman while in Spain. *Mary Lavelle* was banned for its representation of female sexuality and homosexuality.

Although all three of these novels deal with different topics and were banned for different reasons, there are some overlapping themes. *The Dark* and *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* both contain instances of sexual assault that were used to critique the way Irish society punished not only the perpetrators of the crime, but also the victims, albeit to a lesser degree. Both Judith Hearne and Mary Lavelle subvert the ideal of a perfect Irish woman who was virtuous, virginal, and without vices, while *Mary Lavelle* and *The Dark* had at the centre of their story the awakening of a young person's sexuality. What is common to all three novels under discussion here is the enormous influence of Irish society on an individual. Under the pressure of the extremely conservative and punishing Irish society all our protagonists end up unhappy and miserable: the main protagonist in *The Dark* gets a boring job he will in all likelihood dislike, Judith is taken to a mental institution and Mary decides to give up on love and marriage.



## 6. Bibliography

- Barry, Michael. "Censorship board bans book for the first time since 1998.," *The Irish Times*, 12 March 2016, [www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/censorship-board-bans-book-for-the-first-time-since-1998-1.2571029](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/censorship-board-bans-book-for-the-first-time-since-1998-1.2571029), Accessed 14 Aug. 2018.
- Brown, Terence. "Redeeming the Time: the Novels of John McGahern and John Banville." *The British and Irish Novel since 1960*, edited by James Acheson, Palgrave Macmillan, 1991, pp. 159-173.
- Cahalan, James M. "Female and Male Perspectives on Growing Up Irish in Edna O'Brien, John McGahern and Brian Moore." *Colby Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, March 1995, pp. 55-73.
- Green, Robert. "Brian Moore's Judith Hearne: Celebrating the Commonplace." *The International Fiction Review* vol. 7, no. 1, 1980, pp. 29-33.
- Keating, Anthony. "The Uses and Abuses of Censorship: God, Ireland and the Battle to Extend Censorship Post 1929." *Estudios Irlandeses* vol. 9, 2014, pp. 67-79.
- Kent, Brad. "Literary Criticism and the Recovery of Banned Books: The Case of Kate O'Brien's Mary Lavelle." *ariel: a review of international english literature* vol. 41, no. 2, 2011, pp. 47-74.
- Maher, Eamon. "Religious Practice Bereft of Faith." *Doctrine and Life* vol. 49, no. 7, 1999, pp. 386-397.
- McGahern, John. *The Dark*. London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1983.
- Mentxaka, Aintzane Legarreta. *Kate O'Brien and the Fiction of Identity: Sex, Art and Politics in Mary Lavelle and Other Writings*. Jefferson, McFarland, 2011.
- Moore, Brian. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* 1955. New York, Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1983.

Ó Drisceoil, Donal. "The best banned in the land': censorship and Irish writing since 1950 ."

*The Yearbook of English Studies* vol. 35, 2005, pp. 146-160 .

O'Brien, Kate. *Mary Lavelle* 1936. London, Hachette, 2016.

O'Donoghue, Jo. *Brian Moore: A Critical Study*. Motreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1991.

## 7. CENSORSHIP IN TWENTIETH CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE:

### Summary and Key Words

The aim of this paper is to analyse reasons for the banning of the selected novels by three Irish 20<sup>th</sup> century authors: John McGahern's *The Dark* and its portrayal of awakening sexuality, sexual abuse as well as profanity; Brian Moore's *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and its criticism of the Catholic Church; and Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* and its portrayal of female sexuality and homosexuality. The paper tries to demonstrate that each novel was banned for containing subject matter deemed not appropriate by either the church or Irish society. Furthermore, the paper shows how the authors used their novels to criticize Irish society and how numerous constraints affected Irish people.

Key words: censorship, Ireland, sexuality, abuse, Catholicism

## 8. CENZURA U IRSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI DVADESETOG STOLJEĆA:

### Sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj završni rad analizira razloge zbog kojih su zabranjeni odabrani romani troje irskih autora 20.stoljeća: *The Dark* (1965.) Johna McGaherna i buđenje seksualnosti, seksualno zlostavljanje i psovanje; *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955.) Briana Moorea i kritika katoličke crkve; i *Mary Lavelle* (1936.) Kate O'Brien i prikaz ženske seksualnosti i homoseksualnosti. Rad pokazuje kako se romani bave temama koje crkva i/ili irsko društvo nisu smatrale prikladnima. Nadalje, rad pokazuje kako svo troje autora svojim romanima kritiziraju Irsko društvo i njegov utjecaj na formiranje identiteta.

Ključne riječi: cenzura, Irska, seksualnost, katoličanstvo, zlostavljanje