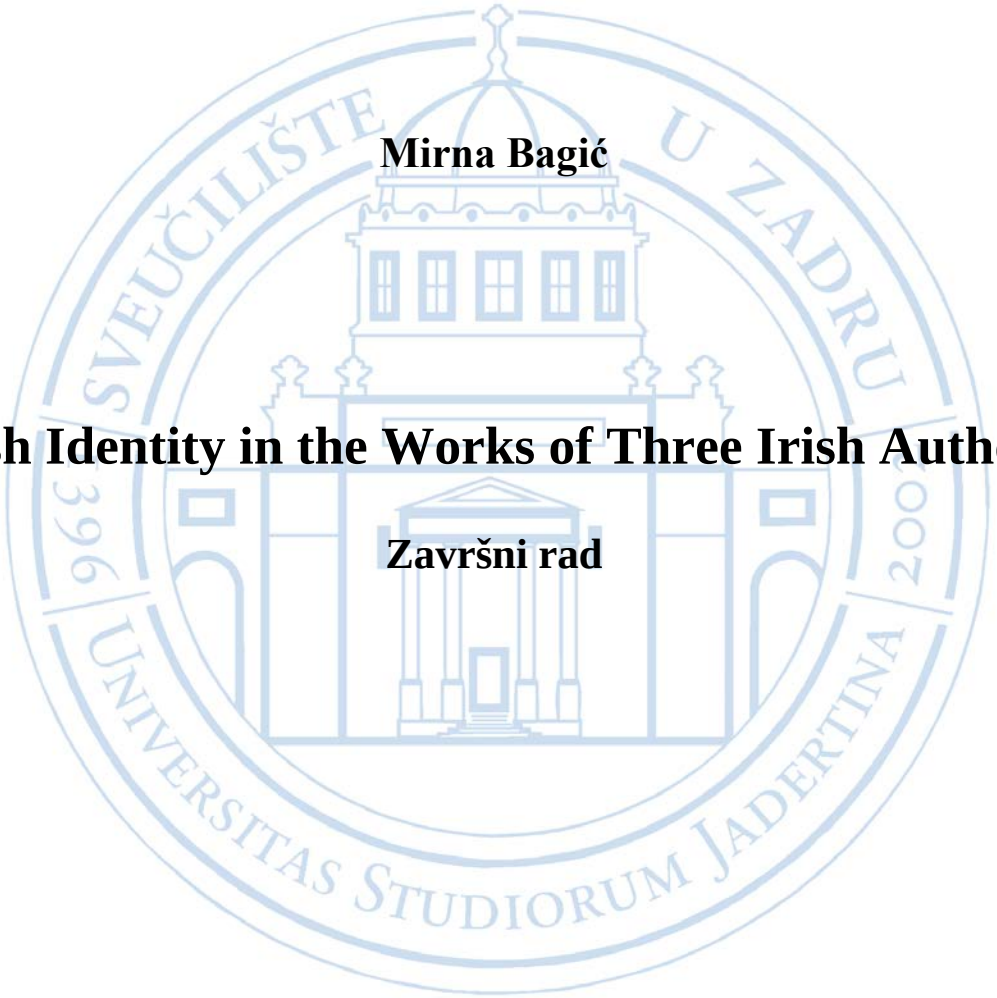
Irish Identity in the Works of Three Irish Authors

Bagić, Mirna

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku
Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)



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Završni rad

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Zadar, 2019.

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Zadar, 1. listopada 2019.

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IRSKI IDENTITET U DJELIMA TROJE IRSKIH PISACA: SAŽETAK I KLJUČNE RIJEČI 26

Introduction

Defining Irishness is a complex issue as the concept of Irish identity constantly changed throughout the centuries. What is it that makes the Irish different from other nations or ethnic groups, if that distinction can be made in the first place? In her book *Language, Identity and Liberation in Contemporary Irish Literature*, Jennifer Keating-Miller quotes Seamus Deane who says that "nothing is more monotonous or despairing than the search for the essence which defines a nation" and adds that "it is an exhaustive task that in twentieth-century Ireland has led to violent conflict, bloodshed and the undermining of democratic processes" (24). While creating a unique national identity individuals, groups and nations very often emphasize or suppress certain characteristics. Today there are many facets of Irish identity and Irishness is a concept that is constantly defined and re-defined. In the context of a modern, globalized Ireland, the stress is on the diversity of Irish place and society and the fluidity of Irish identity. However, the sense of Irishness still remains a product of Ireland's political, social and cultural history and the historic rise of Irish nationalism.

Throughout the past centuries some important constituents of Irish identity were forged and they created a strong sense of social cohesions and national unity. Some of these constituents of Irish identity which fall under the traditional definition of Irishness are the following: Catholicism, conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, rural Ireland, family, the Irish language, emigration, the Great Famine, the position of Irish woman in the society etc. Tom Inglis, a sociologist who has written extensively on Irish culture and society, states that the forces that have helped constitute the Irish as different from other people relate to the particular type of social bonds and sense of belonging that developed in families and

communities around Ireland and that those bonds were so tight that they stifled individualism (*Global Ireland* 37).

There is no doubt that much Irish literature of the twentieth century has an important role in articulating what it means to be Irish. In this paper I will analyse the selected works by three Irish writers*: Memoir* (2005) by John McGahern, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) by Brian Moore and *The Last September* (1929) by Elizabeth Bowen. The aim of this paper is to show how Irishness is portrayed in these books and to explore how the above-mentioned constituents of Irish identity are represented in them. We will try to demonstrate how being Irish affects individuals who struggle for freedom in a society which was conservative and rather repressive for much of the twentieth century.

All Things Irish in John McGahern's *Memoir* (2005)

As opposed to other two books under discussion here which are novels, the first book I am going to analyze in this paper is John McGahern's autobiography *Memoir*. In the last book he published before he died in 2006 he gives an account of his life in Roscommon-Leitrim county and then in Dublin in the course of the forties, fifties and sixties. McGahern talks about social, political, and religious forces that shaped life in mid-century Ireland and his autobiography seems to confirm everything he used to say about art, mainly that it is deeply self-referential, a revelation of the "private world." McGahern states that "art is an attempt to create a world in which we can live . . . allowing us to see and to celebrate even the totally intolerable" (Sampson, "Introducing" 2). What the "totally intolerable" McGahern is referring to are undoubtedly his personal traumas of living with an authoritarian and violent father and the repressive force of the Catholic Church which pervaded almost every aspect of people's lives. However, the darkness associated with the authority of his father and the

Church is opposed by the light associated with Irish landscape, the liberating power of reading and most of all, his beloved mother who passed away when he was ten. Some of the key constituents of Irishness that we find in McGahern's autobiography can be said to represent life in mid-century Ireland rather accurately: rural Ireland, family life in a close-knit community, Catholicism and its control of the life of an individual, poverty and an air of self-denial, the Irish language and emigration.

The importance of place in creating a sense of Irishness has been significant throughout the history of Ireland. In his book *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland: Webs of Significance,* Tom Inglis states that "spaces become places when they are invested with practices, beliefs, and meaning" (41). People sense that they belong to a particular place and that place shapes their identity. Ireland has a long history of emigration and the Irish have been working and living in different parts of the world. However, those who stayed in the country as well as those who emigrated, always remained attached to the small communities where they had grown up. The emphasis on collective identity created a favorable environment for the Church in Ireland and, as John Wilson Foster says, "the Irish Catholic cultural environment thus diverged from the European mainstream in which urban experience and the triumph of individual experience were prized" (97).

In *Memoir,* McGahern makes an obvious distinction between the local and national identity: "People did not live in Ireland then. They lived in small, intense communities which often varied greatly in spirit and character over the course of even a few miles . . . the local and the individual were more powerful than any national identity" (211). It was the local, close-knit community that was imbued with meaning and created a sense of belonging. Inglis stresses that it is particularly McGahern who "brought intense emotional meaning to the nooks and crannies of the house in which he lived, the garden and the lanes and roads, array

of houses" (*Meanings of Life* 43). McGahern's *Memoir* thus begins with the description of lanes and fields in county Leitrim where he grew up and moved back there in the seventies:

> The fields between the lakes are small, separated by thick hedges of whitethorn, ash, blackthorn, alder, sally, rowan, wild cherry, green oak, sycamore, and the lanes that link them under the Iron Mountains are narrow, often with high banks. The hedges are the glory of these small fields, especially when the hawthorn foams into blossom each May and June. (1)

It was rural Ireland that became a privileged place of Irishness at the turn of the twentieth century. Leading figures of the early-twentieth-century Irish struggle for independence, Collins and de Valera, shared a common myth of rural Ireland as a place where anti-materialism and traditionalism were nurtured in the Catholic spirit of self-denial and simplicity. According to Collins, Irishness in its purified mode was to be found in isolated areas of Ireland where "one gets a glimpse… of a prosperous and happy gaelic life" (qtd. in Moffatt 6). Consequently, urban space with Dublin as its center was seen as foreign and polluted by English ways.

What constituted the concept of rural Ireland were thick social bonds within a family and community. Family was certainly one of the main social forces in Ireland for much of the last century, and in *Memoir* it takes central stage. Unsurprisingly, McGahern's own family is in the focus of his autobiography: his mother who was a teacher and a woman of profound faith in God (like most Irish women at the time), his father, and his younger siblings who all had to learn how to deal with their father's constant mood changes and later move on with their lives. His own family inspired many of his novels, as Denis Sampson carefully observes: "If we take all of his novels and stories as a whole, and reassign the parts into a chronological sequence, there is no better record of the inner and outer stresses to which a rural Irish family was subject over a period of more than two generations" ("Introducing" 5).

The idealistic, heroic vision of the young Irish State with its image of Ireland as a rural nation had little to do with the reality of life in the countryside. The life that McGahern describes was marked by hard work and food was scarce. "The Great Famine that hit Ireland between 1845 and about 1851, caused the deaths of about 1 million people and the flight or emigration of up to 2.5 million more over the course of about six years" ("The Great"). Although the Great Famine was long gone, people still remembered the "hard times" and McGahern remembers how "potatoes were too plentiful. One year he [his father] took to giving away bags as presents. They were not appreciated because of their association with the famine, but people were polite and accepted the presents even if they were to dump the potatoes later" (165). This condition of lack in terms of material things was a soil on which Catholic Church hierarchy planted its teaching of self-denial and frugal living which people accepted as a sort of comfort in this life. McGahern recalls how his mother comforted him by saying "when people are rich it is often harder for them to leave the world" (20).

There is another aspect of rural life that McGahern touches upon and that is a high proportion of unmarried men and women. From letters his mother and father exchanged and which he used in his autobiography he reveals that their engagement "was to last many years" (54) probably because of the restraints imposed by the Church regarding premarital sex and its Jansenist approach to human body and sexuality. Another reason was the economic situation in the country which forced men to wait until they were financially able to sustain a numerous family. Since the use of contraceptives was illegal and shunned by the Church as sinful, most families were numerous and children were "resented as unwanted mouths that had to be fed, the unpleasant and unavoidable results of desire" (51).

Needless to say, the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland throughout the twentieth century was huge: "To be a Catholic essentially meant to be Irish/nationalist/Gaelic/Separatist while to be a non-Catholic may have implied

British/Protestant/foreign/alien" (Moffatt 19). By establishing close links with the political structures the Catholic Church in the independent Ireland operated like a second government or a state within a state. In McGahern's words, "in that country individual thought and speech were discouraged . . . the State had become a theocracy in all but name" (210). The Church maintained absolute control over the behavior of individuals and public discourse. McGahern discusses religion by describing the everyday use of symbols, words and ceremonies, by mentioning the control of education, by the portrayal of Protestants and by mentioning censorship which affected his literary work.

As Inglis suggests, "people used Catholic language, metaphors, and symbols to develop and maintain a shared understanding of life" (*Meanings of Life* 13). Practices such as regular Mass attendance, family prayer, novenas, fasting and pilgrimages to Catholic shrines were part of being Irish and, and as McGahern states: "religion and religious imagery were part of the air we breathed" (10). Prayer and acts of penitence were part of the daily routine, and people observed these practices regardless of whether they understood their true meaning or not. After McGahern's mother was stricken with cancer his father led the prayers, but the children did not understand the meaning of the prayers and were never told their mother was in the hospital.

The Catholic Church controlled almost all levels of education. Teachers were appointed by the Church, and schools were managed by priests. What the author notices is that the acquisition of knowledge was valued much less than the exercise of authority. McGahern went to quite a few schools in his childhood and youth and the thing he vividly remembers are corporal punishments which were brutal, administered both in schools and in churches. "I have seen men my own age grow strange with anger when recalling their schooling: 'Often we wouldn't be able to hold tools in the evening, our hands would be that black and swollen . . . How we learned anything was a mystery" (17). Another important

factor in creating a distinctive Irish identity was the learning of Irish in schools. The use of Irish language in Ireland gradually declined under the British colonial rule. In the colonial period the imposed English language functioned as one of the means of colonizing the Irish. Still spoken in rural areas, Irish was seen as backward and inferior. In the independent Irish state, quite expectedly, Irish became a symbol of independence as well as self-identification. However, as McGahern stresses, "the demand that all the children of the State should be able to speak and write in Irish had been raised to a punitive level" (9). Irish was also a tool of ideological repression used by the State while outwardly functioning as a symbol of Irish identity.

Not only did the Catholic Church control the educational system in Ireland, but it also supervised literature that was published in Ireland, and McGahern addresses that issue too. Whenever writers in Ireland dealt with daily human dramas or anything connected to sexuality, they were promptly banned by the Irish Censorship Board. This is one of the reasons many of Irish novelists became estranged from Catholicism. It was thought that all literature promoting materialism and immorality came from abroad and "it was the business of an Irish legislature to protect Irish life from the impure external influences and to help build up a healthy, clean-minded Catholic Irish civilization." (Brown 69-70). McGahern mentions his novel *The Dark* which was published in 1965 and soon banned by the Censorship Board. He found it "childish and unpleasant" and adds that he was ashamed that their "own independent country was making a fool of itself yet again." (250)

However, it should be noted that McGahern does not have a one-sided view of the Catholic Church. In *Memoir,* he makes a clear distinction between the Church as an institution which he obviously abhorred and the beauty of sacraments, liturgy, ceremony and mystery surrounding them which was the "sacred weather of his early life" (222). He associates "the fortress churches with their edicts, threats and punishments" (271) with his

violent father and authority in general. On the other hand, the "churches of the spires and brilliant windows that go towards love and life" (271), remind him of his mother's "faith of light" (Sampson, "The Sacred" 8).

Narrowness of Irish Life in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) by Brian Moore

The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne is the first novel by Brian Moore which turns out to reflect, as we will see, all the loneliness and bitterness of an Irish author who was forced into an involuntary exile. Just like John McGahern who left Ireland after the banning of his novel *The Dark* (1965) and after being sacked from his job as a school teacher, Brian Moore also shares the experience of exile. Moore was born in Belfast to a strongly nationalist, middle-class Catholic family. He left Ireland, one of the main reasons being his loss of faith, and worked for the Allies in World War II. Later he settled in Montreal, Canada where he started his writing career. Throughout this novel, Moore addresses, although covertly, all the factors that led him to abandon the Catholic Church and the social climate of his local community:

> I left Ireland with the intention of not going back, but my reasons became clear only when I wrote that first novel. It was then that my bitterness against the bigotry in Northern Ireland, my feelings about the narrowness of life there, and, in a sense, my loneliness when living as an exile in Canada, all focused to produce a novel about what I felt the climate of Ulster to be. (O'Donoghue 16)

The "climate of Ulster" Moore is referring to is the peculiar environment created by the two opposing camps: the Irish Catholic minority and the Ulster Protestant majority which was politically and economically superior. Irish Catholics in Ulster take pride in their

Catholic roots and their Catholic identity is perhaps even more pronounced than in the rest of Ireland because it sets them apart from the Protestant majority and makes them well integrated within their own community. Irish Catholics in Ulster try to make up for their political inferiority by creating an illusion of moral superiority over Protestants. Denis Sampson states that "Moore was born into a state of conquest and colonial settlement in which racial origin and religion had been matters of life and death for centuries; the faiths of the fathers were at once absolutely true and, at every turn, under siege" (qtd. in Maher 304).

The central theme of the novel, which would become a recurrent theme in Moore's later novels, is loneliness and the loss of faith in a repressive society. The main characters and the image of Belfast in the novel represent a critique of both the Irish Catholic and the Protestant community. Judith Hearne is a poor, middle-aged spinster living in Belfast in the fifties. After the death of her aunt she moves from one boarding house to another, trying to make a living by giving piano lessons to children. Her only comfort in life is her faith, her family (represented by a photograph of her aunt) and alcohol. Judith finds herself in the midst of these two worlds. She is trapped inside the Catholic "ghetto" or "insular world" (16) as Robert Sullivan describes it, and the imposed "Protestant surfeit of order" (Moore 90) which dictates the main protagonist's behavior and shapes her worldview. All of the novel's protagonists are subject to ideological forces of family and religion which Louis Althusser terms "ideological apparatuses" (Sullivan 12).

Catholics in the novel represent different types of bigotry in Northern Ireland that Moore mentions in the quotation above. Mr. Madden, for example, embodies an Irish emigrant who does not wish to identify with the Irish whom he sees as backward. In his view, sacraments function only as a means to clear his conscience. Mr. Lenehan is an extreme nationalist while Miss Friel, the teacher, represents "pious rather than political bigotry; above all, she is concerned with upholding temperance and what she sees as exclusively Catholic

values" (O'Donoghue 25). The landlady's son Bernard, on the other hand, represents those who are alienated from religious beliefs and the institutional Church. Bernard's response to Miss Hearne is a pessimistic view of faith and the promotion of human self-sufficiency: "Do you think God gives a damn about the likes of you and me? . . . You've got to make your own miracles in this world." (Moore 159-160). Irish Catholics in Belfast portrayed in the novel are always careful not to show their moral weakness in public which would place them in an unfavorable position compared to Protestants. When the taxi driver drives drunken Judith Hearne to the church, he calls the priest "Sir" and not "Father." The priest concludes that "the taxi-man was a Protestant. Nice thing for him to see" (206), and adds that "it was very awkward in front of the Protestant taxi-driver" (207).

As this novel shows, two pillars of Irish society, the Catholic Church and the family, shape Irish identity. Judith Hearne never questions her identity and, in her own way, struggles to fit into the prescribed social norms. However, in moments of crisis, when loneliness and a sense of failure become unbearable, she cannot find comfort either in religion or the community. The Church with its representatives as well as her "surrogate family" prove to be a "hollow shell" which cannot fulfill her intimate desires for recognition and love. Moreover, it is those two institutions that stifle her individuality and freedom in the first place. She finds solace in drinking which, when the word is spread about her secret "passion", alienates her even more from the conservative and bigoted Irish society.

For Judith the authority of the Church is unquestionable and "religion was there: it was not something you thought about" (59). Compared to other characters in the novel who all have families, Judith's piety and blind obedience to the Church is more pronounced because she has no one to rely on and in her life there is no sense of belonging. Her social life revolves around Sunday Mass, an opportunity to be part of a community, and weekly visits to her friends, the O'Neill family. Judith also personifies a high-class Catholic community in

Belfast; she is full of prejudices towards Protestants as well as fellow Catholics who belong to a lower class. She speaks with contempt when she refers to "common" people such as her friend Moira O'Neill who grew up on a farm or Mr. Madden, the man she fancies. After making a shocking discovery about him not being a hotel manager in New York but a doorman, she calls him "common as mud" (97). Judith's view of Protestants is also a product of her Catholic upbringing as can be seen in her comment on Mrs. Strain who spreads gossip about her drinking: "You might know, being a Protestant, she wouldn't have one ounce of Christian charity in her" (33).

If there is a sense that Judith belongs somewhere, it is represented through two of her most precious possessions: a silver-framed photograph of her deceased aunt and an oleograph of the Sacred Heart. She once had a family and Catholic religion is where she finds comfort in times of trouble, as already stated. However, as Sullivan says, these two items function as "representatives of social force" (12), the family and the Church. She is constantly being controlled by her past (the authority of her aunt) and the Church teaching on morality and sin. This is why she cannot stand their admonitory gaze when she succumbs to her weakness (drinking) and has to turn the picture of the Sacred Heart to the wall: "He looked down, wise and stern and kindly, His fingers raised in warning. No, He said, you must not do it. It would be a mortal sin . . . So she turned the Sacred Heart to the wall, scarcely hearing the terrible warning He gave her" (97-98). Objects, devotions and even patterns of behavior and speech function as an escape from the harsh reality and represent something which is constant in her life. However, emotionally, physically and psychologically she remains unsatisfied.

Judith desperately wants marriage and family, the institutions fostered by the state and church. Her social life revolves around Sunday visits to the O'Neills she calls her "surrogate family." The O'Neills are a respectable Catholic family who welcome her every Sunday, but

lack a real sense of Christian compassion and love, just like other characters in the novel. Mrs. O'Neill frequently falls asleep during Judith's visits, her husband is always in the study room and the children mock her behind her back. Still, Judith wants to believe they are her friends and they, "in full consciousness of their good fortune and superiority, allow her to continue in her self-delusion" (O'Donoghue 40). She never loses hope of getting married eventually, but after she is rejected by Mr. Madden, she plunges into despair realizing her dream of a bright future might not come true. It is at this point that her belief system starts to crumble and she starts losing her faith.

By losing her faith and without much human contact Judith no longer sees her place in Irish Catholic society. These two attributes, "Irish" and "Catholic", are inextricably tied together as she concludes: "But I was of Ireland, among my people, a member of my faith. Now I have no – and if no faith, then no people" (221). The church for her is now "an empty space" (124), her prayers are unanswered, and the pictures of her aunt and the Sacred Heart which used to give her a sense of fixed identity have no real significance. As Green says, "Judith's loss of faith, in her acquaintances and in her nominal religion, has turned her into an exile in her own land" (33). Father Quigley, who represents Catholic clergy in this novel, fails to offer her emotional support. After witnessing Judith's mental breakdown, the priest's solution is to place her into residential care. He refuses to see her condition as an illness or her legitimate search for truth. Instead, he continues to offer her confession and absolution of sins and by doing this he asserts the Church position of power. The priest in the novel acts as an enforcer of religion which controls people through sermons, devotions, communal prayers, and its ties with other social forces. Individuals with personal doubts such as Judith are controlled especially through the sacrament of confession which appeals to their sense of guilt and shame. Judith's attempts to fulfill her desires and express her individuality prove to

be futile in a society controlled by the Church and marked by hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness.

Not only Irish but Anglo-Irish: *The Last September* (1929) by Elizabeth Bowen

Compared to the previous two authors who are both Catholics, the author of *The Last September* was an Anglo-Irish Protestant. The last section of my paper will thus discuss issues linked to Anglo-Irish identity. Elisabeth Bowen was born into a society which had difficulties in defining its identity; it was neither entirely English nor Irish. Similar to John McGahern and Brian Moore, she was also inspired by her personal experience of exile. In this novel, Bowen explores two main themes: the disintegration of the Anglo-Irish as an aristocratic class and the coming-of-age story of Lois Farquar and her search for identity. The "Big House" (a large country mansion of the Anglo-Irish) functions here as a metaphor for the emotional state of the Anglo-Irish and also for their political power in Ireland.

"Anglo-Irish" is a term which was used mostly in the nineteenth and at the turn of the twentieth century to define descendants of the English Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. The Protestant Ascendancy strengthened its political position within the Catholic majority in Ireland with the introduction of Penal Laws in the seventeenth century which forbade Catholics to own land, practice religion or develop an education system ("Anglo-Ireland"). Three crucial events weakened and subsequently ended the Ascendancy's political power in Ireland: The Act of Union passed in 1800 which removed the parliament they had monopolized, Catholic Emancipation Act which allowed Catholics to sit in parliament, and the distribution of land following the Great Famine in Ireland 1845-1849 ("Anglo-Ireland"). Irish Catholics never approved the way in which the Ascendancy rose to power:

> Their opportunism and their undignified scramble for land, their hatred of the Catholic religion . . . their enactment of the penal laws against Catholic and Dissenter: all these betokened a band of mercenary adventurers, "cheese eating bodachs", out for what they could get, rather than a people who cared for the country they had settled in and won. (Boyce 94)

With the rise of Irish nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century Protestants in Ireland were seen as an ethnic minority and the idea of a pluralist country was not welcomed as the Irish saw their identity as strictly Catholic, purified from foreign influences. The Anglo-Irish with their English manners and Protestant faith had no place in the creation of the independent Ireland. "The mainstream of Irish nationalism, therefore, involved mounting an attack not only on England, the alleged originator of Ireland's ills, but on the Protestant minority in Ireland, who sheltered behind the British Protestants' skirts" (Boyce 382).

This Protestant minority portrayed in *The Last September* find themselves in the midst of the Irish War of Independence. However, they seem totally uninterested in the revolutionary changes that are surrounding their estate. Terence Brown claims that the Protestants of Ireland, "in the decade before independence, made almost no effort to comprehend the nationalist cause" and adds that "a dismissive contemptuousness characterized fairly commonplace Protestant reactions to Irish nationalism" (106). Lois Farquar, the main protagonist of the novel, belongs to this Anglo-Irish class: she is an orphan living with her uncle, Sir Richard Naylor, his wife Myra and Myra's nephew Laurence. Other protagonists are guests at Danielstown, the Naylors' Big House: Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency, Miss. Norton, Gerald Lesworth and the wives and officers of the British army. Mrs. Naylor, for instance, is aware of the changes which could affect their lives, but she cannot seem to embrace them: "From all the talk, you might think almost anything was going to happen, but

we never listen. It's all very well to talk of disintegration . . . one does wonder sometimes whether there's really much there to disintegrate" (Bowen 31). Social gatherings such as tea parties and tennis matches organized by the Naylors seem like a deliberate distraction from the perils of war. All the incidents in connection with the guerilla war between the Irish Republican and the British Army are described using euphemisms such as "a horrible thing" (64), "unpleasantness" (49) or "that dreadful rebellion"(62) referring to the Irish 1916 Easter Rising. The Anglo-Irish want to keep the "status quo" and refuse to take sides, which inevitably makes them more isolated.

The isolation of this big house, the symbol of the Anglo-Irish political power which is fading, reflects the isolation of its dwellers. It is through the eyes of Lois Farquar, the main character who is most aware of the need for change, that we see the position of the personified house:

> 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 gather its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide, light, lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set. (92)

The atmosphere in the house (and in the novel!) is moribund and the protagonists feel as if they are haunted by their predecessors, the old colonial aristocracy. The inside space, the interior of the house, "the blistered shutters", "exhausted chairs", "smell of camphor and animals drawn from skins on the floor" (7) are read as images of decay and portray the imminent end of the colonial power and the loss of Anglo-Irish identity. According to Bowen, "the big house had no future because by living for a myth, they refused to give history direction" (Lassner 32).

Lois and Laurence, the youngest characters in the novel, are the only ones who rebel against the tradition and want to break free from the past which stifles their individuality.

However, just like others who refuse to identify with either the Irish or the British, they also refuse to be defined either by their past or their prospective future. This ambivalence and the inability to make decisions refer not only to their social role but also their national identity. As Laurence says, "but I should like something else to happen, some crude intrusion of the actual . . . I should like to be here when this house burns" (58). At the same time, he refuses to leave the big house because he lacks the funds to be independent and the Anglo-Irish estate offers him all the commodities. Contrary to what may appear, Laurence does not take a stand regarding the war: "It would be the greatest pity if we were to become a republic and all these lovely troops were taken away" (31).

It is significant that every protagonist who even remotely shows interest in the matters of the war is soon hushed. Referring to an abandoned ghostly mill, Hugo Montmorency cannot finish his sentence: "English law strangled the – " (178) as he is soon silenced by Lois and Marda. "Hugo identifies the decline as the deterioration of Irish economy under the Act of Union. The 'terrible secret', then, concerns the slow death of the Anglo-Irish from their complicity in that domination, their inability to fit in either Irish or English society as a whole: their ghostliness" (Wurtz 126). In a similar way, Lois Farquar refuses to be defined by anything or anyone. She overhears a conversation between Mrs. Naylor and Mrs. Montmorency talking about her future and the moment Mrs. Montmorency tries to define Lois by saying "Lois is so very –" (83), Lois interrupts the conversation by making a noise in her room.

Lois's inability to find her true identity is also seen in her ambiguous feelings towards marriage and national identity. In her relationship with the young British soldier Gerald "she felt some kind of wistfulness, some deprivation" and she wishes "if he would not love her so, give her air to grow in, not stifle her imagination" (71). On the other hand, she would like to have stability that marriage offers: "I like to be in a pattern. I like to be related" (141). One of

the central events in the novel is her unexpected encounter with an IRA rebel ("some resolute profile powerful as a thought") and she concludes that "it must be because of Ireland he was in such a hurry" (42). Lois wants to identify with Irish nationalists, but sadly realizes that she does not share the same patriotic feelings: "she could not conceive of her country emotionally" (42). Although for a brief moment she experiences the thrill of patriotism and sexual energy in her relationship with Gerald, Lois reverts back to the oppressive and sterile environment of her ancestral home, a "kind of cocoon" (66). Mrs. Naylor, who best represents the Anglo-Irish tradition, rejects Gerald Lesworth as a potential suitor because he is a middle-class English soldier and does not fit into the rigid codes of the Anglo-Irish. Gerald's death at the hands of the Irish rebels marks the final "premonition" of the tragic end of the Big House.

The novel ends with the burning or "execution" of Danielstown, the Big House. The symbol of the Protestant Ascendancy is thus destroyed, which signifies the end of British political power in Ireland. Terence Brown claims that "these attacks on the houses were part of a political and military strategy but to Anglo-Ireland itself this must have seemed a veritable Jacquerie and a painful demonstration of their isolated vulnerability in an Ireland which no longer appeared to accept them" (110). The novel is left open-ended as we do not know the fate of the main characters. All the guests depart before the burning of the house and we find out that Lois has gone to France. The only witnesses to the "execution" of the house are Sir Richard and Lady Naylor.

It could be said that the ambivalence towards the events happening around them, desperate clinging to their conceived national identity and, ultimately, their loss of identity result in personal and social isolation from their homeland. The Anglo-Irish share a sense of belonging with their own class only and are thus not recognized by either of the two nations. The Big House is both a place where they feel protected and inhibited at the same time. They

fail to "go out", leave the security of their ancestral past, and discover their identity in the context of the birth of a new nation. They lack the determination Lois Farquar shows when she goes out into the dark to meet the Irish nationalist: "She went forward eagerly, singing, with a hand to the thump of her heart . . . she thought of herself as forcing a pass" (41). The Anglo-Irish are ‘paralyzed’ as a class as they fail to find their rightful place in Irish society. However, with the burning of the symbol of their past, the Big House, there is a prospect of re-defining Anglo-Irish identity in the new socio-political environment. "The Irish fulfil Laurence's wish and burn the cocoon, freeing the children of the Ascendancy to realize their own capacity for life" (Lassner 46).

Conclusion

In this final paper I have analyzed Irish identity as portrayed in the three selected works: John McGahern’s *Memoir*, Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September*. I have tried to demonstrate how national and religious identities are heavily intertwined and that is what all of the three authors articulate in the texts under discussion here. In John McGahern's autobiography Irish identity is mostly defined by the influence of the Catholic Church which, as McGahern shows, permeated all aspects of people's lives. What McGahern stresses in his *Memoir* are aspects inextricably linked to Irishness throughout most of the twentieth century: the influence of Catholicism, life in rural Ireland, family life in a close-knit community, heavy distinctions between Catholics and Protestants, the Irish language and emigration. McGahern especially emphasizes the importance of place in shaping Irish identity: small local communities the Irish are attached to which create a sense of belonging.

In *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* the author focuses on an Irish woman and her role in mid-century Ireland while identity is seen as strictly Catholic and anti-Protestant. Irish Catholics in Ulster strongly cling to their Catholic heritage because their Catholic identity sets them apart from the Protestant majority. Irishness is here shown through some of the typical values promoted by the Catholic Church: family life, moral behavior and observance of religious practices. The main protagonist, however, fails to fit into the image of a 'good' Catholic woman as she is not a wife/mother and her only 'passion' (and also a sin) is alcohol.

In the last novel that I have discussed in this paper, Bowen's *The Last September*, the author explores issues dealing not with 'pure' Irish but this time Anglo-Irish identity. Just like the previous novel, this one also has a female protagonist in search of her identity and place in Irish society. In *The Last September* it is obvious that the young Irish state defines Irish identity as Catholic, anti-British and anti-Protestant and the main protagonists, the Anglo-Irish, seem unable to find their rightful place in this new Ireland.

In conclusion, the works analyzed in this paper show how some important constituents of Irishness were articulated in Irish literature and performed in Irish society throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Products of Irish Catholic heritage and Irish nationalism, they played an all-important role in defining and re-defining Irish identity.

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IRISH IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF THREE IRISH AUTHORS: SUMMARY AND KEY WORDS

This paper sets out to analyze the issue of Irish identity in *Memoir* (2005) by John McGahern, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) by Brian Moore and *The Last September* (1929) by Elizabeth Bowen. Irish identity in these works is analyzed in the context of tumultuous political changes, culture and Catholic religion in the first half of the twentieth century. The paper examines many of the themes portrayed in these works such as Catholicism, the issue of the Irish language, emigration, repressive society, the role of woman, Catholic-Protestant conflicts, religious sectarianism.

KEY WORDS: Moore, Bowen, McGahern, Irishness, Catholicism, Anglo-Irish, women

IRSKI IDENTITET U DJELIMA TROJE IRSKIH PISACA: SAŽETAK I KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Ovaj završni rad analizira irski identitet u djelima: *Memoir* (2005.) Johna McGaherna, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955.) Briana Moorea i *The Last September* (1929.) Elizabeth Bowen. Irski identitet se analizira unutar konteksta burnih političkih promjena, kulture i katoličke religije prve polovice dvadesetog stoljeća. Rad proučava mnoge teme koje su prikazane u ovim djelima kao što su: katolicizam, pitanje irskog jezika, emigracija, represivno društvo, uloga žene, sukob između katolika i protestanata, religiozno sektaštvo.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Moore, Bowen, McGahern, Irska, identitet, katoličanstvo, anglo-irski, žene