



Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin

Copyright statement

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

Liability statement

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

Access Agreement

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Trinity College Library Dublin



University of Dublin

THIS THESIS MAY BE READ ONLY
IN THE LIBRARY

Trinity College Library College Street Dublin 2 Ireland

The protesting conscience = the Role of women
Kate O'Brien. Ph.D 1989.

9

ABSTRACT (Joan Ryan)

This dissertation examines the role of women in Kate O'Brien's 'Irish' novels. It analyses the protesting conscience of the heroines, who have the personal qualities necessary to question the conditions of their lives when their needs are in conflict with their roles, and with the expectations of their milieu. Sometimes they succeed in transcending the restrictions of their lives, sometimes they don't, depending on the period in which the novel is set. Scholarly attention has been directed towards O'Brien as a chronicler of her time and class, and also towards the psychological states of women in her novels. There has not been, until now, any attempt to locate the heroines within their historical context in terms of both Church and society.

The thesis shows that O'Brien's perception of ordinary women, conveyed through the minor characters, is, that they get very little satisfaction from life, unlike the heroines, who usually, through their protests, attain an appreciation of the 'self', and a personal ethical relationship with their world. Happiness and contentment are not the rewards of such protest; more often than not the heroine is displaced from the mainstream, and settles for a life of loneliness and individuality, choosing the harmony of integrity rather than blending with her milieu.

O'Brien is an interpreter of her own world, that of middle-class Catholic Ireland. This thesis explores the role of women in this world in the chronological sequence of the novels' settings in order to demonstrate the connection between the development of the heroine and the socio-historic environment.

Each chapter deals with a separate novel; an introduction in each case focusing on the historical background of the novel and its themes, while the main body is concerned with the female characters, their development, and roles.

O'Brien has filled a gap in Anglo-Irish Literature by recording the nature of the lives of women in Irish Catholic middle-class Ireland from the 1860s to 1939.

DECLARATION

The Protesting Conscience: The Role of Women in the Irish
Novels of Kate O'Brien

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as
an exercise for a degree at this or any other University.
I also declare that it is entirely my own work. All
information from other works is acknowledged in the
Footnotes and Bibliography.

212347
2921

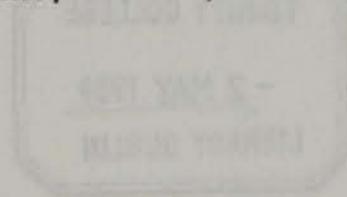
A thesis presented to the Department of Modern English of
the University of Dublin in qualification for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

Signed

Joan Ryan

by

JOAN RYAN, B.A., H.Dip. in Ed.



October 1988

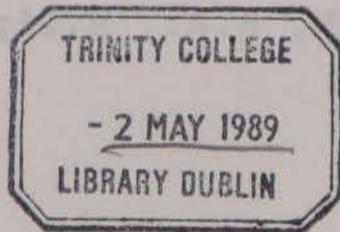
The Protestant Reformation: The Role of Women in the Irish

Novels of Kate O'Brien

THESIS

1673

A thesis presented to the Department of Modern English of
the University of Dublin in partial fulfillment for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy



DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. I also declare that it is entirely my own work. All information from other works is acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography.

Signed

Jean Ryan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help of Dr. Nicholas Grene, and especially the encouragement of Dr. J.F. Andrews in the writing of this thesis. I wish to thank Geraldine Mangan in the Department of Modern English for her constant co-operation and kindness. My grateful thanks to my friends who at all times showed interest in my work, and suffered my unsociable seclusion. Thanks to Dr. Augustine Martin U.C.D. for his advice and support. This work is dedicated to Nessa, Cliodhna and Vourneen, my daughters, who at all times supported my efforts, shared my problems, and supplied the unconditional love necessary to see this task through.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Kate O'Brien 1897 - 1974, novelist, dramatist, and journalist was born in Limerick City. She was the seventh child in a family of nine. Her mother died when she was five and she was almost immediately sent to board at Laurel Hill Convent, Limerick, where some of her sisters already were. The O'Briens were middle class, relatively wealthy, with a keen interest in bloodstock, and could afford the high fees of this, then, very exclusive school. Kate O'Brien continued her education at University College Dublin, having won the County Scholarship. She took an Arts degree in English and French in 1919.

After University, O'Brien went immediately to work as a journalist in London and subsequently spent some months teaching in St. Mary's Convent, England's Lane, Hampstead, where Mary O'Neill, who was to be her life-long friend, was a pupil at the time. After a period in Washington in 1921, as secretary to James O'Mara who was organising a loan for De Valera, she returned home in 1922. After a year in Spain, in the village of Santurco outside Bilbao as a 'Miss' to the children of the wealthy de Areilza family, she returned to London where she married Gustaaf Renier, a Dutchman she had met some few years previously. The wedding took place in the Registry Office at Hampstead on 17 May 1923. Renier was a writer. The marriage was not a success and, against her husband's

wishes it ended almost as soon as it had begun.

Kate O'Brien's writing career began in 1926 with a play, Distinguished Villa, which ran in London for three months. Her first novel Without My Cloak appeared in 1931 for which she was awarded the Hawthornden Prize and the James Tait-Black Memorial Prize in 1932. The Ante Room was published in 1934 and was dramatised in 1936, the same year in which Mary Lavelle appeared. A travel book Farewell Spain was her next publication in 1937, and a year later came her next novel Pray for the Wanderer. Her most autobiographical work The Land of Spices appeared in 1941. During World War II Kate O'Brien worked in the Ministry of Information in London. Her writing career never waned, as in 1943 both her English Diaries and Journals and her novel The Last of Summer were published. The Last of Summer was dramatised the following year, in 1944. As a result of her novel That Lady 1946, she won the Irish Women Writers Club prize and became a member of the Irish Academy of Letters in 1947. That Lady also kept her from visiting Spain, a country she dearly loved, due to the treatment of Philip II in the novel. The Spanish government only relented in 1957 on the intervention of the Irish Ambassador, Stephen Rynne. That Lady was dramatised in 1949.

In 1950, Kate O'Brien returned from England, now relatively wealthy, and bought a house at Roundstone, Co. Galway where she lived until 1961. In this period she wrote two novels, The Flower of May 1953 and As Music and Splendour 1958.

In 1961 she returned to England and lived in the little village of Boughton near Faversham and not far from Canterbury, in Kent. From here she wrote her column Long Distance for The Irish Times and did journalistic work for The Spectator, Hibernia, The New Statesman, as well as writing short stories which were published mainly in The Spectator and in Blackwoods Magazine. She visited Ireland and Spain regularly and travelled abroad as Irish delegate to the European Community of Writers.

Kate O'Brien died in hospital in Faversham on the 13th August 1974. She is buried in the graveyard of the Catholic Church in Faversham, Kent.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE END OF THE ...

CHAPTER FIVE: ...

CHAPTER SIX: ...

CHAPTER SEVEN: ...

CHAPTER EIGHT: ...

CHAPTER NINE: ...

CHAPTER TEN: ...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: <u>Without My Cloak</u>	7
CHAPTER TWO: <u>The Ante Room</u>	54
CHAPTER THREE: <u>The Land of Spices</u>	91
CHAPTER FOUR: <u>The Flower of May</u>	134
CHAPTER FIVE: <u>Mary Lavelle</u>	179
CHAPTER SIX: <u>Pray for the Wanderer</u>	211
CHAPTER SEVEN: <u>The Last of Summer</u>	229
CONCLUSION	260
FOOTNOTES	273
BIBLIOGRAPHY	284

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s there has been a welcome revival of interest in Kate O'Brien and her work. Although she achieved a considerable success with her first novel Without My Cloak, in 1931, winning the Hawthornden and the James Tait Black Memorial prizes for it, she was never very widely read or very highly regarded outside Ireland during her lifetime. Within Ireland she has always had her champions, some of whom in fact maintained that it was the unfamiliarity of her Irish settings and the emphasis on Irish Catholicism which limited her success abroad.¹

As they appeared, her books were enthusiastically and perceptively reviewed by, among others, Austin Clarke, Vivian Mercier, Hubert Butler and John Jordan.² But the banning of her two novels Mary Lavelle and The Land of Spices, damaged her reputation in Ireland, scandalising in particular her native city of Limerick. In recent years, however, the critical neglect and misunderstanding of her work has begun to be overcome. There have been re-issues of her novels by women's presses both in Ireland and the U.K. Her long-time Irish supporters have contributed fresh essays on her, and younger critics including Desmond Hogan, Tamsin Hargreaves and Eavan Boland have re-introduced her novels to a new generation of readers.³ The Irish ban on her works has been long since rescinded and Limerick has

atoned for its past hostility by hosting Kate O'Brien seminars and producing a special collection of essays to commemorate the granting to her, posthumously, the freedom of the city.⁴ In 1987 the first book-length critical study on her appeared, Lorna Reynold's Kate O'Brien: A Literary Portrait.⁵

It has been generally accepted that two of the main sources of interest in Kate O'Brien's novels are her portrayal of the Irish Catholic upper-middle class, a social grouping not previously represented in literature, and her rendering of the psychological and emotional states of her women characters.⁶ However the inter-relation between these two areas has never before been seriously or systematically studied. That is the principal objective of this thesis. It is not a consideration of the art of Kate O'Brien as a novelist, or of her development as a writer. It does not cover all the novels in which women play a central role, excluding That Lady and As Music and Splendour, neither of which are set, even partly, in Ireland. Instead, by concentrating on the Irish novels and showing the changing role of the female characters in them through the range of historical periods in which they are set, the thesis aims to reveal the nature of Kate O'Brien's extended exploration of women's situations within an evolving Irish social milieu.

The thesis will demonstrate how the heroines' dilemmas are due to their particular sensibilities and how they also reflect the restrictions of the world in

which they live. It will show how O'Brien portrays the central women characters as voices of a protesting conscience, recording their dissent at what they feel to be a denial of their needs as individuals. By a detailed consideration of the major figures and of the secondary women characters, the thesis will illustrate the parts they play in an exploration of the main themes: the need for freedom, the need for love, the importance of exercising a personal ethic for moral development, and the need for the shedding of religious dogma in the individual's attempt to attain a personal individual morality and, thus, freedom. The thesis illustrates how the smothering of the needs of women, the denial of the opportunity to love, can take pathological forms. The study will show how O'Brien's heroines through their protesting consciences transcend the impediments of their world, some more successfully than others depending on the era in which they live. The minor women characters will be given detailed consideration also, as they are of importance in the exploration of the themes of the novels.

The thesis will consider the women characters in relation to a very specific social milieu. Due to the peculiarly Irish nature of the novels considered, there is a need for elucidation of the changing social/historical background in order to appreciate the changing situations of the women in the novels. The theme of stricken conscience, for example, which is explored through Caroline in Without My Cloak and to a

greater extent through Agnes in The Ante Room, both set in the late nineteenth century, has worn thin by 1922, the year in which Mary Lavelle is set.

The design of Kate O'Brien's first book, Without My Cloak seemed to indicate a series of novels in saga form; it has a Forsyte-like concentration on the evolving generations of the representative upper middle-class family. Thereafter, O'Brien abandoned this design. But a sequence of novels covering virtually all the different periods from the 1860s to 1939 can be reconstructed, though they were not written in the order of their chronological settings, as can be seen from the following list:

	Dates of setting	Dates of publication
<u>Without My Cloak</u>	1860-1877	1931
<u>The Ante Room</u>	1880	1934
<u>The Land of Spices</u>	1907-1918	1941
<u>The Flower of May</u>	1907	1953
<u>Mary Lavelle</u>	1922	1936
<u>Pray for the Wanderer</u>	1938	1938
<u>The Last of Summer</u>	1939	1943

The thesis will show this historical conspectus, the development of the very particular pocket of Irish society that O'Brien focuses on, as she uses various aspects of that developing world in order to explore a variety of themes in her novels. In breaking with a more usual novel by novel sequence, studied in the order of

writing, the thesis aims to establish the sequential pattern of the changing role of women in O'Brien's fictional world, as it reflected the changing conditions of the real world.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, one chapter to each of the novels considered in the sequence of their chronological setting. The introduction to each chapter contains an assessment of the themes of each novel, some consideration of technique, and a discussion of the social and historical details on which O'Brien draws in order to construct a milieu for her characters. The significance of the socio-historic milieu is explored in so far as it is relevant to the purpose of the novel. There is an attempt to elucidate and 'explain' the nuances which apply to a particularly Irish experience, in order that the situations of the women characters can be more fully understood. The title of each novel and its significance is considered, and also the possible impulse that initiated the writing of each novel is discussed.

The main body of each chapter focuses on the depiction of the heroines and how they, as well as the secondary women characters contribute to an exploration of the themes of the novel. In this section also, there is an examination of the way in which the roles of women have changed from those of the novels set in the earlier chronological period to those of the later settings. There is some consideration of the procedures O'Brien follows in her portrayal of the females in their world.

The overall purpose of this thesis, summed up in the conclusion, is to illuminate O'Brien's achievement in charting the evolving role of the female characters in an Irish Catholic middle-class world. An exploration of 'the protesting conscience' as a progressive and developing theme in her Irish novels is essential to a first detailed study of women in the novels of Kate O'Brien.

novel, Kate O'Brien's first, was published in 1911. It was immediately acclaimed a book that 'by quality of atmosphere and psychological content could hardly be surpassed as a study of the Irish Catholic upper middle class during the Victorian era?.'

The novel begins in the year 1860 and it spans almost twenty years. The entire narrative is concerned with the Irish Catholic middle class, and O'Brien sets herself the task of investigating and exposing almost every facet of life within this class. She achieves this by writing a saga-like story of a family representative of this wealthy Catholic Irish pocket of society of the late nineteenth century. They are the Conrighs, a landed family, in the part of 'Mullin'.

The novel is almost certainly based on Kate O'Brien's own family. There are several points which suggest that the name 'Mullin' resembles that of the village of Mullin which lies some miles from the city, and that the novel is based on the Irish west. The novel 'The Valley of the Moon' of the novel is almost certainly the 'golden vale' of the Shannon banks, and the geographical details that O'Brien furnishes confirm this.

CHAPTER I

WITHOUT MY CLOAK

INTRODUCTION

This novel, Kate O'Brien's first, was published in 1931. It was immediately acclaimed a book that "for quality of atmosphere and psychological content could hardly be surpassed as a study of the Irish Catholic upper middle class during the Victorian era".¹

The novel begins in the year 1860 and it spans almost twenty years. The entire narrative is concerned with the Irish Catholic middle class, and O'Brien sets herself the task of investigating and exposing almost every facet of life within this class. She achieves this by writing a saga-like story of a family representative of this wealthy Catholic Irish pocket of society of the late nineteenth century. They are the Considines, a merchant family, in the port city of 'Mellick'.

'Mellick' is almost certainly based on Kate O'Brien's native Limerick. There are several pointers which suggest this; the name 'Mellick' resembles that of the village of Meelick which lies some miles from the city, and both names are based on the Irish word for honey, 'mil'. The 'Vale of Honey' of the novel is almost certainly the 'golden vale' of the Shannon basin, and the geographical detail that O'Brien furnishes confirms this

supposition. The 'Bearnagh Hills' which "shelter [the city] from the Atlantic salted wind", and the city lying at the mouth of "a great river" (p. 3) places 'Mellick', where the authentic Limerick is situated.

Kate O'Brien, in this novel, is writing about a unique section of Irish society at a certain period. Limerick had a merchant class, as had the cities of Belfast, Dublin and Cork, and, to a small extent, Galway. F.S.L. Lyons identifies this small cultural section of Irish life as "a cash economy tied to that of England by trade, traffic and people and growth of credit".² The merchants of each port would have been involved with merchandise relevant to the nature and function of its hinterland. The Considines were fodder merchants and shared the wealth of the port of Mellick with coal merchants, millers and wine importers (pp. 9-10). Terence Brown, writing of the cultural and social life of that time considers that this class, in general, was "content to live a comfortable petit bourgeois life of similarly placed people in Britain than to any vision of special destiny".³ The Considines represent what Curtis identifies as "the new urban leaders"⁴ at the time. But the Considines were different in one aspect, and that is in the fact that they were Catholic, while "Presbyterianism dominated the world of business" in the nineteenth century in Ireland.⁵

This business world was entirely patriarchal. The family dynasty depicted in the novel, was initiated when a horse-thief, Anthony Considine, in 1789, arrived on

foot leading a lame horse to the 'Vale of Honey'. As the main action of the novel opens, the horse-thief's son, 'Honest John' is the head of this now wealthy family business. Honest John's son, named Anthony after his grandfather does most of the work at the port for his ageing father. Then there is Denis, Anthony's eldest son, who is the link between the early part of the novel and the end. O'Brien, throughout the narrative attempts to explore the relationship between Anthony and Denis; she angles it so as to expose the manipulation of Denis by Anthony through his use of love and indulgence. She depicts an unusual and deeply emotional father-son bond, underlining what Eddy Considine, Anthony's brother, regards as the "terrible family affection", the "inability to do without each other" that he sees as the nurturing and stifling quality of Considine family relationships (p. 244). While Honest John can be regarded as head of the patriarchy, Anthony is head of his family and boss at the place of business. He is an aggressive business man who demands his own way; his handling of the strike notice served by the Mellick Docker's Union (p. 270) illustrates his personal arrogance as well as his harsh attitude to his workers. His own and his father's lack of interest in any aspect of life except in what concerns themselves (p. 43) is all indicative of a single-mindedness which can be identified as egocentricity.⁶ Denis is part of Anthony's plan for 'Considines', and much as he loves him, he refuses to let him go. The concept of son following son, the idea of

family, is uppermost in the patriarchal structure, and love must accommodate itself to it.

The title of the novel is rather ambiguous in relation to the story. It is taken from a Shakespearean sonnet:

"Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds oertake me in my way".... etc.

The suggestion is that the speaker has come through an experience without being fully prepared, or forewarned, for there is a bitter recognition that the effects can never be erased, no matter what love, kindness or sorrow issues from the "thou" of the poem. The lines of the sonnet may appear most obviously to refer to Denis, the male central character, who at first rejects the way of life planned for him and then succumbs to the beauty of Anna and an implied acceptable marriage, as suddenly as the poet is appeased in the closing couplet of the poem. But the title can also be taken to refer to the situation of the females, for in the novel, Kate O'Brien highlights quite forcibly the problems and the dilemmas of the women in this patriarchal world of business, and within the patriarchal personality of the Church to which they belong. She focuses on the private, emotional, and domestic world in which the Considine women live. She acknowledges the fact that all the females are enjoying the attendant luxuries of their wealth such as fine houses, servants, silks, jewels, expensive education for their children. O'Brien shows how, within this

environment where nobody wants for anything materially, each woman suffers according to the response of her own nature to strictures that bind her to a pattern of life that is at odds with her own 'protesting conscience'. Each woman finds herself 'without her cloak', illfitted for the obstacles imposed by society, Church and family.

The women of the novel are mostly beautiful, lady-like and gentle, non assertive. They endeavour to be true to their own individual impulses and to forge a life for themselves within the framework of a male-dominated culture. Their situations culminate in a breaking of moulds, the splintering of values and subsequently, in domestic confusion.

In this novel, Kate O'Brien introduces a theme that runs through her work for the remainder of her life; that of the

individual protesting conscience moving in a world whose conduct is primarily dictated by Catholic theory and practice, but refusing, ultimately, to work out its problems other than in terms of its own personal ethic.⁷

The world of Without My Cloak, in the context of society, religion, and local references, is closely identifiable with the real world of Limerick in the same era. Obliquely and directly O'Brien has overlapped her fictional world and a real world. In this novel mention of the new gas lighting (p. 19) ties up with this innovation in Limerick at much the same time. The papers carry notices as to its spread into neighbouring towns, and plumbers advertise their ability to install it.⁸ The

trend of the wealthy to move out towards the suburbs, even as far as Castleconnell is documented in O'Brien's reference to "the tall brown houses" which are springing up at the "southern end of the town" (p. 10). Referring to Anthony's education and to Denis's, Kate O'Brien draws on her knowledge of the religious orders which existed in Limerick in the late nineteenth century. The Christian Brothers and the Jesuits served the different classes in society, and in pointing to the fact that Anthony attended the former, while he sent his son to the Jesuits, underscores the change in his fortunes and indeed, his attitude to that change in fortune. It is clear that O'Brien, while she creates a fictional world for her plot, also sets out to record various aspects of her native city. This feature of her fiction in general has earned her the assessment of being "one of our most intelligent and honest interpreters of the contemporary scene".⁹ John Jordan justifies the importance of this area of her achievement, stating that "every social grouping needs its laureate".¹⁰

Kate O'Brien was not the first or only woman novelist to explore women's role in a setting which is predominantly that of provincial Ireland - there were many of them writing at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries such as Somerville and Ross, Jane Barlow, Katherine Tynan, Anne Keary, Emily Lawless, Sara Grand and Rosa Mulholland.¹¹ These novelists for the most part accept marriage as the end to be achieved, the happy ending to any woman's

romance, the worthwhile and desired state to be in. Kate O'Brien challenges this conventional novelistic assumption. She sees marriage as hostile to women to varying degrees; it is at times a sentence to a life of compromise and servility, it must be avoided or abandoned if one is to be free.

The females and their consciousness in O'Brien's novels are moulded to a large extent by the social milieu, and to a greater extent by the ideology of the Catholic Church as it expresses itself in their lives. What interests the writer is how the women of her fiction react to their world and how they transcend or escape what they consider to be its strictures. In general she explores the experience of being a woman "imprisoned in a code of response, a minuet of programmed answers and expectations".¹² She portrays the female, married or not, as someone who accepts or rejects the moral attitudes and values inherent in her world. Her acceptance and rejection both have definite consequences such as, in Molly's case, her death, and in Caroline's a life a bitter compromise.

In the patriarchal milieu of the Considine family the females have a very definite role, they are expected to support the status quo. In order to explore this role O'Brien has woven into the narrative various types of women through the primary plot line and through the sub plots, but she focuses principally on two females, Caroline and Molly. Molly and Caroline are very different personalities; Molly remains true to her role,

accepting it passively because she loves her husband, while Caroline, who does not love her husband and who rejects the role of wife, flees from the restriction of family and from the intolerable claustrophobia of her life in Mellick society.

The portrayal of the dilemmas experienced by those two women is vivid and commanding. The device of using an omniscient narrator in the third person who seldom allows any distance between the sensibilities of these female characters and the position of the narrative voice, creates a feeling of concentrated communication and intimacy between the narrator, characters, and reader.

Molly

Molly is introduced to the reader as Anthony's wife for whom "he whistled" when he arrived home after his day's work (p. 21). There is the immediate association with the action of the master who summons his favourite dog. Molly has been married to Anthony for five years when the novel opens, and she is expecting their fourth child. Molly is beautiful as are all of Kate O'Brien's heroines. Some have an unusual fatal kind of beauty, some have a dazzling breathtaking beauty, but Molly's appearance is lovely in a soft misty way. O'Brien takes great care in creating a certain aura, a certain allure, where this character is concerned. She builds up a picture of an extremely feminine pretty creature, who wears "night-blue silk", with "her little bodice, beribboned up and down with velvet and inset with lace", her hair is gathered in a fashionable chignon which "lay softly" at her neck. Her eyes are blue, but they are "misty", and the curve of her mouth "had a dream's outline". The narrative voice is tender and approving, and describes Molly as "all woman, all fragility, of the type that flowers enhance", adding that "evening and quietude adorned her like a crown" (p. 27). Her nature mirrors her appearance; she rejects the harsh glow of the modern gas lamp in her home, and prefers "wood fire and candlesticks; open piano, open windows, breezes from the river, flowers and flowers reflected" (p. 49). This woman is close to her natural environment, almost shading

into it at times, when she gathers "dewy chestnut leaves to drench her face and hands", and she "often greeted Anthony with forget-me-nots twisted in her hair" (p. 113). The image which O'Brien constructs of Molly is fundamental to the sense of outrage one feels at her death.

Anthony's attitude to his wife is traditional and patriarchal. He

"visualised Molly ... tenderly and kindly, as his dear little wife who loved him and whose life and thoughts were bound up irrevocably and uncomplicatedly with his".

He represents the wealthy Catholic merchant, the successful business man of basic education and little sensibility. The narrator gives the assurance that "of the spirit's hinterlands he had never heard". His domestic situation is simple and clear to Anthony, "he led and his wife followed" (p. 31).

The marriage of Anthony and Molly adheres faithfully to the teachings of his Church. A religious climate which inculcates a puritanical abhorrence of sexuality and sensuality outside of marriage gives Anthony licence within his marriage to father as many children as he wishes, while Molly is seen as a victim of this religious system which "both idealised and repressed women".¹³

Anthony does not question; the fact that O'Brien explores the nature of Anthony's love for Molly indicates that she is anxious not to condemn him, but to explain him to her readers. Fennell, referring to Catholics of

the late nineteenth century, writes that, "fearing the worst from inquiry into human life", the ideology which they were absorbing, "inhibited its victims from using their mental faculties to wonder about, investigate, observe and reflect upon themselves, others, human life and language, man".¹⁴ Anthony's blindness to his and Molly's situation is presented by the emotive voice of O'Brien herself, unfair perhaps, as she writes from the position of the 1930s, "it had never occurred to him that [Molly] should not [follow], or that there was anything else for her to do; he had not loved her quite enough for that" (p. 31). He did not love his wife as he did his son Denis for whom he built 'River Hill' with all the notions of posterity and family dynasty. The narrator, with ironic weight behind the juxtaposition, states that here in River Hill, in the fashionable suburbs, Denis would have fresh air (p. 32) whereas Molly, in her ugly mansion feels "buried alive" (p. 25).

Molly fulfills all the expectations of her role as wife and mother. She bears Anthony eight children. Anthony is aware that childbirth frightens Molly, that it has "wilted and crushed her", he acknowledges that "it was a problem they could never thrash out" (p. 77). Molly is a victim of both her deep love and devotion for her husband, the passionate sexual relationship they share, and of the system in which they live. Anthony recognises that "there was no help within the social and religious code they both upheld", so Molly has "only thirteen months of freedom from pregnancy" (p. 76) in her

entire married life (and this was due to Anthony's self-control). O'Brien directs her criticism to a certain extent towards Anthony but it is mostly a backward look from the year in which she was writing to a time when the inadequacy and cruelty of the Church sanctioned abstention from sexual intercourse as the only method of family planning. She expresses her impatience with its ruling, seeing it as detrimental to women; she charts the physical deterioration of lovely Molly whose "youth had been given over to weariness and pain of pregnancy" (pp. 115-6), who "was having to bear too many children" (p. 113). The narrative voice is charged with emotion, engaging the reader in sorrow and indignation at Molly's eventual death in childbirth. O'Brien allows a long and eloquent passage to express the painful and wasteful exit of Molly and her ninth baby from this life. There is some parallel between Molly's death and that of O'Brien's own mother. They were both beautiful, approximately the same age, and had the same number of pregnancies, both had adhered faithfully to their roles in life and to the codes of society and religion.¹⁵ In O'Brien's eyes these very codes had killed Molly; she does not survive them, she just "slipped away suddenly, silently, leaving the brief and futile panic round the bed almost before it had arisen" (p. 117). At her grave Anthony cries out "oh what's the meaning of it Molly?", and the narrator answers with a certain amount of sympathy;

"Molly could have told him what the meaning of it was, as in life she had often longed to find words to tell him, when he was distressed for her childbearing. She had longed to tell him that she, who was a timid woman, afraid of mice and the dentist, unable to endure toothache calmly or to face his gusts of temper with any spirit, was willing to bear as many children as he gave her, not because she wanted them but because the risk of having them was the price she must pay for his passionate love" (p. 122).

The passage reflects the role that Molly played within the religious and social context of her world, and, in the context of the narrative represents O'Brien's perception of the fate of the good and faithful woman who remains, to outer appearances, a good wife and mother, and who fulfills all expectations within her home and in society. O'Brien's sympathy is for Molly whom she sees as a victim, a lovely unprotesting victim who "made her escape" (p. 117) at last in death. Molly has paid the price of her commitment to a system which she was not entirely comfortable with, and one with which O'Brien has no patience. The price one pays for love is always one which takes its toll on all O'Brien women, on both heroines and others. At times it seems justified to wonder if O'Brien is saying "is love worth the pain"?. Yet, looking at her entire fictional output it is clear that she values strength of will, effort, and integrity, the untapping of human potential, above mere happiness.

Caroline

Woven into the account of Anthony and his son Denis, is the story of Caroline, Anthony's sister. It is with Caroline that Kate O'Brien begins her exploration of the female, the heroine, that was to be of such importance throughout her work, and the exclusive concern of most of it. In her depiction of Caroline she explores a theme that has become synonymous with most of her novels, the need for love, and the necessity of the freedom to love, and the condition of love itself as a complex and often elusive emotion. O'Brien depicts love as good; without it, people are seen to be all the poorer and even inferior. Love within marriage rarely exists in Kate O'Brien's fiction, and illicit love is fated to fail due to the fact that all expressions of love are controlled by the various elements which dictate the world of the heroine; these are family, Church, and the State, all pillars of a patriarchal society.

In order to chart the domestic and emotional life of Caroline, O'Brien focuses on the nature of her personality and sensibility and on the influence of her religion on her development as a character. She uses the omniscient narrative voice at all times both as narrator and also as a commentator on the socio/historic significance behind the episodes.

In her treatment of Caroline what is most noticeable initially is the fact that O'Brien makes no reference to Caroline's home, to her social ambitions, or to the

importance of her family name; these preoccupations have been assigned to the other female characters. Caroline is different. From the moment she enters the world of the novel she is different, requesting red wine when all the other ladies are drinking "sweet sauternes" (p. 38).

Caroline is the most beautiful woman in the novel. Her beauty is exotic and dramatic. She is the prototype for all O'Brien's beautiful heroines, who, because of their beauty find the world a different place to that of their plainer counterparts. Caroline's appearance is described in detail, tall, slim, clad in silk, jewels on her fingers and with eyes like Molly's, blue, but unlike Molly's, "a brilliant lightning blue". Her dark hair is "the fairy-tale raven's wing", and "fairy-tale blood-red came and went in her cheeks" (p. 41). Her father loves her "silky jewelled beauty" (p. 12). Caroline is "silky and chic" (p. 176).

Caroline's respectability and place in society are underlined by the knowledge that her marriage was "staggeringly correct" (p. 41). She is married to a professional man, Jim Lanigan, solicitor, and is the mother of the "six most beautiful children in Mellick" (p. 57). All the ingredients are there for contentment, but from the very beginning of the novel there is the implication that all is not well with Caroline.

Although her father, Honest John, reflects that after ten years of marriage to "that thin-lipped fellow" (p. 41), her beauty hasn't diminished in the slightest, the narrator insists that Honest John is wrong, he is

"deceived in thinking that the years had not touched her", for Caroline's beauty "that had glowed with such softness in her once, was burning frostily now" (p. 41). Eddy, who is at times used as the authorial voice, notices that "bitterness was sometimes almost too apparent in his sister Caroline" (p. 53).

The nature of her unhappiness is disclosed to Eddy and to the reader simultaneously. The setting is down by the river, where growth is wild and untrammelled. Eddy finds his beautiful sister standing on a mossy stone close to the water's edge. There is a Lady of Shallot suggestion here, as she hints to Eddy that only for the presence of her father in her life she would drown herself, for, she confesses to her brother, she has only experienced a reflection of life rather than the palpitating vital existence that she needs; her marriage is unhappy, in fact "impossible" (P. 58), it is "crazy without love" (p. 58). For ten years now her life has pivoted on "James and his food, and the children and the house". This is her perception of her role and she is miserable in it. It is established that Caroline is not a woman who cannot recognise love, who doesn't know what it is and therefore, fancifully, feels that she is missing some novelistic grand passion. Caroline has experienced love and it is because of this experience she knows the bleakness of life without it now. Ten years ago she was in love with a young lieutenant, who, after promises of devotion and vows of love left her, because "what he lacked and had to get from a wife was breeding

and I haven't that" she tells Eddy. She confides that that young lieutenant was "my first, last love" (p. 55). Eddy speaks for the reader and for society in general when he assures his sister that "almost everyone is putting up with marriage somehow, without what you call love", causing Caroline to insist that she is not "almost everyone", she is different. She cries, aghast, "what are they made of" (p. 58).

Caroline has a dilemma, for marriage is integral to the structure of the milieu to which she belongs. She has struggled to accept her role, but her restless unhappiness, her reluctance to 'put up' with a marriage that her sensibility rejects, erodes the strength of that struggle which is seen to weaken in definite stages. After years of passive acceptance and endurance, two years ago Caroline,

without faintest warning, had cried out with a terrible cry as she lay in his [Jim's] arms, telling him with all the insane cruelty of despair that she couldn't bear it, that he mustn't touch her, that he must never touch her again.

Jim heard the "heartbreaking revulsion in her voice" (p. 86) and, appalled, never touched her again, and tried not to, even by accident. The narrator shifts all blame from Caroline or Jim, for he "belonged chronologically and in spirit to a time when the sexual problems of marriage had to be left dumbly to darkness and the night" (p. 87). This aside is ironic in so far as at the time of writing this novel, nothing had changed in the Irish context and

Kate O'Brien was well aware of this; her own marriage had ended after less than a year; by all accounts it was also an incompatible arrangement. The milieu in which O'Brien lived allowed her to leave her husband and declare the marriage a failure; Caroline on the other hand is caught. After her father's party and after the gaiety of the family gathering, and influenced perhaps by the whole idea of family, Caroline, beginning a "new era" (p. 88) resumes sexual relations with Jim; she naively hopes that things will have changed; but no, "she caught back a shudder with skill she had taken long to learn but which two years disuse had not overthrown" (p. 88). Caroline prays every night for a miracle to make her love her husband (p. 192).¹⁶ Her prayers take place at her bedside, at the little altar to Our Lady of Victories, lit by a blue light. This blue light has witnessed her life, for her perception of her life is one of endless nights, lit by this little lamp;

it had lighted her through secret places, through her husband's hours of passion, through child birth's unremembered woe, and once through the shadow of death; through nights of listening for a child's cough, through nights of desperate thought, through nights of toothache, through sleepy interludes with sucking babies, through foolish make-believes and brave plans for new eras, through blessed sleep, through all the variegated monotony of the nights of ten married years (pp. 87-88).

The emphasis on darkness and night is used symbolically; her life has been bleak, dreary and lightless, her world is a sombre joyless one. Eddy reinforces the symbolism when he reflects that Caroline

who had asked so little of life, only the wedded love that others had, only to be loved in the sun as well as in the dark ... to be loved naturally ... not snatched in the night and bowed to respectably by day (p. 173).

Any thoughts of escape that Caroline may have had are quenched by her father's last words to her. She took his parting banter of "be a good girl" as "a sermon ... aimed directly and singly at her" (p. 97). So for the next ten years she remains "good", while each Spring her restlessness and misery are compounded by the perennial renewal of life and beauty in nature. Her personality perversely rejects all the new signs of loveliness and renewal. Denis finds his beautiful aunt one Spring at the river's edge, her face transformed by tears; he sees her firstly as "a figure of woe", but her transformation is such that, for the boy, she is no longer Aunt Caroline but "an abstraction called Despair". The narrator is not at all perplexed; the narrative voice declares that Caroline is weeping for

love and frivolity and foolish talk and lover's friendliness and the pleasures and satisfactions of passions for which an ironic God had surely built her (p. 143).

It was the Spring in which Denis saw his Aunt Caroline weeping that she packed her bags and fled to London, to Eddy. She left home, making the rather confused distinctions that "Jim and the children she would always want", but "Jim ... she could bear no longer" (p. 172). It was her role as wife that was repulsive to her, while as mother, and part of the family

unit she was content. The distinction contradicts her previous protestation to Eddy to a certain extent, and perhaps the lack of clear definition is what makes her attempt at flight so abortive. Initially, Caroline "only knew that she must get a breath of air before she died" (p. 148).

Caroline's action is revolutionary in the society in which she lives; the narrator assures the reader that "it wasn't easy for a lady to escape from Mellick to London in 1870" (p. 146). Her flight is seen as a subversion of social behaviour. The general reaction to her exploit points to the attitudes of the time and indicates clearly the intransigence and intolerance of a family whose respectability has been hard won and energetically guarded. The consensus was that Caroline was "disgracing her children for ever, disgracing them all, the sons and daughters of Honest John". There was a "sea of panic and astonishment" in the Considine camp, explained by an ironic narrative voice asserting that "it was beyond the span of Considine thought that a wife should leave a husband" (p. 158).

Mellick's reaction is conveyed through Caroline's own perception; she is certain that the entire affair will be "torture" for Jim, because what she had done "was an unheard-of thing, a ruinous, preposterous, inconceivable thing, a sin, a disgrace, a family shame, a scandal, a ringing mockery" (p. 148). The identifying labels of her very existence are removed by her action in the eyes of society; for she was more than a Considine,

she was "Irish, Catholic, rich, respectable" (p. 158). For Caroline, these identification marks are in fact the Joycean nets; the 'non serviam' instincts of her nature are the spurs that cause her to seek the anonymity she needs. Caroline is the first heroine in O'Brien's work that possesses 'the individual protesting conscience', seeking to express a personal ethic in the face of entrenched conservatism. She has to break moulds and reject traditional and sacred values. The very ethos of her life is Catholic, her conditioning has been Catholic. Catholicism at the time had an intense and evangelical character. It was a religion striving for recognition, having survived the Penal Laws. Caroline had been raised in a household where to be Catholic was important; her father "was proud to be Catholic in days when that was not easy" (p. 15). Her own doctrinal practices are extravagant, her devotion and faith verge on superstition and credulousness, as is seen in her years of praying for the 'miracle to make her love her husband'. There is no doubt in her unquestioning commitment to her faith. The precepts of her religion ensnare her in the freedom of London, and turn her new-found love into hideous guilt and self-reproach.

In London Caroline's dilemma is compounded by the fact that she and Richard, Eddy's friend, fall quickly and completely in love. Her own lovless marriage is highlighted by this new love, and her capacity to love and be loved is affirmed. Richard has fallen in love with Caroline's unposturing and guileless beauty, and she

with him, for he has all Eddy's attributes without being her brother. However, he is non-Catholic and a stranger to sin and guilt, so he sees no gamble in giving his heart to this beautiful woman. He is unaware; innocent of the years of conditioning that underlie Caroline's vulnerability just then. His only experience of Irish Catholicism would have been the rather untypical avant-garde Eddy.

O'Brien probes the condition of being Irish, Catholic and a woman. Caroline's reaction in terms of conscience, protesting but conditioned, is what interests the author at this stage of the novel. Caroline's struggle is charted with the social and religious requirements of her milieu kept well in sight. In Mellick, where she presumably has spent all of her forty-two years, Catholic teaching was punctuated by an all absorbing interest in the sin of impurity. Fr. Tom Considine represents the Church in the novel, and is noted for his "purity mission" (p. 36). Prudery was laudable, and anything approaching 'free' behaviour was considered audacious.¹⁷ Caroline tries to share with Richard what it means to be Catholic. He lets her wander on, while all the time her explanation gathers momentum as her language becomes more and more involved with words like "sacrament", "God's will", "confession", "grace" (pp. 191-192); evoking all the restrictions and laws of her Church. Richard does not stop her, and her conversation leads on inevitably to the next restriction, that of family, her four sons and two little daughters

who resemble "two brown leaves in the wind". Before he knows it she is ensnared, her mood has changed, she is back in the land of her religion and her family, she is no longer 'in love' with Richard; on the contrary, she is "committing mortal sin" (p. 192). The narrator warned that "the wave must break, either in passion or in anguish" (p. 191), now Caroline's voice is raised in anguish as she realises what has happened. Richard, out of kindness and ignorance had allowed her to reminisce, whereas, the narrative voice regretfully states, "he ought to have known" (p. 193). It could have gone either way, the narrator explains how;

Caroline ... by her sex and training and tradition ... was bound to be either the woman that he did not know, creature of her Church and of her filial and maternal and herd instincts, a piece of her own setting indeed - or else a woman transfigured out of all that setting by passionate love (pp. 193-4).

Caroline appreciates how she is trapped, she recognises how powerless she is in the face of a force greater than her own individual desires; she exclaims "I'm crushed by them, Richard. I'm owned by them. I think my heart is dead". Caroline's plight, the implication of seeing herself annihilated by her entire milieu sets up a feminist criticism on the established institutions of society, marriage, Church; this is underscored by the plight of universal Catholic woman, expressed in Caroline's anguished cry "I took him for better, for worse ! oh isn't that terrible? - for better for worse ! Isn't it terrible how there's no getting away from that?"

(p. 195). Her bondage means that "the ghosts had chained her back in her own place where wives are faithful" (p. 196). The narrative voice is ironic in its claim that Caroline "has been saved for the Considines", and, true to form, proceeds to shift any blame away from Caroline's own nature, insisting that the blame lies in "the sentimental weakness of her lover" (p. 197). Men never come out very triumphantly from an O'Brien plot.

Caroline's return home resolves nothing. Her bedroom has been dusted, her little altar is still there and as her eyes rest on the double bed she cries silently for Richard. Her life now she refers to as "this despair, this cage" (p. 202). Denis's image of his Aunt as a "lovely bird" (p. 142) is associated now with her "cage", her home, her life. Her life resumes the Lady of Shallot-like unreality; she experiences it as if it were "behind glass, behind folds and folds of memory" (p. 201). There is a picture of her after her return, at dinner in River Hill, surrounded by the entire extended family, as if they were closing ranks around her, engulfing her in a suffocating solidarity, and what now seems sinister concern. When she escapes and takes her usual path by the river, it is Tom, the priest, who accompanies her this time, not her ally, Eddy.

Caroline fades into the background of the story, only to re-appear years later in the scene in which Denis announces his love, and sexual relationship with Christina. "Young fool ... theatrical and scandalous young fool" (p. 372) Caroline cries at her favourite

nephew, blind with pain from an unhealed wound. The narrator understands her pique and is aware of the metamorphosis that the years have wrought on her, the narrative voice explains that

love, that Caroline had so long forgone, then found and flung aside and wept for, had now become a thing she hated to consider. It was only with mock kindness that she looked on the legitimate pairs of young lovers who were forever cropping up in these days in the young generation of the family (p. 372).

Denis had decried a love that she recognised as full-blooded, passionate, and physical, and "for that kind of love ... she had no endurance at all"; it set off associations, it rekindled memories, and caused "disturbance ... among nerves and desires that she wished to regard as dead" (p. 372). The suppression of desire, the unfulfillment of love, the aridity of a loveless marriage, all worked insidiously on a passionate and vivacious nature, changing it to one of malice and animosity. Without love the O'Brien heroine deteriorates, without the freedom to love there is a blighting of the personality. Caroline's old struggle goes on; she is doomed to life within the status quo, and her struggle for freedom is over; she is trapped by the obvious elements of her life, but now, also, she is trapped in her own destructive bitterness.

Minor characters

What helps to make Without My Cloak a novel of panoramic dimensions is not only the large time span over which the narrative spreads, but also the attention O'Brien directs at the concerns of the minor characters. Agnes, Sophia, Teresa and Rosie all contribute to the female world of middle-class merchant Mellick, and more especially give an extended experience of the Considines. While they live on the periphery of the Considine world, they act as commentators and add to the texture of the novel in so far as the condition of being a woman, in whatever role, seems to be fundamental to the nuances of the plot.

Sophia and Teresa are married, they fit in, are acceptable, and maintain the status quo with rigorous attention to detail. Together, they speak as a Greek chorus when the Considine cult is threatened, such as on the occasion of Caroline's flight to London. They are proud of the Considine name, one has it by birth and the other by marriage. They defend it against all threats.

Agnes and Rosie figure as little as Teresa and Sophia in the actual plot line, but they are important as representatives of the maiden aunt and the raucous, embarrassing cousin, probable tangents to any family circle.

In the portrayal of these four women O'Brien employs an ironic narrative voice which varies from amusement to

satire, very often revealing the author's impatience with a social ambience that creates and supports such types. Together, these characters illustrate certain elements of their class, and introduce or underline themes which are at the basis of the story; they contribute to a sense of shared experience in the lives of the female in this specific milieu.

In the patriarchal world of the novel, O'Brien presents Agnes as an aberration. She is an embarrassment by virtue of the fact that she is a spinster. She does not fit in, she is nothing. She has remained unclaimed by any man, and is useful only to her father as "the companion of his fireside" (p. 16). From the outset, Agnes's function has to be a domestic one, as housekeeper at her father's house, and even in that role she is unacceptable. She is portrayed as a drudge, a colourless, plain woman, in fact everything a spinster could be in a family and a milieu in which high achievers are the only acceptable species. Anthony, her brother, has had to force himself to be philosophic in dealing with this slight to his family, realising that "there was nothing for it but to accept her as an old maid". The embarrassment was verging on disgrace, for

in spite of the open secret that John Considine's daughters must have at least eight thousand pounds apiece, no one had come courting Agnes - no one, that is, whom a Considine would desire to be permitted to marry.

The situation indeed hurt the proud Anthony most, it galled him "that any bearer of that name should appear to the world as flouted and unimportant", and the narrator adds that "Anthony could not help admitting that old maids were unimportant" (p. 11).

Agnes's situation in society is seen to be in direct contrast with that of Eddy Considine, her brother. He is also unmarried, but does not fall victim to the social stigma directed at his sister. There is some comment from Teresa and Sophia who feel that "he couldn't be up to much good all by himself over there in London", but Anthony and Caroline regard his private life as a source of mischievous and amused curiosity, and they "loved and trusted" him (p. 43). The difference in perception between the situations of Eddy and Agnes is something that O'Brien focuses on here. The difference in standards for women's and men's behaviour is also pointed to earlier in the novel when Molly's absolute commitment to her marriage is contrasted with Anthony's double standards in his philandering involvement with a woman on his journeys abroad (p. 113). At this point it is useful to mention that O'Brien often expresses the feminist concerns of her own day in the themes of her novels, even in this one, set in the nineteenth century.

In the depiction of Agnes, the focus is on the fact of her spinsterhood. The reality of her life seems as hopeless and without resolve as is Caroline's; they both seem to be trapped in a society where they waste away and deteriorate as people. Marriage is certainly not the

resolution, in O'Brien's vision. The forces of family, Church, and society, attempt to consolidate their efforts in bringing the individual to heel, and are seen by their solidarity to cause divisions and to create rejects. Agnes is rejected, there is not the same camaraderie between her and her family as between Caroline, Anthony, Eddy and even Teresa. The theme of self sacrifice runs parallel with Agnes's depiction as a spinster; she shares the lot of women in general, however, in so far as she is seen as a victim in the acquisitive merchant world. In Anthony's attitude to her, and also in the general disapproval of the women towards her, it is obvious that her fate is not alone due to the attitude of men but also to that of the stereotype female of such a milieu. The general attitude to spinsterhood is one of impatience, intolerance, and embarrassment.

Agnes seems unaware of her role as dogsbody; there is no consideration in the novel of her personal needs, nor of her emotional life. This is because of her minor role in the novel but also it is a technical device to underline the fact that Agnes's needs are of no importance to anyone. This lack of importance is emphasised in the language employed to describe Agnes; she is seen as a plain woman with an "unremarkable neck" (p. 71) and eyes that "were cushioned in tender swollen flesh" (p. 92) as she wept at her father's funeral. Without Honest John she is now "flattened, broken, emptied Agnes", she is redundant. Anthony gives her a home, not out of brotherly affection, but out of a kind

of family pride; he refused "to see one of his own blood left so bleakly unwanted" (p. 77).

At the end of the novel Agnes is seen as a cantankerous fussy woman who "had nothing to do except say her beads, give notice to servants, and order the carriage". O'Brien now focuses on the emptiness of this woman's life, its lack of fulfilment. She is seen to be worthless in this family, and social milieu, and this general attitude has extended even as far as the Church. This is expressed in a description of her confessor's growing impatience with the over zealous, over scrupulous Agnes; he "sometimes asked her lately to cut it short for God's sake and stop wasting his time about nothing". It is well illustrated in the novel that "life had given her nothing but money, a poor gift" (p. 132).

The Considine family's experience of the embarrassment and discomfiture caused by Agnes's single status generates panic when they realise that Caroline's flight to London may cause a public scandal; their immediate concern is with the fact that Millicent's market value would be endangered, and they fervently agreed that "nobody wanted another old maid" (p. 158). Mrs Barton of George Moore's novel A Drama in Muslin voices the general attitude of the era, that "marriage gives a girl liberty, gives her admiration, gives her success, a woman's whole position depends upon it".¹⁸ In Moore's novel it is the intelligent Alice who appreciates how the social strictures of the age render the terms 'liberty' and 'success' meaningless, while in O'Brien's

novel the women discover this through the painful process of growth, and time.

Agnes is passive, there is no 'protesting conscience', and even in her passivity she is seen to deteriorate into an unloving and unloved woman, as society had ordained.

Sophia and Teresa work as a team in the interest of family pride and social position. They are intensely sensitive to the values that serve to prop up the status quo of the Considines. Sophia is pure caricature; she is the mouthpiece of the foppery and posturing associated with a certain perception of this class and its attendant life-style. Teresa cares most for the protection of the Considine name, and is considered "the strongest pillar ... of the family pride" (p. 40). Her role in the novel is one of commentator and assessor of the events that happen concerning the family circle. Kate O'Brien never takes Sophia seriously, the narrative voice pokes fun at her in a benign way, and when there is ridicule, it is without malice. She is the wife of Dr. Joe Considine and the marriage seems satisfactory and even loving. Neither her's nor Teresa's marriages are held up to scrutiny. Both Teresa and Sophia share a deep affection for their maiden names and what those names mean, or have meant, in society. Teresa considers herself a Considine, although married for many years to timid, proverb-quoter Danny Mulqueen. Sophia seems uneasy with the nouveau riche element in the Considines, and refuses to abandon the past glorious associations of her maiden name, Quillihey,

of Mountjoy Square, Dublin. She reminisces on the "social delights" of her youth. The narrative voice is amused in its response to Sophia's account of "the struggle it had been for a woman of her nature" to abandon these 'social delights' in order to marry Joe Considine. The narrator states that Anthony's impressions of these 'social delights' were that the 'struggle' had been not to abandon them, but to "keep them up". Anthony's belief was that "Joe's application for the hand of the hook-nosed and dowerless Sophia had resembled nothing so much as the relief of an exhausting siege". Her ridiculous pretensions are again a source of amusement as she enthuses to Eddy - who, because of his domicile in London, she assumes is a kindred spirit, about "the card parties, the *fêtes champêtres*, the balls!" (p. 42). Sophia's behaviour is motivated to a great extent by one-upmanship. This is expressed especially in her insistence that "if the Lanigans could go to Downside her boys could go to Beaumont" (p. 110) - a much better class school. Compounding the caricature-like portrayal, O'Brien describes how, because Sophia's son Victor was a student at Beaumont, "it became apparent that Carrington Street was no longer spacious enough to hold the mother of so distinguished a son". There was nothing for it, but "Beaumont Oblige and Dr. Joe had to move his family into the larger seclusion of Finlay Square" (p. 111).

Sophia's contribution to the family structure is seen in terms of the care she takes in ensuring that she

and her family have an unblemished place in society. There is a different perception of Teresa; her "contribution" has been to produce eight children (p. 40) for the Considine line. She remains a woman whose instincts are more maternal and family orientated in a non frivolous and unpretentious manner. She is serious and stolid, and her reliability is underlined in all instances. She too, in her youth had suffered "the lonely dread that no man would seek her out" (p. 40) and so she accepted Danny's proposal, to the amazement of her family. She has never known romance, "was bewildered" by Denis's liaison with Christina; indeed, it is pointed out that "the only great love that Teresa had known was maternal" (p. 372). This maternal love is channelled towards her syphilitic son Reggie whom she loves with devotion.

Like Sophia and Agnes, Teresa does not protest. She blends with society and contributes to the values inherent in it. As a woman, she knows very little outside of what concerns her domestic role in life. She is ignorant of what "Palmerston's desertion of Reform" means, and "being a woman", the narrator explains ironically, "she was spared the necessity of knowing for certain which party was which". Politics was for men, and had no place in Teresa's domestic world; this is expressed in symbolic terms in the statement that she "was inclined to regard politics as she regarded firearms - things that shouldn't be left about the house" (pp. 43-4).

Towards the end of the novel the focus is on the mother-son relationship, on the fierce and unwavering love that Teresa feels for Reggie. She guards his terrible secret, and loves him without censure. This relationship, and Teresa's increasing ill-health anticipates the plot of The Ante Room.

The characters of both Teresa and Sophia extend the familial texture of the novel, contributing also to the concerns of the sub-plots. The character of Rosie, however, does not. Rosie serves to state a theme, and so, as her character does not contribute to the storyline, very often her cues into the world of the novel are not convincing and seem somewhat contrived.

Like Sophia, Rosie's name is very much part of her character. She is depicted as a woman in full bloom, sensual, colourful, and decorative. She is good humoured and brash, a merry widow. Her character is sketched in terms of her appearance and her overt sexuality. In order to transmit this perception of Rosie, O'Brien portrays her through Eddy's eyes, from the viewpoint of the gay, bachelor, man-of-the-world. He is attracted by Rosie's physical appearance and by her daring flamboyance. He regards her as "dear, lively, vulgar Cousin Rosie, with her great laugh and springing shameless bosom" (p. 75). She attracts Eddy in the erotic sense; he looks on her body as "splendid" and notices that she is "superbly casual about her bodily splendour". His eyes, resting on her hips register that "she walked as if [they] were gloriously balanced" (p.

81). He notices that her "eyes were full of benevolent life, and her amused mouth curved back sensually over milky teeth" (pp. 81-2). Her dress however was tasteless but not cheap, for at this stage of the novel "Rosie was by no means poor" (p. 82).

Her obvious sexuality offends her pious cousin Teresa who, because of it, regards her as "no class" (p. 72). Rosie's appearance gets much attention in order to point to the theme of the detrimental effects of marriage. O'Brien underscores the deterioration after seven years that a bad marriage and four children can cause on this hitherto alluring woman. Later in the novel, Rosie is observed to be a begging, broken, "poor skeleton" (p. 163) by Anthony. The transformation shocks him when she visits him to ask for a 'loan' of money. He notes that she has "indeed deteriorated", that "hips, teeth and bosom", the features Eddy had marvelled at, were "both comic and tragic" now, and "the flashy clothes were shapeless and untidy". Anthony is certain that her husband has "ruined her and dragged her down in the world" (p. 162). Rosie's absence from Denis's fourteenth birthday celebrations, the fact that she had been forgotten, underlines her decline even within the family circle, whereas seven years earlier she was a prominent guest at the Considine party (p. 75). When she arrives at Denis's birthday uninvited, and clutching her generous gift, the reader gets the opportunity of getting a close look at Rosie, again from male perception. Anthony perceives that "this cousin of his, whom he remembered

beautiful and rich and full of hope, was a seedy fat drudge now with varicose veins" (p. 321). The essence of the point O'Brien wishes to make lies in this observation; romantic love and marriage have brought Rosie to this state. In O'Brien's vision, particularly in this novel, marriage is destructive and consuming for women. Rosie's deterioration represents the corrosive effects of marriage and childbearing, her name, as the novel progresses, becomes incongruous, it is no longer related to her appearance, in fact "it was a family mannerism to talk as if Rosie's looks were a present-day fact and not a diminishing legend" (pp. 222-3).

Womanhood exists in infinite variety in Kate O'Brien's novels. Christina Roche does not belong to the middle classes; she is a peasant girl, living in a humble cottage, poor, unadorned and simple, quite different to the Considine women. O'Brien has limited success with this character; it must have been a problem to move outside a world she knew so well, and perhaps knew only, in order to portray a nineteenth century peasant girl convincingly. She also endeavoured to contract all the misfortunes which society could visit on womanhood into one character for didactic purposes as well as plot. Christina is a secondary character to Denis. She is also the medium through which O'Brien highlights all that she herself found distasteful in Irish society, focusing on the social and religious prejudices of the day.

Christina's milieu is the countryside near Mellick. In Christina's case as so often in Kate O'Brien, the

outward world is used as a backdrop for the investigation of the inner world, of the selfhood of character. The rural community in which Christina lives is inextricably a part of her predicament; it has ostracised her for being illegitimate and poor. Although belonging to a different class, she shares with the other female characters the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society. The themes introduced by Christina point to a certain and specific society. While they may be similar to the domestic fiction of other countries, the underscoring of place makes them Irish and regional. Lorna Reynolds has remarked how "Kate O'Brien's Mellick and the adjoining Vale of Honey is as distinctive as the most famous, as Hardy's Wessex or George Eliot's Warwickshire".¹⁹

Christina's character is utilised for so many purposes it is not an entirely successful creation. O'Brien's depiction of the girl falls into what could be considered a novelettish strain as she endeavours to utilise her presence in the narrative in various ways. As a secondary character to Denis she is drawn as a type of nymph of the woods, an ideal antidote to the 'cut and thrust' of his daily routine in the merchant world of the Considines. She awakens his sexuality, untaps his romantic nature, and, together, they surrender their virginity. Christina is a creature of a different world than that of 'River Hill', hers is a natural, green world. She is a "farm girl", unsophisticated, and beautiful, who stands before him suddenly, bearing "a

bundle of firing-twigs under her arm" (p. 280). She seems to have stepped out of a Gainsborough painting; the impact of her simple beauty was not lost on the artistic, poetic Denis. The narrative voice discloses what he saw;

in her face, her white, deep brow, on her slow-smiling mouth, in her innocent, sane, unruffled eyes, fold after fold of unconscious beauty seemed to have been laid away and then forgotten. Denis thought that he had never looked on a face so strong and pure (p.281).

On second meeting he is even more impressed, breathless at her "loveliest, loveliest face - oh, God, how beautiful she is" (p. 286) he exclaims. Christina is depicted as a Romantic figure, portrayed always against a natural background, at times even blending into it; the narrator makes the point when she remarks that Christina's "drab olive green [dress] became part of the hedge of hazel" (p. 296). She always appears suddenly out of the verdure of the hedges and meadows, invariably leans her body against an oak tree, her "eyes ... filled with sunset" (p. 291). Denis notices that as she walked, the grass "brushed against her knees and scattered its gold and white dust upon her dress" (p. 296). She woos him to her world, where the only sounds are the "stir" of the water rat, "the white owls' cry or the cough of a far-away sheep" (p. 300). Here they became lovers, in "the little bright world that they had shared", which was simply a "buttercup field and stream of trout and shadowy tree" (p. 308). The mention of the hazel hedges, and the trout, and Christina's close resemblance to a "glimmering

girl" suggest an echo of Yeat's poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus".²⁰ This suggestion is compounded in the description by the narrative voice of the two lovers

wading through pools of fern ... as Angus may have led them, to a still greener, quieter place, where, canopied by long satiny leaves of chestnut, their bed of wood sorrel was laid (p. 308).

There is something unreal and other-worldly about Denis's and Christina's meetings; he sees his love for her as "pagan" (p. 315) and has no wish to make it domestic, to translate it into marriage, house, or children, although reason tells him that this seems to be the natural sequence of love. O'Brien gives Christina an irrational intelligence, a seer-like wisdom. She pronounces her truths and premonitions with an assurance born of her "natural untutored sanity" (p. 320), and of her "lonely, aristocratic, passionate mind" (p. 291). She resembles an allegorical figure, the Spéir-bhean of Irish folklore who appears to, and bewitches the poet both by her elusive beauty and by her utterances. Christina tells Denis that their love is but "a hidden, summer ecstasy" (p. 323), she "could not disbelieve in the impregnability of the inner life" (p. 321), and while she understood how formidable the Considines would be if she married Denis, she also knew that to have his constant love "would turn the great Considine enmity into a very pitiful affair" (p. 322).

Considine enmity represents the general enmity towards a girl who, "burdened ... by her bastardry" (p.

291) is at odds with society. She is an outsider. She lives with the "handicaps" of being "illegitimate, and without a halfpenny of a fortune". O'Brien underlines the extent of her alienation through the examples cited by the narrator, who explains that

a common labouring man or a man going the roads with the tinkers would look for a girl with five pounds maybe, or a cow, before he'd court Christina (p. 293).

She is worthless in the marriage market, and is considered "a living blot of sin" (p. 347) by her aunt. O'Brien points to a hidden Ireland where the powerlessness of poverty is offset by a Church which offered the people "an ideology that fitted their plight", and, "to make life seem purposeful" the poor grasped it, for they needed it.²¹ Christina, as mouthpiece for the depressed and the poor, accepts the reality of her miserable life, for "her religion sufficiently explained it" to her. The explanation made sense of her existence; the earth was "a place of error and suffering, for the making of souls" (p. 294). Her acceptance of such precepts is based on her unquestioning faith in the wisdom and holiness of her parish priest who happens to be Fr. Tom Considine; she declares "he's a priest. He must be right" (p. 298).

Emigration and poverty were closely associated in the period in which the novel is set. Christina dreads it, looking on it as something that was a probability for her. Christina's eventual enforced exile in New York is

contrasted with Caroline's voluntary flight to London, underlining the difference between the classes. But how Christina's emigration came about is tied in thematically with O'Brien's focus on the domineering and retributive nature of the Church. She shows how Christina, representing in this case women in general, has "been condemned to a restricted or mutilated existence in the name of religion".²² Christina has already suffered restriction and isolation as a "scullery maid" (p. 364) and a "farm girl"; to remove her from her environment, and to banish her to New York, swiftly and cruelly is seen by O'Brien as a 'mutilation', for her "natural place was in the country" (p. 294). O'Brien conveys Christina's nightmarish perception of what New York was like;

an unending grey-white pavement over which dust and rubbish swirled on a hot, wild wind. Night never fell on this pavement, and men and women tore up and down it in packs, like wolves.

Christina had gleaned bits of information from the "reports" of returned emigrants, and her dread is intensified by "the sight of the emigrant train, taking desolate young men and women, her friends, away from all that was native to them". The thought of emigration has been "a festering sore" to Christina (p. 293). Nightmare becomes reality when Fr. Tom Considine insists on, and pays for, her quick dispatch to New York. He had seen Denis and herself together and knew that they loved each other and were 'keeping company'. Within the patriarchal

world of society and Church Christina has to be punished, she is an offender. Denis earns only the disapproval of his family and the contempt of Christina's aunt. Fr. Tom Considine spans the two worlds, that of the Considines and the Danaghers. Both support his action; he, as a priest, holds sway both in his family and in his parish. He represents the Church in the novel, and while O'Brien acknowledges that he is not bad, or evil, and that his actions, at the time, were acceptable, she herself doesn't draw back from condemning his autocracy and his attitudes. Kate O'Brien endeavours to illustrate the Irish and Mellick aspects of the Catholic Church which she most disliked, using Christina, the victim, the Christ-like pawn, as medium. She underlines the point that Corish has made, how Irish society in particular was thoroughly dominated by its clergy.²³ She treats the historical fact in the context of Christina's plight. Fr. Tom has acted out of prejudices which coloured the ethos of the Retemptorist Order in Limerick and more generally, the Church as a whole. This is emphasized by the constant references to his obsession with sin, notably the sin of 'impurity'. The narrator explains that he was inclined

to lay an overemphasis on the horribleness of those sins of the flesh he must never know outside of theological books, training himself to believe that the sensualities were an incomparably greater evil in the world than cruelty or dishonesty or greed.

He abandoned love in its physical expression, and preached "sermons for which he was already locally famous" on the dangers of company-keeping; he terms such an occupation as "loathsome goings-on" (p. 36). He has taken personal responsibility for the behaviour of his parishoners; stating "I believe in keeping young people out of danger - however they may resent it" (p. 363). The narrative voice is ironical when it confides that "on the subject of 'morality' which he seemed to take to mean exclusively man's conduct of his sexual life, Fr. Tom was fanatical" (p. 36). He protests to Denis and to the assembled Considine family that it was "a sensible way of ending a silly business" (p. 363) to send Christina away. He declares "I acted judiciously, in Denis's interests as well as the girl's" (p. 364). The narrator's assessment of Fr. Tom's attitude to the sexual act is confirmed in his reaction to the knowledge that Denis and the exiled Christina have been lovers, "it gave him a slight feeling of sickness to look at this nephew and know him deep-soaked in sin of the flesh" (p. 373). Fr. Tom's "purity mission" (p. 36) laid an emphasis on virginity for women, reflecting the devotion to the Immaculate Conception at the time; it strove to control all manifestations of love. Denis and Christina, well aware of that climate "saw, however dimly, that religion and society waited behind this forbidden joy for a grave reckoning" (p. 310). The 'grave reckoning' was their separation and Christina's exile.

Christina can also be seen as a fairly typical O'Brien female character; untypical as regards her class but otherwise she fits in with the ubiquitous beauty of all the major women characters. She also has an independent mind and a personal ethic informing her conscience. In so far as she is an outsider in the middle-class society of Mellick, and in so far as she enjoys a certain amount of autonomy, being an orphan and free of family ties, she develops to a certain extent as a character. She is more free than Caroline or Molly. She never suffers the guilt of Caroline, there is no self reproach that she has 'sinned', although she had always been "chaste", and is "Catholic". Her own ethic is implemented in the context of her love for Denis, and she is surprised to discover that "it was possible to commit what priests call mortal sin, without the faintest sense of guilt" (p. 308). Having experienced love now, she asks Denis "how could God put the like of you in hell, my darling?, sure doesn't he love you more than I do"? (p. 309). There is the pull of conditioning in so far as she considers herself "barred from sweet and holy customs that were more than half her life", while her conscience insists "it was no sin to me or him" (p. 407). Christina, because of her portrayal as a creature so much at one with the natural world, has assimilated a pantheistic rationale with the tenets of her Church, the former detracting from a full commitment to organised religion or laws. Her love for Denis belongs in the natural world beside the river, it is, according to the

omniscient narrator, "irrational", it is "harvested from touch and pause and intonation, from words unsaid, from light and shadow of his eyes" (p. 411).

The nightmare of New York turns out to be not so nightmarish; Christina finds that "it was possible to walk safely among the wolves ... and though the paving stones were hot and hard ... two living rivers flowed about the terrible streets"; the peace she knew in the Vale of Honey was replaced by "another moving, mysterious peace that was new to her, and yet old and friendly" (p. 405). Christina's illegitimacy and poverty are of little consequence in New York. Anonymity brings a certain amount of freedom. She misses Denis's love. Unlike that of Caroline, Christina's love has not been thwarted; she has dealt with its absence in the Wordsworthian manner, she has transferred it into an area of her experience which she can draw on for ever, believing that "the best things were incommunicable ... they were imperishable too". To an extent she foreshadows Mary Lavelle in this philosophy. On the banks of the Hudson which now replaces the Shannon in its symbolic timelessness, she decides that all she needs is "such a quietude as this that lay about her, in order to prove that scene of childhood remembered and love remembered had a reality that went deeper to the spirit than the reality of tactual life" (p. 413). The discovery of this "hidden treasure" (p. 414) enables her to send Denis on his way, to set him free.

The 'freeing' of Denis underscores a theme which is relevant to all of O'Brien's novels. The freedom to love and the freedom that love must give is the main concern underlying most of O'Brien's plots. The freedom to love is impeded usually by various forces within the female protagonists' environment, and also, love often acts as a shackle and a prison for the people who have made a commitment to it. Denis's declaration to his uncle, Fr. Tom, that "Christina doesn't see what love has to do with claims and claiming" (p. 370) is what is of interest here, for the nature of Christina's love for Denis is the kind considered rare and precious in the thematic texture of all of Kate O'Brien's work. The narrative voice gives recognition to the pain and self-sacrifice involved for Christina in her action, for she was aware that "she had him and could have him now and still wanting him would let him go" (p. 411). There is no happy ending for Christina, but neither is there hopelessness or bitterness as in the case of Caroline. There is also a vindication of Christina's unselfish love, for Denis meets Anna Hennessy, at which point the "base clouds" of the sonnet disappear and Anna supplies the "physic to [his] grief".

Befitting the closing couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, all is swiftly resolved, and there is a definite suggestion that Denis is re-integrated into his family and his place in society.

There is no such optimism in the concluding pages of O'Brien's subsequent novel in which she examines the

agonising conflict between "the claims of human love and the restrictions imposed by the well-trained Catholic conscience".²⁴ She focuses on a theme already begun in this novel, "the pursuit of freedom", "the freedom to love" and the licence "to love in freedom".²⁵

In writing Without My Cloak O'Brien was discovering her subject, she set out to write a novel of broad panoramic scope and probably intended to examine the concerns of the full extended family of the Considines at different eras. Instead she changes direction, and in the rest of her work she concerns herself mostly with a focus on women in an inward-looking world of emotion and sensibility. She chooses the two young ladies mentioned towards the end of Without My Cloak, Agnes and Marie-Rose Mulqueen, as central characters for The Ante Room.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTE ROOM

INTRODUCTION

This is Kate O'Brien's second novel. It was first published in 1934, three years after Without My Cloak. It was re-published by Arlen House, The Womens Press, in 1980. Most critics regard this novel as O'Brien's best work, and she herself claimed that it was her favourite novel.

The title of the novel has been commented on by various critics; Ben Kiely states

The Ante Room of the title is not a place where the bourgeoisie suffer before they become poets, but the dread hall of silence and pain where body and soul kiss for the last time before the final parting in death.¹

Eavan Boland suggests that the title symbolises "O'Brien's last act of love for a world she inherited".² Within the novel itself, Vincent refers to it in terms of an element of "expectancy"; he states that "to-day is an ante-room" (p. 213). It is the only place in the narrative where the title is referred to, and seems to be apt in the context of the tight-rope atmosphere of life/death within the plot.

The novel is set in Mellick, in the year 1880. It concerns the Mulqueen family of Without My Cloak.

Teresa, the mother, is Teresa Considine, married to Danny Mulqueen. From the novel Without My Cloak it is known already that Teresa is ill, that her favourite child Reggie is suffering from syphilis and that one of her daughters, Marie-Rose, has married the handsome Vincent De Courcy O'Regan and is living in Dublin. It is also known that the younger daughter, Agnes, had fallen in love with Vincent from the moment she and Marie-Rose were introduced to him.

This novel, however, is not a sequel to Without My Cloak. O'Brien has turned away from merely documenting middle class society and their concerns, and has, as Ben Kiely states "moved on to matters much deeper than even the most faithful observation of social matters".³ The Ante Room shows a shift in design from a broad study of a bourgeois clan as was undertaken in her first novel, to a narrow intense focus on one woman and one family. Instead of covering several years, it is concerned with just three days. The Ante Room is not a story as such, there is very little attention to a **linear** plot sequence. Action is suspended to allow Agnes's dilemma to direct and dominate the narrative. The only **stir** is the quiet movement of people to Mass or Benediction. Sydney Janet Kaplan has pointed out that in the first half of the twentieth century, certain writers realised that in the case of women, a "larger share of the conflict lay beneath the surface within their divided consciousness", and that consequently the novel had to shift its focus "from the outer world to the inner ...

from plot to patterning, and from action to thinking and dreaming".⁴ O'Brien employs this technique to express the inner life of her heroine, using the devices of omniscient narrator and interior monologue, with subtle shifts away from her character's consciousness to the more general voice of the narrator.

O'Brien is always interested in depicting her fictional characters in a world that she herself knew; she always prefers an authentic milieu, and it is 'Mellick' again, her native Limerick, that forms the backdrop to The Ante Room, a novel which has been described as "a masterly study of her own origins and her attitude to these origins".⁵ The milieu of the 1880s in Ireland is similar to that of ten years previously, as depicted in Without My Cloak, a comfortable existence, physically, for the middle-classes. O'Brien re-affirms the wealth and social position of the Mulqueens, stating that 'Roseholm' their home, "stood amid trees and lawns" (p. 3), later adding that "the Mulqueen household stood high in the prestige of the Mellick bourgeoisie" (p. 54). The term "bourgeoisie" she uses somewhat satirically, as this class had a lot in common with the excesses of their French counterparts. Eavan Boland points out that they "shut out the cacophony of the times, the Land War, evictions, the disgrace of Parnell".⁶ They are insulated from such matters by their own security and their lack of interest in national, local, political, or social matters. This has been underlined in Without My Cloak; here it is more like a nuance, as such matters of

feverish national interest serve only as frivolous after-dinner chat. The main concern of this family is Teresa who lies in her bedroom upstairs, dying of cancer; her illness permeates the household, making reality intangible for its occupants.

In order to examine her subject, O'Brien focuses on religion versus the individual. Three religious feast days form the framework of the novel, The Eve of All Saints, The Feast of All Saints and The Feast of All Souls. These occur at the end of October and beginning of November. O'Brien writes about Catholic feeling operating on the level of the individual, more than as a national characteristic.

Agnes has not got the status of 'married woman' that Caroline or Molly has in Without My Cloak, but, by force of circumstances, has adopted the role of her Aunt Agnes, that of spinster housekeeper. As with all O'Brien heroines, Agnes has a need for love, for her life seems loveless. The author explores the fantasy Agnes has created as an antidote to the dullness of her life, and in doing so, she charts, as John Jordan has stated, "the power of romantic love in souls dedicated from birth and by upbringing to that peculiar variety of sacred love engendered by Irish Catholicism".⁷

Dr. Curran's remark that "the Catholic Church provided as good a system as might be found for keeping the human animal in order" (p. 67) provides a clue as to O'Brien's main intention in this novel. Agnes is kept 'in order' by the nature of society and to a greater

extent by the nature of Catholicism in the 1880s in Ireland. The dilemma of the heroine and the traumatic nature of her confusion is shown to be a result of an intense emotional response to the tenets of her religion. It is useful to note that at this time the developments in the Catholic Church were of an emotional and personal character. Caroline's and Christina's responses (Without My Cloak) were very similar. This environment is depicted as hostile to Agnes's love; while striving for emotional fulfillment she is filled with guilt, misery and despair; she is left "dying" (p. 301) although she appears young, beautiful and very much alive. In order to illustrate how the Catholic Church of the time can have more serious effect on the individual than Caroline's bitterness or Christina's lonely exile, O'Brien focuses on a woman with a conscience which is scrupulous and fastidious, trained in a religion which was essentially reactionary in the historical context. Patrick Corish suggests that in attempting to "turn back the tide",⁸ in order to express Catholicism in a Protestant environment, the Church had at this period become extreme and inhuman; in fact the concerns of the individual were lost in the fierce struggle of this re-emerging Church to establish an "identity"⁹ for the Irish people. Lorna Reynolds points out that in The Ante Room, as in other O'Brien novels, "the problem her heroines confront are not metaphysical or theological: they are essential and arise when the experience of living comes into conflict with the rules for living inculcated by

their religion".¹⁰ This religion, through the Catechism, taught society "a fixed system of beliefs and a definite round of religious practices" as Corish points out. Agnes expresses this state in her entire response to her religion, in her guilt, and in her expectations of herself. These expectations are of course conditioned, and what is harmful about this conditioning, Corish states, is that the people began, and continued, to accept this Catholicism "as a 'normal' way of regarding life and the world, as a 'normal' way of living".¹¹ Agnes's acceptance of the way in which her religion expresses itself in her life has not brought her any sense of achievement or aesthetic fulfillment, as is seen at the end of the novel. Her passiveness reflects Mary Daly's assessment that women in the second half of the nineteenth century were "made feel guilty and 'unnatural' if they rebelled".¹² Agnes depends on prayer, as "nothing was more natural than prayer" (p. 50) for her, and this dependence keeps up a see-saw existence for her between the physical world and the spiritual one. She reflects, in this respect, a condition which Desmond Fennell sees as a "result of the Church's campaign at the time" which led to a situation where "the 'material world' of everyday action was unrelated to the 'spiritual', and life had to go on simultaneously in both of them", a state which Fennell terms "inhuman".¹³ It is in these very terms that Kate O'Brien depicts the character of her heroine Agnes, and shows that until the two worlds fuse,

one lives only in "an ante-room ... perhaps to truth, or fate" (p. 236).

Other themes are introduced, notably that of love. Marital love fails also in this novel. The marriage of Vincent and Marie-Rose is unhappy, "a desperate situation to have to conceal from the sharp and prudish eyes of Irish society in 1880" (p. 105). Familial love is strong and always triumphant; Agnes's love for Marie-Rose transcends all other loves, and is instrumental in her rejection of her illicit romantic relationship with Vincent. Illicit love interests Kate O'Brien greatly, and in this novel she explores the effects of this 'sin' on the psyche and on the conscience of her heroine. Agnes is seen as a victim of attitudes inculcated by the dogma of a Church at a certain stage of its development. At this time the emphasis on sin was great and the fear of retribution was even greater. Breaking the Commandments means mortal sin punishable by Hell's fire, the only antidote is a 'good' Confession, meaning a Confession made with 'a firm purpose of amendment'. Agnes, in the throes of her secret love, in sin, is reluctant to let that love go; this is her dilemma of conscience.

The theme of *illicit* love is a theme often, if not always, touched on by Kate O'Brien. In Without My Cloak there is the suggestion that Denis's love for his teacher Martin Devoy is homosexual, while Martin Devoy forces himself to consider the possibility that what he feels for the younger man is wrong. There is no identifying

label put on their relationship, but neither is there on Eddy's and Caroline's which just stops short of being incestuous. Caroline's involvement with Richard is adulterous and therefore is clearly illicit, causing much pain to the two participants. O'Brien's empathy for Caroline, and indeed for Agnes and Vincent may stem from the fact that her own marriage was, by all accounts, an almost immediate failure. She was known to favour the affections of women rather than of men and was regarded by many as lesbian in her sexuality. Her novels resemble much nineteenth century literature in ^{so far as} ~~in~~

it was moving towards a disclosure of the real self of the novelist. In such literature the novelist is often torn between pleading his case and running away and hiding, so, it would seem is Kate O'Brien, who often writes obliquely of love between people of the same sex. O'Brien always stands firmly on the side of the individual who has not the freedom to love; she concentrates on the bleakness and pain of such a life when the best efforts at love fail. To be at odds with one's conscience, to be ostracised, is very often the lot of the heroine who makes a bid for freedom. Agnes does not make a bid for that freedom; she is shackled by duty, a sick mother, and, furthermore, her whole response to life is non assertive and accepting. Agnes represents the O'Brien women to whom Margaret Lawrence refers when she writes of Kate O'Brien that "the emotion of her people is centred upon their family life and upon the Church to which they cling".¹⁴

Agnes

The novel opens on the last day of October, the "tenuous sunshine" of the morning is "swathed in river mist"; it is the morning of "a muted day" (p. 3), and the house of the Mulqueen family is "deadly quiet" (p. 8). It is a reluctant heroine that "stirred and sighed" to this new day, for she is being brought "back to things she did not wish to face" (p. 4). O'Brien draws a picture of a girl who sits, her head sunk on her hands, with "more neutrality than weariness in [her] attitude" (p. 5). Very soon it becomes quite clear that Agnes's environment is problematic, as "there was no space in it where a heart might scold against a private wound" (p. 9). By the use of innuendo, nuance, imagery, O'Brien soon establishes her heroine as a young woman who has a personal, private burden to bear as well as the public one of seeing her mother so ill and near to death. The "private wound" that Agnes is nursing was inflicted three and a half years ago on the day that she fell in love with Vincent, who, in his turn, had only eyes for her pretty older sister, Marie-Rose. Since that day, the narrative voice explains, "for her sanity's sake", she has "learnt to fix her eyes upon the griefs of others and ... ignore her own" (p. 9). In doing so, Agnes has had to adopt devices by which she can acknowledge her love for Vincent and at the same time remain the Agnes that her role in her family and society expects. The entire household depends on her "courage and direction" (p. 9),

and she is Marie-Rose's solace when she comes back to Roseholm smarting from a row with Vincent.

Agnes inhabits two worlds, the 'material world' and the 'spiritual'.¹⁵ Although she fully realises that the love she harbours is forbidden, out of the question, she guards it jealously, for it is the only thing she has. It has lived and flourished in her private subjective world now for years, and she escapes to this world at every opportunity. Agnes responds to the diurnal sound of the 'material' world with robot-like efficiency. Routine numbs her; the monotony of her life is underlined by the narrator's account of the predictability of her existence, "at each falling asleep she knew what she would presently wake to; at every waking her spirit went through the same dull exercise of pulling itself together for the forseen" (pp. 9-10). Reality is fraught with boredom and routine, it involves subduing and denying her love for Vincent, it contains the rationale of sin and duty. Agnes chooses an alternative reality, an interior world, where quite the opposite is the case; there, "no section of [experience] seemed to have offered preparation or warning for the next" (p. 9). The narrative see-saws between the two worlds in order to explore, define, and even justify the various facets of Agnes's character. One world - the outer one, is dictated by the practices of religion, the domestic concerns of the household, the comings and goings of doctors, the comforting of her sister, attending to her mother, in other words, the execution of her role. Her

interior world guards luxuriously the fantasy that her love for Vincent is legitimate and possible; she reasons in her own mind, "'I'm doing no harm to anyone, and I have nothing else on my own to think about'" (p. 34). This almost self-deceiving defence of herself does not consider Marie-Rose, for she belongs in the other world of family and loyalty. Agnes is right to a certain extent, she has done "no harm to anyone", for her love is secret, has never been expressed except in her interior monologue. In her fantasy world anything is possible, but it is clear this state cannot last for ever, suggested by the narrator who knows that Agnes "could not temporise for ever with the ninth Commandment" (p. 34).

This is a trying time for Agnes in the exterior world; she is presented out of what must be the normal context of her life, in so far as her home is now hushed by sickness, the atmosphere charged with expectancy for the verdict of the visiting consultants. Privacy is encroached on by the fact that Nurse Cunningham lives at Roseholm caring for Teresa, by the presence of the Blue Nun and by the ad lib visits of Dr. Curran. Agnes's role is strained as it is, and O'Brien probes and dissects the condition of being a devout Catholic in provincial Ireland in love with one sister's husband, by delving deep, sinking a narrow shaft into Agnes's nervous and emotive systems to record what goes on there while she is at her most vulnerable. All around her the demands on her personality and on her time increase, and the dilemma

of her secret love affair becomes more difficult to accommodate. Firstly, she has seen the necessity to abstain from the sacraments of Confession and Communion since Vincent's last visit, at which point she had defined, in terms of the Commandment "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife", (or husband), the category of her forbidden love; she 'coveted' her sister's husband indeed. She has sinned in thought, not in deed, yet her fastidious conscience allows her no escape, and she suffers a similar loss to that of Christina (Without My Cloak) at not being able to participate in the very practices that sustained them both spiritually, and were a natural part of their lives. Now Agnes's life is disturbed from its normal pattern; she had always received Communion "twice a week" (p. 34); by complying with the conditions for absolution that she have 'a firm purpose of amendment' she would have to put an end to her 'coveting' and so her love for Vincent, she would have to banish the only thing that makes life meaningful for her.

The narrator's premonition that Agnes could not 'temporise for ever with the ninth Commandment' is soon seen to be accurate when Canon Considine forces a resolution of some kind when he asks Agnes to go to Confession and Communion, as the entire household would, for the Tridium which was to be celebrated for Teresa so that "His Will should be made clear" (p. 45). Agnes's reaction is one of compliance, and instead of any resentment, she feels "touched", and "her strong faith sympathised with his" (p. 50). Agnes is shown to be

obedient and dutiful because this is what she herself believes to be right; she acknowledges that she had erred, that she "had allowed her rigorous conscience a little sleep of late" (p. 33). She promises to "'ring for a priest'" after Benediction (p. 51). Resolution brings great relief, for earlier her involuntary gesture of reaching out her hand as if to touch Vincent's, as if his were lying beside her, caused her to be "chilled with fear", and "had betrayed how far her laxity was bearing her" (p. 34). There has been no gesture, no words, to demonstrate her secret love; it was hers, in her fantasy world. At this point she must confess, and promise never to sin again. The relief that comes with her resolution is seen to blind her to the personal price she must pay for absolution. Her faith tells her that this Confession will be an exorcism "to destroy the unclean and sentimental selfishness of these three months" (p. 51); Vincent's presence in her interior world can be eradicated, and she can "be clean and free of it, and filled with prayer". For his arrival to-night with Marie-Rose, she would be "armed" (p. 52); it would be all over "before she saw his dreaded face again" (p. 51).

From this point of the novel O'Brien focuses on the conscience of the heroine and how it is at odds with the workings of her heart. This is a recognisable O'Brien theme, but each heroine is different, and set in a different time, in a different set of circumstances. Agnes is a particular type of heroine, one who has been conditioned in the denial of 'self' and in the adoration

and love of the Divine; the narrator points out that Agnes, in her dilemma, must pray. Yet prayer is never seen to be strong enough a barrier against the force of love; Agnes's heart cries out "oh God, there is no sin. Love happens - out of the simple fact that one's eyes can see, that's all - and in itself is pure, it has no evil in it" (p. 50). There is a distinct echo of Christina Roche here (Without My Cloak p. 407), who, with Agnes, protests out of a personal ethic. Here, in The Ante Room, Agnes's protests are defined by Reynolds as "that phantasmagoric effect",¹⁶ the divorce between what Agnes is expected to feel and what she does, in fact, feel. The tension in her interior world now derives from this conflict, her heart protests, her conscience sees the sin. The narrative at this point remains in the third person, and objective; it is by the punctuation, and the short, breathy sentences that the urgency, the reluctance and fear, are conveyed from the heroine's turbulent subjective existence.

Agnes's interior world has remained intact for three years, in which time she has nursed the fantasy of a relationship with Vincent. Now this world is threatened from without by the demands of Confession, and it is further threatened by Dr. Curran's probing questions as he attempts to weaken some of the barriers that he feels are protecting an area of her personality. Agnes detects that she is at risk from the doctor and assures him that all is well, that she is only suffering from "a maggot in [her] brain" (p. 75). Her silent world of interior

monologue has been fractured slightly by the verbal admission that there is, in fact, something amiss; although she has intended to convey that it is a trivial matter, she has made Dr. Curran more alert and watchful of her and she has made her much guarded fantasy potentially accessible.

Examination of conscience, by its very format, undermines her fantasy even more. She accuses herself of sinning against the ninth commandment, and also against Marie-Rose, "the beloved, pretty sister whom she had once loved above all living things" (p. 80). Marie-Rose was never considered in her fantasy world, it only contained herself and Vincent; now, the real world of family ties and love merges with her secret subjective one of 'self' and she recognises that her sin is "enhanced by all the pitiful complications of sister love" (p. 80).

O'Brien utilises the process of self-criticism to illustrate the pain and guilt and self-reproach that the heroine must suffer before she finally lets go of her fantasy, with "its suggestions, its seductive day-and-night dreams". Agnes searches for words to assess exactly the "fool-fantasies of being his wife, or even, in secret, in treachery his mistress". A sympathetic narrator asks "must all her hoard of misery be sloughed away" (p. 82). The narrative voice blends with Agnes's sorrow, with her confusion and anguish. There is very little detached assessment in this section of the novel; Agnes's suffering dominates all, "it was too much, this shame, this pitiless exaction. She had fought her dark

imaginings, and if they had defeated her, were they not only dreams, and senseless, hers alone, safe in the shame of her heart?". Agnes's "disciplined spirit" replies that they are not safe from God (p. 82). O'Brien points out that Agnes's response is that of a devout woman who is responding "to the training that was at least half herself" (pp. 82-3).

This training remains unexplored, or unnarrated, in this novel; O'Brien examines the finished product of such in revealing what proceeds now in her heroine's heart and conscience. She examines the tension between forbidden love and conscience. Agnes struggles for the correct way in which to tell her sin; she must be completely honest; to dramatise it would be "despicable", and she reasons that "to have sinned was only too nauseatingly ordinary" (p. 83). The narrator recognises that Agnes is attempting to deny "her own awareness of the agony which this Confession was to be". The opiate of ritual, incense and chant at Benediction prevents the incursion of reality; this is underlined by the narrative voice which explains that in this context, Agnes "was not herself, she was much more fortunately part of a formula", all that is required of her now, as part of that formula is to be "accurate, regular and cold" (p. 84). The 'inhuman' nature of Agnes's religious responses is underscored here, supporting Corish's and Fennell's opinions of the way in which Catholicism expressed itself at this particular time in history.

O'Brien's attitude, while it sympathises with Agnes's almost heroic faith and approves of her devotion, also points to what she disapproves of. She employs the imagery of "cold" from this point to the end of the book, to illustrate the numbness which is required to deny love. Agnes clings to the image 'cold' as the antithesis of 'heat' and passion. It is another 'memorare', an aid to solve her dilemma. Agnes is required to "kill" her "personal anguish" with "coldness" (p. 84). She, herself, acknowledges that she must "destroy fantasy" with "coldness" (p. 84). As she prays "Blessed be God, Blessed be His Holy Name", her heart takes over from her lips and she hears it say "Blessed be God, who made so absurd a thing of human love" (p. 85).

The bell for Confession is heard to "jangle coldly", and she prepares herself for the ordeal, keeping "cold and quiet". The tension between reason and heart is to be felt in the arguments that teem in her mind; Confession is nothing, "a matter-of-fact and necessary transaction" (p. 85), and "in ten minutes it would be over and she would be loosed from sin"; the narrator, however, sees what goes on in her heart, and reveals that Agnes sees herself as a "murderer" rather than as a penitent (p. 86). Her confessor assures her that if she gives this "thing" no further licence in [her] mind, that it "will die". The irony of Agnes's echo "yes it will die" (p. 89) is seen later when Vincent takes his life. As she says her Act of Contrition, Agnes is aware of "coolness", she acknowledges that "she had done that

which her belief exacted" (p. 90). O'Brien illustrates in the imagery the effect of this act, the result of the emotional effort needed by Agnes to deny the demands and needs of her heart, of her 'self'. As if her heart had stopped in the process, and her blood had ceased to flow, "she was cold all through, and coldness, she was now aware, was the perfect state" (p. 91). Feeling nothing she could manage, she could face the consequences, and reality.

Agnes has new-found confidence and assurance as a result of Confession; "with heart cleaned of offence against her" (p. 106) she can greet her sister with "easy grace" (p. 97). Vincent presents as little a problem now, she can "look at him and feel no fear or heat or tenderness" (p. 106). Agnes had locked tenderness away, heat she has cancelled with cold. The narrative voice issues a warning, that this self-assurance is "a dangerous condition of feeling invincible" (p. 108). Agnes's dependence and confidence in God and in prayer is shown to be a flaw in her character, keeping her in the role of victim, preventing her from taking action, from taking responsibility for her dilemma or of facing the consequences of her decisions, such as Caroline, Christina, and to a certain extent Molly, do. Dependence on her faith is eventually seen to be a weakness, impeding any degree of self-knowledge occurring. Kate O'Brien points to Agnes's certainty that Confession had sealed away all 'weakness', stating she is "startled" when the tenderness she extends to her miserable sister

associates with her feelings for Vincent, and she asks herself, mystified, "was love not dead after all?". Agnes takes immediate comfort in recalling the assurances of her confessor, that "earthly love" is sure to die (p. 111). What could be called naïvete is but a response to a faith which depends on divine intervention and design. It is born from a religious environment where prayer will 'move mountains', where spiritual matters remain in the environs of one's religion, and where prayer replaces human resources as the answer to problems. Agnes regards her love and her guilt as belonging to her 'spiritual' world. She considers her love for her sister's husband in terms, only, of 'sin' initially. O'Brien shows that prayer does not help, Agnes's constant recourse to the 'memorare' is ineffective; when she walks straight into Vincent, having recited it yet again, and when he puts his hand on her shoulder saying "I love you, you love me" (p. 139) its effects dissipate immediately. At this point the two worlds meet for Agnes, and the effect is intense with its mixture of pain and love and relief. O'Brien illuminates the struggle between the 'formula' part of Agnes and her heart; all resolution is suspended for a moment when "her nature was as if hypnotised by a revelation of its own weakness, even when tested in an hour of special strength" (p. 139). The Blue Nun's cough breaks the trance and, true to character, Agnes runs away repeating the "memorare" with urgency, seeking the impossible from prayer.

From this point Agnes's dilemma is on a different plane; her interior world which harboured her emotional life is now redundant. The "maggot in the brain" has lost its metaphoric significance. Words have been said now, breaking the silence of her interior monologue, and her silent longings are part of reality. Reality must be dealt with now on its own terms, and this is done in a step by step process. O'Brien has Agnes achieve this, as gradually she comes to appreciate the enormity of the dilemma that she and Vincent are in, in terms of reality. Final clarification brings her relationship with Vincent to an end.

From Agnes's new perspective, she views the lives of her family as pathetic and blighted, she recognises that each member of the household is attempting to reject reality, and she asks herself "what then [is] her delusion" (p. 201). Marie-Rose has declared that she "hated realities", her father puts on a show of being cheerful, Reggie "lived from hour to hour on bits of Chopin", while her mother Teresa "was kept this side of agony by dreams". Vincent has assured her that his life has been, of necessity, a "fantasy life", and "Agnes knew what he meant". She recognises that the private subjective world that she has had to abandon "had been her prison" (p. 192). There is some growth in Agnes's character from this point, she has been forced to re-enter reality, and now she sees that her fantasy existence "had lately seemed, in its sweetness, its uncertainty, its truthfulness, to be taking on the very

bulk and texture of reality. It had made fantasy of every day" (pp. 192-3). Agnes takes the final step back into reality, and particularly into the reality of her dilemma, when Marie-Rose confides in her that she loves her husband and could never love any other man (p. 197). At that moment "the air was cleared and her own folly, falseness, disloyalty, and impurity of heart once and for all revealed to her" (p. 198). At this point Agnes relinquishes finally the refuge that she has occupied for three and a half years.

O'Brien now depicts Agnes as a woman who can look at life critically, and with new eyes; surveying the gathering around the dinner table, she considers "the irrelevancy of visible life", recognising the tension between the spiritual and material forces in the individual, acknowledging that "the spirit might or might not be willing, but it got no assistance whatever from the wily flesh" (p. 240). The recognition of the role of "the flesh" in her love affair is of major consideration when looking at Agnes's growth within the novel, for growth stems from this realisation as from her realisation that Marie-Rose is to be considered as an element in her love for Vincent. With these recognitions also comes the knowledge that prayer is not the answer; in spite of Confession and the morning's Communion, this day "had been one long assault, one long desire" (p. 240). Agnes now takes control; not waiting for the power of prayer to work, she goes to make "a complete good-bye"

to Vincent (p. 242), she is certain that "'it' must die" (p. 240).

The subsequent confrontation between Agnes and Vincent is written with O'Brien's eye for theatre. The setting of fir trees (usually associated in the Irish context with graveyards) is enhanced by eerie moonlight. What follows is a scene reminiscent of a Bouccicault melodrama; Vincent and Agnes meet, they embrace, Vincent lifts Agnes in his arms and carries her across moon-drenched lawns to the garden house. Here the melodramatic effects end and the enormity of her task becomes clear. In Vincent's arms, Agnes has felt the reality of passion, in his arms "Christian and social duty" (p. 240) are not considered. Love now takes on a sense of fatality. O'Brien suggests that this love is not accidental but pre-ordained, they are meant for each other; "line for line, bone for bone, they seemed to fit together as if by heaven grooved to take each other" (p. 245).

The final step which Agnes must take to end this heartbreaking illicit love is to come yet; she looks around the little garden house, her eyes are now accustomed to the dark and she recognises all the paraphernalia of her childhood, stored there. In her mood of heightened awareness and excitement she experiences what can be termed a Joycean epiphany. Sharp and sudden personal definition comes to her at this moment; the childhood which, at the beginning of the novel she could not get in touch with, which seemed

"someone else's" (p. 5) is now hers, and with the reclaiming of her childhood comes the recognition of all that Marie-Rose stands for in her life. Agnes makes a rational choice; she tells Vincent that her "real duty is to God and Marie-Rose" (p. 250). Familial and spiritual forces prove stronger than the force of her love for Vincent, the "naturalness" (p. 249) of her passion for him is abandoned to 'duty'. The dialogue from this point see-saws between resolution and abandon, but O'Brien never lets Agnes regress in her effort to control the situation, for Agnes has relinquished her fantasy for ever, she knows that this "game" (p. 263) was about to end, and that although "she burnt to be his lover ... it would never happen" (p. 259). Vincent also recognises that the presence of Marie-Rose is too strong for their love to continue, that "violence and passion could have their tortured minute if he insisted, but they could not retrace, unplait, unravel the long slow weaving of childhood" (pp. 267-8). The motif of childhood is sustained to the end of the novel, but at this point the love story ends. The narrator suggests that, in hindsight, when one considers the bonds of religion and family love, Agnes and Vincent went through only the motions of a relationship, that it was, indeed, a "game", and that now "all the cards were on the table - and the game was over" (p. 268).

There is no triumph for the heroine; she has not won the 'game', her personal growth has led nowhere, not to peace, not to hope. There is no vindication of her

painful action, of being true to family and religion. Like Molly in Without My Cloak she has paid a heavy price in terms of human suffering. The coda to the love story explores this price in terms of a tragedy. Vincent has declared "'I cannot live without you" (p. 273) the irony of which is realised when, out in the summer house, among the memorabilia of childhood he takes his own life, "his thoughts far off in boyhood" (p. 306). The horror of his death is intensified by the suggestion of grim significance in Agnes's reply "or I without you" (p. 273). The question is posed here; are her words just a pat echo of his sentiments, or have they a more sinister and morbid import? Agnes has come to the realization that it is she who is "dying" now; her mother is happy that Reggie will have a new caretaker in Nurse Cunningham, who, in turn, is well satisfied with the arrangement. Agnes surveys them all and sees the irony for herself, "they are all alive, even Mother ... but I'm dying, Vincent, if I could only die" (p. 301). This silent wish is given ironic force by the reader's knowledge that Vincent has organised, and will carry out, his own death; Agnes is unaware that in moments the priest's words in Confession "it will die" will have their tragic realisation.

The 'human animal' has been kept 'in order' by her religion. O'Brien, while she approves of Agnes, and sympathises with her dilemma, sees her as a tragic victim of that very "order". Agnes denied the freedom to love, shares the great tragedy of the lives of many O'Brien

heroines. From this novel on, her heroines, as they move chronologically into the twentieth century adopt a more defensive and personal manner of dealing with the restrictive elements of Church and Society. In 1880, in rural Ireland, Agnes, being the particular kind of person she was, did what she could, did what she had to do.

the motif of reality versus illusion. There is a scene with Rose, Agnes's older sister, who is the doctor's nurse, Nurse Conboy.

Each character is defined in terms of how she relates to her world, and to what extent she accepts or rejects its reality. Especially is pointed out women, both male and female, for whom reality is unbearable and for whom fantasy is the only escape. The female characters are not explored merely as individuals nor as representatives of a type; they are essential to the plot, and while O'Brien does not develop their characters to any extent, they are all interesting and are indispensable to the wisdom's plot of the narrative.

Irma is introduced to the world of the novel at the same point in which she opens her eyes to a new world and finds that her pain is unendurable. Her attention is drawn to the world of the novel by her initial activity and "fumbled about the countryside for her money" (p. 12) to get her mother's portrait. Irma, in pain, praying, is in the role of a heroine for the novel.

The heroine Irma's first action is to convey the information that she is praying for Irma's

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

There are three minor female characters in The Ante Room, each with a significant function within the design of the novel, each contributing to the themes of love, self-deception, denial of selfhood, and all supporting the motif of reality versus fantasy. There is Marie-Rose, Agnes's older sister, their mother Teresa, and her nurse, Nurse Cunningham.

Each character is defined in terms of how she relates to her world, and to what extent she accepts or rejects its reality. Roseholm is peopled by persons, both male and female, for whom reality is unacceptable and for whom fantasy is the only escape. The minor female characters are not employed merely as commentators nor as representatives of a type; they are essential to the plot, and while O'Brien does not develop their characters to any extent, they are all interesting and are indispensable to the episodic plan of the narrative.

Teresa is introduced to the world of the novel at the same moment in which she opens her eyes to a new day and finds that her pain is mercifully "vague" (p. 13). Teresa's attention to prayer is immediately suggested in her initial action; she "fumbled about the counterpane for her rosary beads" (p. 13) to say her morning prayers. Teresa, ill, in pain, praying, is in the role she sustains for the entire novel.

The narrator adopts Teresa's inner voice to convey the information that she is praying for something

special, something of great importance. Teresa's faith is unshakeable as she reflects that "God had not answered her yet ... God must hear and answer ... God must be implored, since he was merciful and died for sinners" (p. 17). It is quite clear that she is praying for something specific, and the urgency with which she requires it is clear in the device used. One supposes that Teresa is praying for a cure, or for relief from pain, but no, Teresa is seeking a "miracle"; she wants "her martyrdom indefinitely prolonged" (p. 46). Her dilemma is not in her own suffering but in the fact that if she dies, her son Reggie, who suffers from syphilis, will be without a protector. She is praying that God will see fit to either spare her, or send a new guardian for her beloved son, to tell her "where he was to turn ... so that he would do no harm in his weakness, and yet might be a little happy, a little less than desolate" (p. 17).

Teresa's relationship with her son Reggie is depicted as the strong shielding the weak; in this case this is ironic, for Teresa is dying and still persists in her role as his 'shield', not against others, but against the reality of his condition, against the reality of her own illness which will cause that 'shield' to be removed. She asks God "to keep him safe, to keep him interested, to keep his misery from making misery" (p. 17) by providing some substitute for herself in his life. O'Brien makes it clear that she does not regard this fierce and obsessive love as anything gross or perverted; this protective love has wrought a change in Teresa, but

for the better, it "had given understanding and patience to a woman as prudish as she was holy", she has been, to Reggie his "courage and his hope" (p. 19). There have been the obvious repercussions within the family circle; in the case of her other children, in the "withdrawal of their confidence", and in the case of her "neglected" husband, a certain amount of alienation; he "made no complaint", for he "understood, in part at least, her fierce devotion" (p. 20).

Teresa has protected Reggie all through his illness, and continues to do so in spite of the fact that she feels weaker and weaker each day. Agnes disapproves of this "mighty and painful piece of acting" (p. 22), but Teresa persists, and "attempted little jokes" in order to keep Reggie's spirits up. "I'll be better soon. You'll see" (p. 24) she assures him, stroking "his bald temple, where once the hair had been like heavy silk" (p. 24). The tension between the aversion the reader may feel at this scene and what Teresa feels for the blighted son whom she is stroking lovingly is used by O'Brien to underline the unconditional nature of familial love, and she goes on to illustrate this love further in her depiction of the relationship between Agnes and Marie-Rose. Teresa now feels that her "long bluff" (p. 24) is almost over. Reality is getting more faint as her pain increases and she escapes into her morphia dreams (p. 193). The theme of deflecting reality is very much part of O'Brien's portrayal of Teresa, who "flunked such conversation" as many spell out to Reggie how ill she

really is, and while she acknowledges that Reggie "had refused the realities of his own affliction", she knows that she has subscribed to this, admitting that "her method of making his spoilt life liveable had been a mistake" (p. 25).

Teresa's invocation of "God's goodness" (p. 166) becomes more fevered, more urgent, as she senses that "the dark stretch was coming" (p. 24). Her request now becomes more specific; she is praying now for Reggie's "poor soul", for, she has kept him from harming any other creature during her lifetime, and she seeks guidance now, praying "tell me how that will be done when I'm gone. Tell me who is to protect my helpless child" (p. 166). She asks God for an answer from heaven, and pleads "hear my prayer - and then do with me as Thou wilt" (p. 166). When Nurse Cunningham decides to marry Reggie, knowing his condition, but seeing the transaction as a step up in the world for her, Teresa regards her prayers as answered, "God had heard her one prayer, her miserable, human and weak intercession" (p. 288), while some irony lies in the reader's knowledge of Nurse Cunningham's motives.

Teresa is set free now from her own personal ante-room, having "glided into an enchanted holy peace" (p. 288), she can welcome eternity, for her son is safe. Familial love and devotion and religion combined are presented as the most powerful elements in the lives of O'Brien's characters here in this novel.

The love and dependence portrayed in the relationship between Teresa and Reggie is without the same degree of possessiveness, but is nevertheless as intense, as that of Marie-Rose and her sister Agnes. Marie-Rose is defined in terms of her relationship with Agnes and is seen as an adjunct of her sister's life, unable to function fully as a separate entity.

The selfishness of the other children was not noted before the youngest girl in the school (p. 13). Marie-Rose had insisted that Agnes was lovely, and through Marie-Rose's devotion and love she had become lovely, and blossomed, and had grown beautiful.

Marie-Rose's life was involved with "sharing" with her sister: sharing "secrets and giggles" in their childhood, and later "sharing her husband" in fact. They were "the very best of good companions" (p. 13). This intimacy is emphasized by the writer in order to emphasize the "trains of their parting brought about by Marie-Rose's marriage, and departure to Dublin. Her role in Agnes's life is of major significance. She is "the only ally of Agnes" in what Agnes regards as the "unhappy days" of her life (p. 7). Everything that develops later in the plot of the novel actually springs from Marie-Rose's perception of Marie-Rose in the Dublin pages. Marie-Rose had made "both her Vincent, the little older sister had been the most precious person in the world" for Agnes, and she "the will of terrible dependence" (p. 27). The "terrible dependence" carries ironic implications for the rest of the story.

Marie-Rose is introduced to the reader through Agnes's reminiscences; she reflects on how her older sister "decorated the scene" for her in her childhood and how "the thread of Marie-Rose ... ran vividly through her schooldays" (p. 5). She acknowledges that there had been "hero-worship" for her sister, an admiration which was well earned as that sister had protected her from the unkindness of the other children who had voted Agnes the ugliest girl in the school (p. 15). Marie-Rose had insisted that she, Agnes, was lovely, and through Marie-Rose's devotion and love she had become lovely, had blossomed, and had grown beautiful.

Marie-Rose's life was involved with "sharing" with her sister; sharing "secrets and giggles" in their childhood, and later "ribbons and perfumes", in fact, they were "the very best of boon companions" (p. 7). This intimacy is emphasised by the writer in order to underline the trauma of their parting brought about by Marie-Rose's marriage, and departure to Dublin. Her role in Agnes's life is of major significance, she is "the only unifying thread" in what Agnes regards as the "unrelated phases" of her life (p. 9). Everything that develops later in the plot of the novel actually springs from Agnes's perception of Marie-Rose in the opening pages. Until Marie-Rose and Agnes "both met Vincent, the little elder sister had been the most precious person in the world" for Agnes, and she "was still of terrible importance" (p. 29). The "terrible importance" carries ironic implications for the outcome of the story.

The narrator sees Marie-Rose as contributing to the sense of unreality which expresses itself in the entire household of 'Roseholm'. Marie-Rose's marriage is unhappy, and like her sister, she does not seek any solutions within her own personality; she turns from her problem, not to religion, but, ironically, to Agnes. Agnes herself unwittingly subscribes to the tendency of dependence in Marie-Rose out of love for her sister, and out of the immense gratitude she still feels for the heroine of her unhappy schooldays. Marie-Rose does not seek escape in an introspective world, her dilemma is not so scandalous that she cannot share it with her sister. Her ^{strategy}~~mechanism~~ is to reject the present, - which constitutes adulthood, marriage, Dublin, - and to revert to childhood, back to Roseholm, back to Agnes. She even reverts to the language, petulance, and tantrums of childhood, pouring out her troubles to "Nag" who responds with soothing reassurances to her "pet" (p. 107), her "little Rose" (p. 110). "I hate realities" she cries to Agnes, for reality is the "cat-and-dog" existence she has with the erratic Vincent, it is responsibility, it is conscious of growing old; "it's awful to be twenty-seven" (p. 107) she declares to Agnes.

O'Brien depicts Marie-Rose, not as a victim of fate, but of the flaws in her own character. The narrator's appraisal of Marie-Rose is of a spoiled beauty who expects that happiness is her due. Romantic love did not bring the accessories of happiness and contentment to this unprepared young bride, and her marriage over the

years had deteriorated into a "marital comedy" (p. 110). The "only escape" was Roseholm and Agnes "who always rejoiced to take her as she found her" (p. 110). Marie-Rose's asylum is amongst the associations of her youth; the "creaky board" (p. 106) and the "dear old hole" of their childhood bed-room are all the antidotes she needs. Back with Agnes she declares that she is "alive for a change" (p. 118). Marie-Rose, from the view point of the narrator, is both selfish and vulnerable. O'Brien counterpoints this perception with the very partial point of view of Agnes. Marie-Rose projects herself as a petulant, vain, spoiled, yet soft-hearted young woman. On occasions she appears as the stereotypical social butterfly, as when she responds to both Dr. Curran's and the visiting consultant's attentions with coquetry and pleasure. O'Brien presents her as a young woman who, above all, seeks love; Marie-Rose "must be loved or wither", and when Vincent doesn't give it to her she flees to that un-failing source, Agnes, and, "finding it, bathed her bruised, vain, charming spirit in its tenderness, its flattery, its indulgence" (p. 30). This practice had become a "habit" (p. 31).

William Curran's appraisal of Marie-Rose as a "realist" (p. 95), his opinion that "her intuitions would no more seriously mislead her about herself than about other people" seem unfounded and without support in the narrative. He cynically notes her egotism, thinking that "her own weakness she would not blench at, she found so much compensatory strength in her strengths" (p. 93).

Marie-Rose willingly surrenders to her 'weaknesses', she refuses to face the unpleasant reality of the present, and instead invokes the "free and happy past" (p. 145). Singing Schumann's 'Widmug' she plaintively celebrates her childhood, recognising that "out of some crazy loneliness she was singing to her sister, in denial of her own present life of contempt and irritation, and to praise that which could never be again; that harmony of innocence and irresponsibility" (p. 145). Marie-Rose defiantly insists on maintaining her links with the past, for she considers that those years were her ration, in this life, of "peace and quiet" (p. 146). This is the strategy with which she survives.

As in the relationship of Teresa and Reggie, there is the suggestion here also that such intense familial love and protectiveness and dependence has its destructive side. When Vincent rejects Marie-Rose, when he tells her to "go-away" (p. 160), she flees from their bed, sobbing, to Agnes's arms. Her awareness that Agnes is always there perpetuates her rejection of reality and prevents her growth as a person. Her philosophy is one of passivity, "one could always sit with Agnes and let things slide" (pp. 153-4). Agnes is well aware of her sister's escape routes, she remarks to Marie-Rose that it only takes "five minutes" in their old bed room for her sister "to go straight back to the past" (p. 195). However, it is this trust and dependence that Marie-Rose has in the sisters' relationship, and the love and gratitude that Agnes brings to it, that finally decides

the outcome of the novel. Familial love, as a force, outlasts and overcomes all the accidents, all the eventualities, of humanity.

Nurse Cunningham remains in the background for much of the narrative. She is depicted as a foil to both Agnes and Marie-Rose; she is a realist. She views Reggie with "her realist's eye" (p. 221) and decides to become his wife, choosing this route as her own escape from humble anonymity. For a woman who is depicted as being "pretty", with "feeling" and "sensuality", this is a grim compromise. She shudders at the bargain she is making, but the realist in her reasons that "such comfort and prosperity as she found in this house were not offered by normal men to women in her circumstances" (p. 222). Her marriage of convenience would bring her class, prestige - an invaluable commodity to a person with none.

She serves the purpose in the plot of being the answer to Teresa's prayer. O'Brien treats her name symbolically; suggesting that she is 'cunning' and manipulative, yet the reader could only regard her decision with repulsion.

Reggie has been depicted through his adoring mother's eyes but also through the impartial eyes of the narrator, and through Agnes's, and the result is that from the reader's perspective, to settle for such a man as a husband is almost hideous. In the novel, reality is unacceptable to most women and unreality and fantasy bring pain and disillusion. Nurse Cunningham's sense of reality in so far as she sees marriage to Reggie as a

chance of being rich and socially more secure, is unacceptable and repellent to the reader. She is the anti-heroine in O'Brien's world, the antithesis to everything O'Brien's perception of a heroine is.

O'Brien has identified the tension between the dictates of religion and the desires of the human heart. She has explored through Agnes the neurosis which can result from denial of love. Illicit love, although intense and genuine is never a possibility, it is seen eventually as a 'game'; in the context of Agnes's world that is all it can be. Familial love and loyalty and the conditioning of one's religion destroy love and leave its victims 'dead'. Agnes is 'dead' in the metaphorical sense and Vincent chooses to take his own life. The tragic potential of forbidden fatal love is fully realised.

Maternal love is presented here as obsessive and blind. There is something distasteful about its overabundance.

Rejection of reality is the way in which the women of the novel deal with their problems. Pain and parting are seen to be part of the everyday business of loving.

With The Ante Room O'Brien leaves the nineteenth century and moves on to the early twentieth in which period she sets two of her novels. She progresses to a time when women are moving out of the restrictions which are portrayed in Without My Cloak and this novel; Church and society still make their demands, but women's roles are changing with the granting of concessions to them,

such as higher education, and with the dawning of the suffragette movement in Ireland. The heroine reflects these changes. Caroline's bitter and reluctant compromise and Agnes's absolute adherence to the tenets of her religion are not repeated in subsequent plots. O'Brien portrays a changing environment for her heroines, and they respond to it according to the way in which they relate to it, according to the circumstances of their milieu, as well as from the nature of their own temperaments.)

CHAPTER III

THE LAND OF SPICES

INTRODUCTION

This novel was published in 1941. It is set in a Convent school in 'Mellick' and spans the years 1904 to 1916.

The title of the novel is taken from a poem by George Herbert and is an epithet for prayer. But it also refers to the scents and aromas associated with the atmosphere of a cloistered world; the mixture of beeswax and incense dominate the physical landscape of the novel. The Convent is owned by a French Order, the mother house of which is in Belgium. La Compagnie de la Sainte Famille in 'Mellick' operates a boarding school, principally for upper middle-class girls. In the depiction of the school, and of school life, O'Brien draws on her own experience of Laurel Hill owned and run by the French Order of The Faithful Companions of Jesus, popularly known as the F.C.Js. She boarded there from 1903 to 1916. The connection between Laurel Hill and the school of the novel is established in her unfinished autobiography 'Memories of a Catholic Education'.¹

In the novel, the Convent of Sainte Famille is a mini-society, reflecting the concerns of the world outside. In her own day, O'Brien informs us, Laurel Hill

was criticised for the emphasis its education placed on the social graces such as one might encounter at the London 'Season'. The bourgeois pretensions of the school, she states, were attacked in the ultra-Nationalist Leader which pointed out that "'educating Irish girls to be suitable wives for bank managers and British colonial governors'" was quite unnecessary in the Ireland of that period.² O'Brien comments that the Reverend Mother of the time would not have approved the inclusion of "bank managers" as "they would have been a very low social target", but that the rest of the 'accusation' would have been accurate.³ The Convent of the novel represents the kind of education available at the time for middle class girls, it trained them in la politesse and decorum, and prepared them for life in society.⁴ However, this cradle of middle class education is threatened, as are the middle classes in general in the Ireland of that period by the expectations and pretensions of the nouveau riche; O'Brien points to the social disintegration of life outside the world of the Convent, to the climbing up the social ladder of publicans, shopkeepers and business people of all descriptions, attempting to oust the middle and upper classes from their perch. She charts the new trend of the nouveau riche to send their daughters to Sainte Famille in order to obtain a certain "cachet", a "je ne sais quoi" (p. 9). These girls could not depend on any other source for the finesse their socially inadequate parents desired for them. This causes a certain amount

of anxiety among the snobbish and titled defenders of the schools' 'good name', and of their hitherto exclusive rights to Sainte Famille. O'Brien satirises this pattern in society by employing the nuns of the Convent as representatives of certain attitudes; Sister Angela is a persona non grata in the opinion of some of her sisters in religion, as her mother "was not an 'old girl'", but was "a very common woman, a daughter and sister of tradesmen" (p. 9), while Mother Eugenia, "the daughter of an Earl" cannot tolerate the "upstart educational pretensions" of a woman like Mother Mary Andrew, "that linen-draper person from Tyrone" (p. 16). Fun is poked at Mother Eugenia's feeling of superiority, especially when she seeks out the company of titled people such as the de la Poles whose children are at the school, in order that she might "breathe the air of her own lost world" (p. 59).

The general snobbery of the nuns is given tongue-in-cheek treatment by O'Brien, but there is much seriousness in her depiction of the effects of the attitudes behind this snobbery on the younger generation. The malice and blind intolerance hurled by the young de la Pole at Molly Redmond when it is disclosed that Molly's father is a "bookie", is highlighted by the sense of drama with which the author portrays the episode (pp. 130-3). In this, as in other novels, she underlines how the reverberations of the adult world filter through to the young. The moulding of youth by influential all-powerful adult values is often under examination in O'Brien's work; here

it is explored at many levels.

The Convent of Sainte Famille forms the limited, contracted world of the heroines Helen Archer - Reverend Mother when the novel opens, and Anna Murphy, a pupil. This world, small though it is, is linked to a much larger system of values. While Anna's environment seems secure in essence, there is evidence that it has threatening elements, and she learns even in this seemingly sheltered milieu that one has to be "cunning" and "defensive" (p. 112) if 'selfhood' is to be protected and sustained. The abuse of power, cruelty, and isolation, are all found in these holy, respected surroundings. Father Conroy, when visiting the Convent, brings with him the militant nationalist feeling which the outside world was experiencing. O'Brien depicts him as the representative of a certain kind of xenophobia, an anti-foreign, anti-English expression of nationalism. His presence causes unease and creates disturbance to the sensibilities of Reverend Mother, an English woman, who for all her cool detachment feels miserably alien in such a climate. There is not only the tension resulting from the difference in nationality and temperament between these two characters, but there is also the tension set up by the patriarchal ideals of Father Conroy and the Bishop, and the essentially matriarchal and feminine world of Helen Archer.

O'Brien, again conscious of the period in which the plot is set, and drawing from her own knowledge of Laurel Hill,⁵ refers to the Gaelic League activity at the time

(p. 16), recording in her novel the attempts made in that period to restore the Irish language. O'Brien's own feelings on this political activity leading up to the 'Rising' of Easter 1916 are not detectable in the novel; however, in My Ireland (1962), there is evidence that she was, in general, uninterested in "ideologies and dogmas".⁶

Within the framework of this specific period of Irish history, O'Brien explores themes which are familiar to her work as a whole. Through the two main characters, Helen Archer and Anna, she examines the necessity for freedom. Freedom, in itself, has a new meaning in this novel; with the march of the years it has undergone a shift in significance from its definition in the novels set in the late nineteenth century. The emphasis now is on the freedom to go ones own way, to develop potential, to choose ones own role in life. Anna represents the 'new woman', the female going into the twentieth century with many more options and choices than Agnes, Marie-Rose, Caroline or Molly had. O'Brien connects historical fact with Anna's ambition for further education after school; the implementation of the Intermediate Act of 1878 granted women the right to higher education. Anna's winning of the County Scholarship and her choice of University above a 'safe job in a bank' mirrors exactly O'Brien's own circumstances in that same year. The freedom Anna craves is the opportunity to go to University and to pursue a career. Fanny in The Flower of May set in 1907 also desires further education. These

two heroines represent a new environment with new attitudes and a new role for women in this period, they reflect to a certain extent the consciousness of a growing women's movement; the suffragette cause was gaining ground at the time. Christabel Pankhurst spoke at the Rotunda in Dublin in 1910 and by 1912 Ireland had its own weekly suffragist newspaper, The Irish Citizen. Anna in the novel meets a suffragette lady on the cliffs in Clare during her summer holidays (p. 197). O'Brien employs the meeting between the two as an intimation of the changing role women would have in society when it is Anna's turn to enter the adult world.

The idea of a sisterhood is introduced here in this novel, again reflecting the energy of female solidarity in organisations in the Ireland of that period, such as the Irish Women's Franchise League (1908). Helen Archer supports Anna's wish for the freedom to pursue her own choice (as Anna's brothers were able to do), she champions Anna's cause, outwitting the patriarchal values inherent in Anna's grandmother's arguments. This idea of a sisterhood is developed more fully in The Flower of May.

The healing agent of love is a key theme in this as in all O'Brien novels. The neurotic state that can arise from lack of love and loving is explored at different levels in the cases of both heroines. The accident of the two lives coming together and its effects, underscores O'Brien's own belief in fate. The idea of fate and predestination is often obvious in her work.

Illicit love is explored in its effects in society. Through Helen Archer, the deviation of love is seen in its betrayal of family love and trust. This novel shows O'Brien utilizing the method of 'interiorisation' to a much greater degree than in The Ante Room in order to portray character and events as part of someone's experience. Helen's reaction to her father's homosexuality is basically, in moral terms, that of society at large. In private personal terms it alienates daughter from father, and associates love, for Helen, with corruption. Reflection brings Helen a judgement that O'Brien approves of; a personal moral perception of her father's 'crime' releases her from bitterness at least. In The Flower of May love between members of the same sex is handled discreetly, with no statement as to its sexual nature.

Familial love is shown here again to be intense and important, essential to the emotional growth of the individual. Religion is expressed as a refuge, while prayer and religious ceremony punctuate the narrative, creating a moral and intellectual framework for the plot. The themes of childhood and the gravity of innocence are highlighted, revealing much of O'Brien's own childhood and development. The ubiquitous themes of death and leavetaking are also present, and, as always, are seen to be a necessary element for the individual's growth. The constant inclusion of these themes is explained to some extent in O'Brien's admission that "death and departure attract me as man's brightest hopes have never done".⁷

The emotional growth of the two heroines is the main focus of the novel. They live in an almost air-tight environment; there is no awareness of seasons changing, of rain, sunshine or wind. Signs of nature are confined to stark stately elm trees lining the long walk beside the Convent. There is no heat or cold; the landscape of the novel is the personal landscape of the heroines. Only one chapter, entitled "Summer with Charlie" is different; it takes Anna away from school into the open air, beside the sea, where in this unrestricted unprotected milieu she experiences the greatest trauma of her young life. This episode has a parallel in Helen Archer's own experience when as a young girl she leaves school one afternoon to give a brief visit home. This sortie resulted in witnessing her father's homosexuality, thus traumatising the young girl, turning her life around, killing love in a loving nature. The insulation, the suspension of seasonal change, the handling of the passage of time, all contribute to a concentrated exploration of the heroines' lives within the time span of the novel.

The plot deals with Anna's schooldays from the age of six to eighteen, and by the use of flash back it also reveals episodes in Helen Archer's life from the age of eighteen, when her trauma occurred, to the present, when the novel opens. The sense of the closeness of both lives, the intermingling of experience, is cleverly handled, and facilitates the weaving of the many themes

O'Brien wished to include in this, her most personal novel.

For the first time in O'Brien's fictional world a woman is autonomous, in terms of power; Helen Archer is omnipotent, on top of the hierarchical ladder in an essentially female world. She insures freedom for Anna, giving her a chance at choices other than the traditional ones. Marriage, as in the case of Anna's parents, is again an unenviable state. Love in itself is nourishing, although romantic love is not in question. The solidarity of women, women supporting women, is the message, and is the key to thwarting patriarchal values. Education is the passport to equality and freedom, O'Brien's heroines are brave enough to grasp it.

Reverend Mother, Helen Archer

When the novel opens in 1904, Helen Archer is Reverend Mother of the French Convent, Sainte Famille in 'Mellick'. The ambience of the Convent is evoked distinctly in the opening chapter; there is ritual, chant, prayer, the incense-laden dark stain-glass intimacy of the cloistered world, where nuns and pupils are gathered on this occasion for the reception of three postulants into the Order. It is within this world of prayer, duty and obedience that Helen Archer's character is defined.

Reverend Mother enters the narrative as she observes the ceremony of reception. The reader is taken aback, and alerted, by the revelation that behind the cool impassive exterior, Reverend Mother feels "dry pity" for the lovely novice Eileen Doherty, and is unable to understand why the girl "has refused the sunny, ordinary life her face was made for" (p. 4). O'Brien goes on to examine the basis for this strange reflection from Reverend Mother, revealing in the process that the nun carries two burdens, one which she has borne alone, privately, for almost twenty-five years.

It is immediately established that Helen Archer is uneasy in her role as Reverend Mother in this Irish Convent. Without recalling any of the experiences which have obviously been instrumental in causing Helen Archer's feelings of alienation and discomfort in

Ireland, O'Brien establishes the fact early that the heroine is acutely conscious of her exile and that she has been given cause to feel so. As an English woman, educated in Belgium and head of a French Convent she is unaccepted in Nationalist Ireland. One major source of resentment is the local priest, Father Conroy, representing the prejudice and defensive peevishness which O'Brien suggests is part of the Irish nationalist personality at the time. Reverend Mother's perception of him is that he displays a "parochial conceit" which "might caricature Ireland's conception of itself". On a personal level, she sees his criticism of her and her school as "an awkward desire to counteract the menace of her foreignness" (p. 55). She suffers the priest's onslaughts and patronising sarcasm in silence, unwilling to take on what she considers his innate pique at the function of her school in an Ireland striving to be wholly and exclusively Irish. He expresses his bias obliquely, stating that "a Convent like this wields great influence - through its girls afterwards - in the world" (pp. 92-3). This attitude is echoed in the Bishop's allegation that the girls of this Convent are being misdirected; he remarks that "our young girls must be educated nationally now ... to be wives of Irishmen and to meet the changing times" (p. 92).

This criticism, O'Brien suggests, springs from resentment of foreign trespass on Irish soil, spreading foreignness supposedly, among the young and impressionable. There is also resentment and indignation

at the autonomy enjoyed by this French Convent, which is outside their jurisdiction, unlike the Irish Orders. Unable to dictate the nature of the education, the Clergy renounce the traditions of the school as "démodé" and "'exotic'" (p. 92). Helen Archer's awareness of her unacceptable Englishness is increased by the conjecture that her accent has "a deadening effect" (p. 73) on the pupils; she knows that it is mimicked and mocked behind her back. What would in the context be considered rather typical rude behaviour from young girls, is, to Mother Archer's oversensitive self-consciousness, inflated to a major and distressing affront. Her experience of Ireland has been such that, when the novel opens she is seen to be at the end of her endurance; "Ireland was impossible for her to work in, she quite simply had not the personal qualities it exacted" (p. 54). Contemporary Ireland is in fact under attack to a certain extent here, and it is felt that Mother Archer is perhaps voicing Kate O'Brien's own response to nationalist Ireland, as it expressed itself in her own day. Kate O'Brien, (who left Ireland after University) found, like Reverend Mother, that 'Ireland was impossible for her to work in'.

The theme of exile is very often pertinent to Kate O'Brien's work. In this novel it is explored from the point of a foreigner in Ireland. Exile is always catalytic in O'Brien's world; for Reverend Mother it serves initially as a harsh and painful test of endurance. Ireland's intolerance of foreignness is seen as the main element of the Irish national character at

the time, and its insidious antagonism causes Helen Archer to consider ending "this deepening exile, where she could not pitch a tent" (p. 61); she longs to be "at home, under the skies that loved her" (p. 62). The hostility comes from all sides, pupils, nuns and the local clergy; she has no ally, she is alone, isolated, and feels the danger of such loneliness. It is, she feels, negating in some way the positive strides her personality had taken over the past twenty years of prayer and meditation; she "dreaded now the restoration in her of a loneliness and mercilessness which once made her father shudder" (p. 61). She fears that "misunderstood, she was becoming incapable of understanding" (p. 61). An interior landscape unfolds gradually, revealing a troubled sad mind, threatened by a hostile and intimidating environment. O'Brien underlines the interaction of personality and place; Helen Archer, English, running a foreign institution in a country aggressively devoted to shaking off all badges of colonisation, is in a compromising situation. Ireland, in a state of flux, alive with nationalist activity, is as much unacceptably foreign to her ordered disciplined nature as she is to its anti-colonial bias. Helen Archer considers that the Irish "throve on their own psychological chaos" (p. 75), and she just did not fit in.

The overall experience of alienation is the frame in which Helen Archer's character develops. She, like Agnes in The Ante Room nurses her private misery in introverted

isolation. The pain and segregation of her exile jolts the heroine's consciousness, causing her to feel the ache of being different, being shunned and unaccepted. This awareness becomes one of the main elements in her eventual adjustment to her father's 'difference'.

This 'difference' is revealed through O'Brien's use of flashback. By employing this technique it is possible to present episodes in Helen Archer's past life which are relevant to the shaping of a personality which presents so many questions to the reader. These are answered when incidents in Reverend Mother's present life serve to recall naturally earlier events. The imagination swings from one pole of interest to the other as the reason for the nun's "weary, introverted, inexpressive conscience" (p. 75) becomes clearer and accounted for. At eighteen, it is disclosed, when Helen Archer was still at school, she witnessed her father's homosexuality. This caused almost immediate mutation and subversion of the girl's world. O'Brien explores the effect of the trauma on Helen's psyche at the time, underscoring the permanent nature of the injury to sensibility. Illicit love, explored in both Without My Cloak and The Ante Room is presented here as deviant, unnatural, sinful, harmful to society, causing complete impairment of family. The upturning of Helen Archer's life is representative of what O'Brien probably considers the effects of homosexuality on society in general. Helen's life before the trauma has all the idyllic innocence of a society unconscious of, and not willing to acknowledge, the

complete span of human nature. O'Brien describes Helen's youth in terms which verge on the overlyrical; hers was "a little girl's world of everyday sounds and smells - tasks, pleasures and impressions, hardly seen, hardly felt as they came in their time, so natural were they", she had "a deeply dreaming, cloudless growth" (p. 19). The perfection of her childhood is compounded by the relationship she enjoyed with her father; it was special, intimate, he was "beautiful", she acknowledged often, and "always with new pleasure that he was different from other men" (p. 142). The irony of the child's thoughts is realised in her discovery that the man whom she adored, who gave her, through his teaching "an individualistic, sunny access into life" (p. 142), who believed in and championed "the beauty of personal freedom" (p. 151), had betrayed her. The destruction of Helen's relationship with her father is all the more traumatic because of its unique closeness. The girl's reaction to seeing her father and his pupil Etienne embrace, is noted in sequence; first there is numbness, then, after a while "her spirit moved and spoke again", but "unrecognisably" for it was "distorted" (p. 157). Hidden self-controlled grief was let go only in the darkness of the dormitory at night, muffling her sorrow "without movement, without sob, drinking the tears" (p. 158). The scene she had witnessed would not leave her, it "glittered evilly" (p. 158) in her consciousness. She had to become "cunning" in order to hide her "frenzy" (p. 158) from her school friends. Holding "the whole

concealed shape and flame" (p. 158) of her father's life now up to scrutiny, she recognises that the 'difference' she loved in him was but the hallmark of his deviant sexuality. Helen's condemnation of her father comes from a parrot-like recitation of the dogma she had learned in religion class, she decides that "what lay around under love, under beauty ... was the flesh they preached about, the extremity of what the sin of the flesh might be" (p. 159). Dogma made no allowances for human frailty and Helen's judgement of her father is based on the conditioned sense of right and wrong in which she had been educated. O'Brien doesn't approve of Helen's judgement, and offers little hope for the sexually deviant or for the individual outside the mainstream of society. Helen, as a heroine, eventually reaches a personal ethical judgement, exercising the compassion and charity of the true Christian, arriving at real moral development by discarding orthodox and autocratic theology.

O'Brien reveals the basis for Reverend Mother's concern at the young novice Eileen Doherty abandoning "sunny ordinary life", when she conveys the premise on which Helen Archer herself entered the Convent. Helen "hated her father" (p. 159), and she was glad because hate "held her up" (p. 159) at the time of her discovery. Knowing that her father wished her to go to University and that he would be horrified if she ever entered the Convent, she decided to become a nun. The decision was not only from a desire for revenge, but also "to be out

of sight of him ... and quit of all that he had stood for" (p. 160). She went into religious life, ironically, with a "merciless heart" (p. 160).

Helen's choice to enter the Convent is of technical importance as it orders to a great extent the physical and psychological movements of the novel. O'Brien sketchily fills in other details of Reverend Mother's former life in order to hasten an understanding of the present-day state of her development. There is an acknowledgement, when the novel opens, that she does not wish to revert to her days of 'loneliness' and 'mercilessness', that she has moved on, and is in present time at a stage when she can feel somewhat detached from the experience. The trauma has radically reversed the course of her life, the imagery underlines the anarchy of the experience; it "sealed up girlhood and its pain" (p. 19) and it left her "maimed" and "limping" (p. 20). O'Brien, tracing the process by which the heroine surmounts the consequent aridness of her life, shows that in a step-by-step manner, over the years, she arrives at a personal moral stand eventually, which liberates her from bitterness.

As a nun, prayer and reflection have been healing, as suggested in the epithets that constitute the poem from which the title of the novel is taken. Helen Archer acknowledged that "only prayer, the constant, humble prayer of maturity, could repair the contempt, the cold, wild judgements, the silly, self-defence and self-dramatisation of an ignorant girl" (p. 20). This

acknowledgement is only intellectual however, for it is conveyed, that as a novice, in the midst of all such prayer and meditation, she still remained "hardened in all her defenses against herself by the sympathetic bleakness of Sainte Fontaine", the novitiate (p. 18). When she was subsequently recalled to Place des Ormes, her old school in Brussels, she "dreaded" (p. 19) returning to the place where she considered her former selves still remained in stark contrast, "a child and happy, and a girl and perilously unhappy" (p. 12). She "feared" (p. 19) to return to her father's neighbourhood. But O'Brien regards it as necessary for the heroine's moral development to confront memory; Helen had buried her past when she chose the purest way of life, rejecting the 'world' and the 'flesh'. Her life in Europe, under the maternal attention of Mère Générale caused changes; she had endeavoured "to teach herself ... a belated mercy towards humanity in general" (p. 20). She has done so to a certain degree, and has become "a successful over-disciplined nun" (p. 21). Insights have come through meditation and prayer, she arrives at an intellectual standpoint as regards love, deciding that "to run away, to take cover, to hate in blindness and luxuriously to seek vengeance in an unexplained cutting off ... was stupidity masquerading offensively before the good God" (p. 20). But on her return to Brussels, confronted by her father, she is unable to apply her fine distinctions, and "trembled now in revulsion from his once dear kisses" (p. 21). Love, as an emotion, has been negated,

associated with sins of 'the flesh', with betrayal; to Helen, her father still is "guilty and evil" (p. 22).

Back in Brussels, Helen Archer is visited constantly by her unsuspecting father who gratefully resumes his former role as instructor to his daughter. O'Brien, underlining the healing elements of even one-sided love, shows Helen to be benefiting from her reluctant interviews with her father; they are "stretching her soul", and "activating her as no other spiritual exercise had done" (p. 21). Her conditioned conscience is finding difficulty in categorising her new feelings, "Augustinian and Jesuitical doctrines of sin and grace" do not supply any answers, or at least "the answer that rang true" (p. 21). O'Brien illustrates here, as she does in many of her novels, how love is superior to the comfort of religion in providing answers to the questioning and questing conscience. Helen Archer feels the metamorphosis, recognising that her heart "was expanding again and growing warm" (p. 27), while at the same time her father's presence and its modifying influence she sees as an "impingement on her rigidity". The narrator sees it, on the other hand, as "beneficial" (p. 21).

Now, in Ireland, Helen is without the solidarity of even her father's visits, without the acceptance of the nuns who have come to understand her. Here in this climate of inhospitable coldness she longs for the familiarity of Brussels. It is with this acute feeling of intense isolation that Reverend Mother, watching the new postulants from her place in the chapel, looks across

at the little 'new girl' who is straining to see everything; their personalities make contact briefly, but fate assures that their paths will cross again. It is this fatalism and its consequences that determines the growth of both characters.

Ireland is the location where Reverend Mother regains her capacity to love, and thereby is set on the road of reaching some of her full potential as a person. O'Brien has used the backdrop of the Ireland of pre-1916 in order to explore the character of this exile, focussing on her need for love and pointing to the fact that her feeling of alienation in nationalist Ireland is the source from which she reaches out towards another human being.

It is not another adult, but a young child, that stirs, for the first time in many years, some feeling in Helen Archer's heart. Watching Anna Murphy, six years old, listening intently to Molly Redmond's recitation, she empathises with the child, identifying with her, a victim like herself, "one of a large alien body" (p. 80). She decides, again with empathy, that "the confusions created by parents for children are the most deep and dark of all" (p. 80). O'Brien underlines the dramatic aspect of the re-kindling of emotion in the nun; she "heard a storm break in her hollow heart" (p. 81) as she views the child. She is assaulted by a sensation that she hasn't felt for almost twenty five years, and she is vaguely conscious that this may be an intimation of the return of the capacity to love. Her experience as a nun

is hindered by the fact that since she was traumatised by the discovery of her father's homosexuality, she had been "afraid of ... even the love of God" (p. 24). Mother General, aware of Helen's incapacity, has told her that "God is love", but she rejected the concept, for her He is "equity, detachment, justice, purity - anything good that was not love" (p. 28). Now, seeing the fortuitous possibilities of staying with Anna, she decides, instinctively almost, that she will not return to Brussels.

From this point Reverend Mother's psychological development is defined in terms of her relationship with Anna. The focus is on the growth of love and its expression. Full development of the heroine in O'Brien's novels usually co-incides with, and is a logical result of, her arrival at a personal moral stand. Helen Archer has, over the years, proceeded to shed hate for her father and to abandon gradually through her own moral growth, the dictates of her "petty miserable brain" (p. 6), developing mercy, and foregoing arrogant judgement. Through Anna love returns, and this love is seen to soften Helen Archer's heart and to aid the growth of protest in a conscience hitherto compliant and acquiescent.

Reverend Mother takes on a new role now in the novel, one of protector of the vulnerable and defenceless Anna. The parallel with her father's concern for "'the young and the weak and the sentimental'" is obvious from the beginning of the relationship, as she assesses Anna

with the terms of reference typical of her father; he "would like this child" she decides, he would approve of "the gleam of spirit, the hint of grace, the brush of a wing unspread" (p. 82). A further alignment with her father's sensibilities comes when Anna recites the poem 'Peace' by Henry Vaughan, a poet for whom her father had a great enthusiasm all his life. The recitation brings an "irrational assault of sorrow", and memories "demanding to be faced" confound Reverend Mother. Recognising that Anna, so small in this complicated world is "young", "weak" and "sentimental", she decides to shield her, acknowledging at the same time that her own father's nature is emerging in her new unguarded self (p. 82).

Identifying with both her father and the child, 'self' is forgotten for the moment. When Anna meets her first experience of adult arrogance and injustice, Helen Archer, watching from a distance, "saw this baby in herself, herself in those tear-wet eyes" (p. 82). Anna's tears have been caused by Mother Mary Andrews's harshness. In what could be considered an apologia to her father, Reverend Mother decides that her task in Ireland will be to stand guard over this little person, to assure her the freedom she herself abandoned. In return, unconsciously, Anna helps to irrigate the "dryness" (p. 6) of the nun's sensibility.

The nature of Reverend Mother's guardianship and protection is private and covert, she "veiled it in the name of good example" (p. 102). From a distance she

watches the girl's development and "her eyes rarely fell on Anna without being satisfied by the mood, the state of mind, they saw in her" (pp. 181-2). However, she does not "seek to know her" (pp. 181), but recognises that "whatever was human in her had thrust at least one root into Irish soil" (p. 225).

When Anna returns to school after the summer holidays during which she lost her dear brother Charlie in a drowning accident, Reverend Mother responds to her grief "with love" (p. 228). Identifying yet again with Anna's situation, the loss of a chief "source of love" in the girl's life (p. 239), Reverend Mother, still reticent and guarded, prays to be "more helpful", to be more expressive in her concern for the young girl's silent sorrow. "Every twist of the young, waiting soul" (p. 234) is noted with empathy while she hangs back, unwilling to interfere, fearing that she might "manipulate" Anna's grief (p. 230). Anna's loss brings the two lives even closer, the older woman's past experience is mirrored in Anna's response to Charlie's death. The older woman's wisdom serves Anna in her need; when she comes to Reverend Mother, revealing her sadness and confusion in the privacy of the study, Reverend Mother comforts her with arguments based on Christian acceptance, attempting to quell her fears with concepts based on the faith they share rather than on any complex theories of life and death. She appeals to Anna's faith, asking her not to reason, and concludes the conversation with the first statement of love she has ventured in over

twenty years, "I have always been fonder of you than of other pupils" (p. 239). Anna lets the remark go unheeded, but the verbal acknowledgement of caring again for another human being poses serious considerations for Helen Archer. She recognises that the initial "playful pleasure" that the child gave her had now developed into real affection, that "the pleasures of affection sow responsibilities". Her role as guide and protector is intensified now, as Reverend Mother admits that these 'responsibilities' "she was glad to harvest" (p. 281).

Towards the end of the novel O'Brien ceases to focus, to any great extent, on the character of Reverend Mother, as the development of Anna's character is at this stage of prime importance. There is, however, the interjection in the narrative of the news of Reverend Mother's promotion and consequent transfer back to Brussels. Her reactions are ~~interesting~~ ^{significant}, and reveal a side to her character which was obviously submerged by her melancholy, and then by her singleminded vigilance of Anna. Predictably, she is sad at the thought of leaving Anna who is finishing school, and, whose griefs and conflicts may, in Reverend Mother's opinion, be only beginning. But there is also a sense of gratification at being appointed to the highest office in the hierarchy of the Order. O'Brien depicts, in Reverend Mother, a woman who is ambitious, who "took pleasure in the idea of going as far as it was possible to go in the life she had chosen" (p. 278). There is no passive role for her; even in the context of her life as a nun she reflects the new energy

and assertion that was being expressed by certain sections of women in the Ireland of the early twentieth century. Conscious that desire for power is an "ignoble emotion" (p. 278) she decides that in her case, she has learned "to understand power a little and to use it with care" (p. 280). O'Brien points to the new role of women in the still-patriarchal value system of this period. She conveys, through Reverend Mother, the growing independence of the female in society and the power assigned to women as they adopt new roles. Passivity has ceased almost entirely with Agnes and Marie-Rose in The Ante Room. The strong intelligent female, sometimes manipulative and stubborn, always courageous enough to take an individual moral stand against the patriarchal values of either society or Church, or both, is to be the subject of O'Brien's subsequent novels as they are examined in the chronological order of their settings.

Sisterhood, women helping women, reflecting the growing number of women's organisations at that period, is instrumental in Anna's liberation. Her grandmother, Mrs Condon, who has willingly subsidised Anna's brothers at University, insists that she should take a job in a bank. Anna has won the County Scholarship, but such academic achievement is lost on her grandmother who considers that education is 'wasted' on a girl. Reverend Mother, recognising that this is a definite impediment to Anna's freedom confronts Mrs Condon with a moral argument, "by what authority do you dispose of the life and talents of another?" (p. 258), but seeing that such

reasoning is lost on the woman, she then uses the knowledge of her weaknesses to undermine the stubbornness of the grandmother's stand. Having researched her opponent well, Reverend Mother has discovered that her 'achilles heel' is her partiality towards power, particularly hierarchical power. So when she tells Mrs Condon that the Bishop "does believe in wasting money on the academic education of women" (p. 262), that "he was delighted" at Anna's achievement and "congratulated her warmly" (p. 262), she gets the expected response. There is an immediate change of heart in Mrs Condon, and Reverend Mother knows she has won Anna her chance to pursue her talents in freedom. She has "secured time" for Anna "in which to work and think and get a glimpse here and there over the great vistas of knowledge" (p. 260). O'Brien, underlining her attitude to University as a place in which to grow as a person, shows Anna renouncing the idea of 'being' anything (p. 244) as a result of her education, education being an end in itself.

Departure, a constant theme in O'Brien's novels, is usually accompanied by re-assessment of feelings and attitudes. Reverend Mother acknowledges that she is not even "more than decently afraid" (p. 279) of her new role, as she had never been "seriously afraid ... of the spaces over which her mind had full command" (p. 280). What disturbs her is that she must leave Anna, "the one creature whom by accident she had allowed herself a little to love" (p. 281). Returning to Brussels means a

return "to graves and empty places", as her father had died while she was in Ireland. The inversion of her feelings for Brussels and Ireland is underscored at this point, recalling her former wish to return to Brussels and leave the inclement environment that she found in nationalist Ireland. Now, departure from Anna means "undisciplined pain" for the 'disciplined' nun, as feeling invades her defensiveness, and "she who hardly tolerated feeling found its touch intolerable" (p. 280). She acknowledges that her work in Ireland is complete anyhow, that her "sentinelship" (p. 280) over Anna is ended, that "all that could be done was done" (p. 281). The clipped syllables of her previous admission are absent when Reverend Mother admits to the bemused Anna that she had been her "very dear child, and always will be" (p. 284).

Freedom to grow is the theme as Reverend Mother gives Anna her last counsel; "spend your gifts" (p. 283) she advises, as she reflects, well satisfied with her work, that Anna has been "set free to be herself" (p. 281). Freedom for Reverend Mother herself is assured on her arrival at a personal moral stand regarding her father's 'sin' which still troubles her greatly. Separating the deed from the doer, acknowledging that while hating sin we must love the sinner, she answers the challenge of love. Reverend Mother rejects the idea of judgement, renouncing to a certain extent the theological dogma that has informed her conscience over many years. Her private protest is heard in her exhortation to Anna,

"be a judge of your own soul; but never for a second ... set up as judge of another" (p. 284). The resolution of her own dilemma, the liberation of both herself and Anna, brings Reverend Mother's story to a celebratory end. She has grown from a tragic heroine to a character of great moral stature, from passivity to that of directing the course of Anna's life. However, there remains recorded in the narrative the psychological and moral consequences of the 'sin'. O'Brien has acknowledged, as she does in many of her novels, that the gravity of sin is seen in its consequences. Helen Archer's stunted emotional growth, her neurotic reaction to the visual impact of her father's deviation is conceded, and her mother's willing surrender to death is witness to the discord such deviation caused in the family, in society.

At the end of the novel it is clear that Reverend Mother's life will go forward in a positive way now, that she will fulfill all the duties of her new office with skill and excellence. Her private dilemma has been eased as much as it can be for the moment. The Christian message is received and expressed; there is love, forgiveness and charity, there is a sense that the sacrifice of one individual has served to give life to another.

Anna

In her depiction of Anna Murphy Kate O'Brien explores the sensitive, imaginative and psychological areas of childhood. She introduces the concept of the child as victim, the child as artist, and the child as healer. But the freeing of the girl, when the time comes, to go her own way, is the culmination of O'Brien's intention for Anna.

There are definite stages in Anna's life in the novel, structured and defined by reference to her age. Within these stages of development O'Brien examines certain events in the girl's life which are relevant to the themes explored through Anna's portrayal.

Anna is introduced to the reader through Reverend Mother's perception. What strikes Helen Archer immediately is Anna's interest in the proceedings of the novices' reception, "as if she is memorising the whole affair, for critical purposes" (p. 5). Anna is six years old and is at boarding school. The similarity of Anna to Stephen Dedalus is obvious from early on; the Joycean register protrudes in the prose, connecting the artistic potential of Anna and Stephen and creating a moral and intellectual framework for the development of Anna's character. Anna, like Stephen, has been handed over to educators before the age of seven. Like Stephen, words are imposed on Anna from without, and through them she, also, gets a sense of the real world. Anna's imaginative

response to sound patterns is underlined, "Ansi soit-il" she considers a "very bright sound, like a bugle in a street" (p. 34). "Hottentot" (p. 32) she repeats to herself, mesmerized by the implications of its sound, Molly Redmond's face "made her think of doors banging, or candles going out on a windy night" (p. 33). Her fascination with the rhythms of "no cross no crown" (p. 40), her ponderance on the word "you - funny" (sic) (p. 87), her curiosity about the word "adultery" (p. 94) and her love of poetry - all display an innate sensitivity to words, their shapes, colours and inflections.

Anna is at boarding school because her father drinks too much, also because it has been a tradition in the family for the girls to go to Sainte Famille; Anna's mother and grandmother are 'old girls'. Although the family fortunes had failed somewhat due to her father's reckless spending, Anna followed the female line into this cornerstone of middle class education for ladies in 'Mellick'. Considered "quite a little prodigy" (p. 43) by Mother Agatha and petted by most as she is by far the youngest boarder, Anna settles at school quite well. Kate O'Brien recalls her own experience of Laurel Hill when she describes Anna's carefree unregimented life; she "was not a prisoner" (p. 49) and, because she was so little, she is free to roam and explore. Anna's "curiosity ... was stretched and gratified" (p. 50) in her new environment. O'Brien's own admiration for, and approval of the school is apparent in her appraisal of Anna's first years there; she states that she had "the

liberal education of a free lance" (p. 97).

In 1906 Anna is eight and a half, and in her third year at school. She is now in 'second prep' and showing much promise as a student. O'Brien underlines the education of the artist; two years of learning and reciting poems "had filled her head with words and suggestions she liked" (p. 97). Her precociousness in the classroom is noted by all, she is academically two years ahead of her peers and her thirst for knowledge is satiated only by reading voraciously. She is different from others in that she is better, consequently, to upholders of mediocrity she is earmarked for victimisation. For a schoolgirl "to distinguish herself in any way" is to earn the wrath of the envious Mother Mary Andrew. Anna becomes "a victim" (p. 100); like Stephen Dedalus she is subject to unreasonable and vicious adult authority. Anna's victimisation comes when she is denied the coveted honour of 'emulation' which she has earned by receiving good marks. O'Brien delineates the nature of Anna's ordeal in a graphic description of the scene, when just before bed-time she is summoned by the nun. Aghast and indignant she sees her neat French test for which she has been awarded 75%, slashed with a red pen, and on top, the original mark is replaced by "a big red 0" (p. 106). The premise on which the nun bases her re-marking is unjust and seen by Anna to be so. The misuse of power is highlighted here in its abuse of the child's vulnerable position. In the description of Anna's distress afterwards (pp. 108-9) the reader's

sympathy and outrage are engaged. Anna, who has a clear and uncluttered sense of right and wrong, is devastated by the injustice. O'Brien indicates that Anna is a victim of an omnipotent adult world, and that like Stephen Dedalus when he was "pandied" for breaking his glasses accidentally on the cinder path,⁷ it taught her contempt, she "was never to unlearn the contempt it taught her - her first contempt for a fellow creature" (p. 110). This episode heralds Anna's emergence into the complex rules of a world she did not understand; her wisdom however gives her insight, Anna "knew that she was in the grip of omnipotence" (p. 107) and instinctively adopts the weapons of the animal world. She becomes "defensive and cunning" (p. 112), again suggesting Stephen Dedalus who adopts "silence, exile and cunning" as the "only arms" for his defense.⁸

Anna's growing isolation has its roots in this incident; she plunges into indiscriminate reading, a practice which "made her unsociable and absent-minded towards other children". O'Brien points to the damaging effect the incident has on the psyche of the sensitive child, suggesting that Anna's increasing detachment from her peers is, to a great extent a result of "the shock to her confidence which had been inflicted by Mother Mary Andrew", but also due to Anna's development as an artist. Neither in Joyce nor here does an artistic temperament lend itself to mainstream interests or friendships. Anna's preoccupation with words, "their shapes and lengths, their possibilities of breaking into other

words, or into pairs and groups of letters" is her "constant amusement". The narrator points to Anna's difference from her peer group, stating "as other children played with paper dolls or marbles, she liked to play private games with words" (p. 112).

The scope and random nature of Anna's reading indicates the multifarious nature of the impressions she is absorbing; at ten she is reading The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Stricklands Lives of the Queens of England, the poetry of Pope and Milton, plus Macaulay's Essays. Anna's habit "gave her a larger vocabulary than her classmates" and is seen to contribute to further alienation from the natural and usual intercourse which accompanies school life. Her linguistic superiority only "made her somewhat unpopular, and stressed her detachment". The nourishment and growth of the artist always has its price in O'Brien's novels; in Anna's case it "held her back somewhat from normal friendships" (p. 114).

Anna is immune to, and unaffected by this increasing 'detachment', suggesting that her nature is preparing for the isolation an artist must necessarily settle for, but also because her emotional life is secure in her relationship with her young brother Charlie. Anna up to this, "never felt inclined to substitute anyone else for Charlie" (p. 114). Kate O'Brien, in this book, as in Without My Cloak and The Ante Room, charts the depth of familial love. In portraying the innocent and adoring nature of Anna's love for her brother, and by indicating

that this love is the cornerstone of the girl's existence, O'Brien prepares the reader for the extent and intensity of the tragedy when this source of love is cut off by Charlie's death. In the meantime, Anna feels secure; as long as she has home and Charlie she "did not perceive that she was different from others in having no 'special friend'" (p. 114).

Anna, as yet, doesn't suffer any direct antagonism from her peers, they are still too young to attack her difference, to put labels on her detachment, to feel threatened by her remoteness. They leave her to herself and don't seek her company. Her world however is threatened by a campaign launched by the de la Pole children against any pupils hiding the fact that they were not, strictly, belonging to Sainte Famille, that they were belonging to that new 'breed' the nouveau riche. O'Brien illustrates the way in which the concerns of the wider world are expressed in this small contracted world, focussing in this case on the break-down of the middleclass, the demise of 'old families', and the rise of the moneyed in society. Anna, worried that Ursula de la Pole will research her family, is relieved to learn that she has passed the test, as she lives in a house called 'Castle Tory', and that she is regarded as truly belonging to Sainte Famille. Ursula announces in Anna's favour, "her grandmother was at Sainte Famille, you know - not just her mother", an announcement which "excited awe among her friends" (p. 120). Anna learns quickly "the principles of school snobbery" (p. 117), but "was

not sure how her own parents would stand up to the tests" of Ursula's strict terms of reference, for "she had noted with anxiety that Daddy did not wear spats on Sunday, or stand up every time Mother did" (pp. 119-20). Anna's own reference is "the novels of Florence Montgomery and Rosa Mulholland", and from those she is convinced that she doesn't measure up to Ursula de la Pole's exactions; "Mother didn't wear a tea gown in the afternoon, and she didn't ring a bell if coal had to be put on the fire" (p. 120). The narrative voice treats Anna's naïvety with all seriousness; there is no amused or patronising inflection when it states that she "had begun to fear that the true facts about her pedigree and her address could not possibly satisfy the de la Poles" (p. 121).

These social failings of Anna^{are} all made public sooner than she speculated when Molly Redmond is attacked by the de la Poles in a verbal assault directed at her breeding, family and class. The episode recalls the martyrdom scene in Portrait of an Artist when Stephen is likewise assaulted in Clonliffe Road. Joyce refers to it as a "malignant episode"⁹ in so far as it permanently affects Stephen. The Molly Redmond episode is very significant in this novel as it signifies a very important step in Anna's development. It has been rumoured that Molly Redmond has had an "'unfortunate' upbringing"; there is the question of her "'class'" (p. 116) which puzzles Anna who considers that Molly "had all the requisite splendours" (p. 121), these being a good address, tennis court and a croquet lawn. Anna is unaware of the

subtleties of 'class'; breeding is what the declining landed and titled middle classes are now using as social security, a guarantee to their self-esteem and a levee to their ebbing feelings of superiority. It is discovered that Molly Redmond is, indeed, nouveau riche, her father being "just a very common man - a bookie" (p. 122), which Ursula de la Pole announces is "'an impossible thing to be, worse than having a public-house even'" (p. 122). When Molly is attacked viciously in the school grounds, with her father's occupation and her mother's presumed alcoholism hurled at her over the heads of the watching youngsters, "Anna winced", her "heart was bursting" (p. 123) as she recognises much of the words being used. She hears "legal separation", "drunk", and realises "they were both in her family; both these things were known, and mentioned, in Castle Tory" (p. 124). All is only yet impression on Anna's awakening understanding to the adult world, but she decides that "perhaps she was the only one in Second Rec. who was in a position to understand the true painfulness of this quarrel" (p. 131) and she heroically flings herself in front of Molly, as a shield against Ursula's hurtful words. With tears choking her she aligns herself with the shamed and wounded girl, crying that her father gets drunk, and that she heard her parents say it was too late for a legal separation (p. 132). Anna's act of generosity, her courage in taking the risk of discrediting herself in the eyes of Ursula whose opinions hold sway, engages the reader's admiration. The entire episode explores social codes,

prejudice, apartheid of a kind, the authorial voice condemns Ursula's actions and raises Anna to the stature of heroine. Anna takes a moral stand, the developing artist is seen to care, to be involved actively with Mollys' cause, to stand up and 'be counted'.

In 1912, Anna is fourteen. Isolation from her peer group has even increased now. Her "detachment from the personalities of school" (p. 171) is noted by her classmates and they resent it. She is accused of "cockiness", "conceit", and is regarded as Reverend Mother's pet, a show off and "an innocent" (p. 171). The girl learns the skills of defence, she has "learned not to weep as her attackers wanted her to, and in her turn endeavoured to give as good as she got" (p. 171). O'Brien suggests that Anna's non-participation with school friends indicates a finely tuned sensibility, "books and her own thoughts" are her preference to people. She has not got the adolescent propensity for what is known as 'schwärmerei', "she simply did not feel these things" (p. 171). The narrator emphasises the fact that Anna did not suffer from her isolation; home and Charlie are still the sources of her emotional life, any attachments she made at school "arose from words, words read or spoken or sung" (p. 172).

In adolescence, school has taken on a new meaning for Anna; now it is an escape "from anxieties she could not define" (p. 172). Life at Castle Tory is becoming complicated as Anna's understanding of her family's problems grows. Emotional dependence on Charlie's

friendship increases as her parents become more involved in their own problems. Anna's growing-up process is accompanied by the growing awareness of the reality of her life, her parents' unhappiness, and also their lack of money. Their usual holiday at Doon Point is subsidised by Anna's grandmother; Anna had to "accept uncertainty at last, and look ahead at facts sometimes with wider-opened, adolescent eyes" (p. 195). The awakening to the 'uncertainty' of her life is expressed in her response to the haven of her childhood summers, Doon Point. Now, in her fifteenth year, she feels the place has changed; arriving there for her summer holiday she gets the feeling that the place is "subject to sadness", Anna's finely tuned sensibility detects that this sadness is "not the brief disappointments and hurts of everyday which, she knew, were everywhere - but the undefined yet increasingly perceptible sadness of life beyond childhood" (p. 196). She is visited by intimations of the sadness which she is about to encounter. Doon Point is no longer the automatic carefree respite of her childhood, this year the family is here as "granny's guests" (p. 195), her father has refused to visit, to acknowledge the charity, and Anna decides that Doon Point is "as much a source of trouble and anger" (p. 196) now as all other realities.

The reality of her own situation begins to dawn on Anna at this point; she "was learning ... that liberty to pursue life can be withheld or made difficult" by the omnipotent adult world. Aware of some area in her nature

that is waiting for expression, she, like Stephen Dedalus desires freedom in order to accomplish what she feels she is ordained to do. Anna realises now that "if a girl sees liberty as the greatest of all desirables, she (like Stephen) "will have to spin it out of herself, as a spider its web - her self - made snare in which to catch Anna did not yet know what" (p. 199). The questions directed at Anna as to what "she wants to be" are met with vague notions, changeable decisions, "foolish self-dramatisations" (p. 208). There is the suggestion that she wishes "to discover the mode of life or of art"¹⁰ where she can express herself in "unfettered freedom". O'Brien underscores the "non serviam" allusion, as Anna in her "cunning" decides that "what you had to do was play for time ... to build a high fence about the precious distant freehold, your own future, which you could as yet neither see nor attempt to describe" (p. 208). During her summer at Doon Point, she and Charlie have long conversations with Miss Robertson who had been jailed during the suffragette movement. She speaks of 'freedom' to Anna, and the struggle that one has to undergo to attain it. Anna absorbs Miss Robertson's words, aware in a new way that "it was well to be warned, it was well to have noticed in time that liberty was precious, it was well to have got to know a suffragette" (p. 199).

Anna's preoccupation with the pursuit of liberty is soon abandoned when her brother Charlie dies in a drowning accident at Doon Point. O'Brien allows Anna to

spend her initial grief off stage, as it were. The reader is excluded from the personal and private sorrow and horror Anna must have experienced. Back at school, she engages our sympathy through the perception of the one who cares most, Reverend Mother, who notes her dark burning eyes, her long pale face, hollow cheeks, signs of a "violent disturbance of the individual" (p. 227). Anna, deprived of the healing effects of sleep by the repetition of horrifying nightmares and persistent sleepwalking, is, in Reverend Mother's opinion, subject to "a crisis sustained perilously long" (p. 228). Anna's suffering is conveyed through Reverend Mother's close watchfulness of the girl, her "protection at long range" (p. 230). She notes "the struggling agony in the girl's face" (p. 231) as she pleads to remain in school for Christmas. Anna's eyes "full of helpless pain" bear witness to the horror of her recurrent dream of Charlie's drowning; "I think of him terrified and alone, wanting to live" (p. 237) she tells Reverend Mother. O'Brien emphasises that Anna's loss is not only of a brother but "the loss of a chief source of love" (p. 239). Parental love is not there for the girl, she is alone, for her father and mother "had no time or instinct left for more than perfunctory intimations of parental feeling". The isolation of Anna is stated again and again, "Anna had drawn the warmth of life from Charlie" and she is now alone in her grief; "the one warm love that could have comforted her was the love of her brother for whom she grieved" (p. 239). All this driving home of the point is

unnecessary; what it does is, it creates a kind of incantation of grief, suspending the narrative plot line for the moment in the stasis of Anna's pain. There is then no more reference to Anna's loss, there is only the reference to how she has changed; "from being a good worker at her lessons she had become an avid, almost a brutal one"; her "new defenses of reserve" (p. 237) compounding her alienation from her peer group.

Anna's work pays off, she passes the Matric and wins the County Scholarship. O'Brien sees education as a metaphor for liberty and choice, this she explores more fully in another novel, The Flower of May, set in 1907. Anna's wish to go to University now takes on new definitions, she sees it as an "escape from grief, and direction in some sense, of her own future" (p. 242). She regards her examinations as "an obstacle race to the unknown" (p. 266), University is "the only track she could see", it attracts her, as she sees that "it ended in emptiness, on a wide horizon" (p. 266).

But Anna, unlike Stephen Dedalus, experiences a specifically female quandary in relation to her desire for freedom and for further education. She, unlike him, is dependent on a patriarchal value system which still views education for girls as 'waste'. Stephen has no struggle in order to be allowed take up his University Scholarship. The attempts of the adult world to thwart Anna's wishes are introduced as a theme here, but also point to a general attitude in Ireland, experienced by O'Brien herself, towards females going on to University.

Anna's grandmother wishes her to take a job in a bank, a 'good job'. Feeling the presence of an undefined talent Anna instinctively craves the freedom which she surmises is necessary for its expression. The suggestion of a 'generation gap' is seen here as is the gap between the expectations for male and female siblings. Mrs Condon, Anna's grandmother, willing to support Anna's brother at University, makes quite clear her opinion of Anna's proposed University career; "I disapprove of money wasted on the academic education of girls" (p. 256) is her declaration to Reverend Mother. This deliberately stereotyped response serves here as social satire.

With Reverend Mother's intervention Anna gets her chance at the liberty she craves. In her last days at school she receives an intimation of what her vocation in life will be. Pilar, a class mate, exasperated by the complexity of the poem Lycidas, calls on Anna for help, at which point Anna undergoes what can be termed an 'epiphany'; Pilar is transformed in a 'moment of insight', from being a rather stupid, "foolish school girl" (p. 271) into something elegiac, with "lustrous potentiality" (p. 272). There is a "translation of the ordinary" for Anna, as Pilar becomes "a motive in art" (p. 272).

The end of the novel looks to the future with optimism. Anna is "for life" (p. 281), she has experienced "a plane of perception which was strange to her, and which during its visitation she did not understand but could only receive delightedly ... as if

she had been waiting for the lead it was to give" (p. 271).

Anna has broken moulds in the world of Kate O'Brien. Her role in life will, presumably, be quite different to that of Marie-Rose or Agnes, Molly or Caroline. Anna will achieve personal fulfillment in her chosen path. It is suggested that in this new changing Ireland the female will have choices, and will have functions other than those in the domestic environment. Anna, taking her place with her male counterparts at University, gives a new dimension to the O'Brien heroine which is sustained as the ideal prototype in the remainder of her novels, in the chronological sequence of their settings. Fanny, in The Flower of May, the next novel, follows on from Anna in so far as she also craves education, seeing it as the gateway to personal and economic freedom. The Land of Spices examines the psychological states of its heroines but it also underlines the new roles for women in an Ireland that is gradually granting concessions, and giving way to militant female solidarity.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLOWER OF MAY

INTRODUCTION

The title of the novel refers to the heroine Fanny, and is taken from the song entitled The Gentle Maiden. In the lyric, the virtues of the 'maiden' are extolled; she is pure, fair and gentle. In her father's eyes, Fanny fits into this picture, she is the epitome of all these qualities. Given that O'Brien's heroines are mostly strong and morally brave females it is probable that the title is used ironically, challenging this patriarchal perception of the young girl.

The heroine is placed in the Ireland of 1907; the novel spans eight months. Fanny Morrow shares the experience of Ireland in the early twentieth century with Anna Murphy and Helen Archer, but the landscape differs. In this novel O'Brien abandons the introspective world of Helen Archer and the confined artificial world of the Convent, and lets her heroine develop in the outside world with its variety of experiences. The heroine has a relatively carefree youth, and has the freedom to travel in Europe without any sense of fuss or restriction; she flits from Dublin to Belgium, to Italy, and then to Clare, with ease and competence. Fanny is sophisticated, well educated, and is enjoying much more freedom than any

of the heroines of the novels set in the earlier periods. The absence of interiorizing is apt here, for the heroine's personality does not display any ruminative nor meditative side to it. There is no trauma or suffering complicating Fanny's relationship with her world; in this she is different from Molly, Caroline, Agnes and Helen Archer. Fanny is single, intelligent, and looking out on the world with expectancy and optimism.

The novel follows on from The Land of Spices in so far as it deals more fully with the social disintegration referred to in that novel. The Flower of May charts the decline of the business world in the context of the old established concerns, and points to the new trends in the economic and social life of the Catholic urban middle class. The novel also underlines the reality, the consequences, of the fall of family dynasties, contrasting their present position with the golden age they enjoyed in the nineteenth century as illustrated in Without My Cloak and The Ante Room. Fanny's father, Joseph Marrow, is "head of a wine-shipping firm which his grandfather had founded in 1830, and which in the lifetime of its founder and of Joseph's father, had held its place creditably among the best of such firms in Dublin" (p. 18). The narrative voice is quite emphatic as to the reasons for the decline of this family business. Taking the Morrows as an example, it is pointed out that the failing fortune of family-run business dynasties is due to the decrease in business sense, in the energy and motivation of the sons who had

the business handed to them, rather than to any decrease in market or demand. Joseph Morrow "was lazier and less shrewd than his immediate forebears had been", and although his business "sentimentally ... meant much to him" (p. 18), the Morrow name "was no longer as sound in business as a business name should be" (p. 19).

O'Brien seems intent in completing some unfinished business as it were, when, twelve years after the publication of The Land of Spices she reverts to the same period, underlining and exploring the attitudes of women at this period to higher education, underscoring the agitation at the time, and the debate, leading to the establishment of the National University of Ireland with its constituent Colleges in Cork, Galway and Dublin, in 1909. Fanny expresses the "intellectual ferment"¹ at the time; her dominant wish is to go to University. Anna, in The Land of Spices has an artistic vocation, and regards University as a place where, as well as getting further education, she can 'mark time' until her talent is defined. In The Flower of May education is considered not only a passport to freedom but is an essential as well as an ideal for the intelligent and academic 'new' female represented by Fanny. The novel is further linked with The Land of Spices in the use of the Place des Ormes, where the familiar Catherine Mandel is Mère Générale. The nature and ethos of Fanny's schooling are already familiar, and O'Brien, by tracing Fanny's life after school, gives some suggestion as to what Helen Archer possibly missed when she went straight to the

novitiate. Fanny does all the travelling in Europe that Helen's father had planned for her, and she eventually goes on to University which had been the young Helen's plan also. But the overall portrayal of Fanny in the Ireland of 1907 represents the 'new' female's response to the patriarchal ethos of the time, and to the emerging climate of challenge inculcated by the now-audible voice of the Women's Movement.

Fanny lives in Dublin, at Mespil Road, an address with which Kate O'Brien was familiar, as her 'Aunt Hickey' lived there. This is one of the rare times that the author abandons 'Mellick' in her Irish novels. For Julia, Clare is still 'home' (p. 23); the pull of home and childhood is continued here as a theme, echoing both Marie-Rose's attachment to Roseholm and Helen Archer's wish to be back "under the skies that loved her". The theme of death and departure are in this novel again, contributing to the heroine's development, but also in the context of the necessity to die 'at home'. Reynolds points to the author's own sentiment regarding this concept, when she refers to the fact that O'Brien "used to say that one of the pleasures of living in Roundstone was the thought of being buried in the cemetery at Dogs Bay".²

The social status of the main characters is established in the first pages of the narrative, and with great deliberation. The emphasis on their place in society, on their breeding, religion, and business activities, are all catalogued and underlined to the

point of tediousness. O'Brien seems over-anxious to drive home the relevance of the socio-historical facet of the novel, creating a definite framework of time and place, and a climate in which she can chart her heroine's efforts to gain her liberty. There is a contraction of grandeur here in comparison with what the reader has come to expect of Ireland's middle classes, and of the merchant princes of the cities. There is no big house, no manifestation of wealth, and O'Brien emphasises the straitened economic circumstances of the Morrows when she refers to the fact that their daughter Lilian's trousseau had exhausted their resources, and that there was no money to subsidise Fanny's education any longer (p. 35).

As is suggested in The Land of Spices, breeding is now substituting for any display of wealth in middle-class Ireland, out of expediency, in order to differentiate between the 'new' middle class, the nouveau riche, and those who belong in that class by birth. The O'Connors, who had made a lot of money in auctioneering, "respected more that they would ever admit" the Morrow name, and "its place among safely accepted Dublin names". They did not object when their son Michael chose a Morrow for his wife; they saw "social advantage" in the marriage although Lilian Morrow brought their son "nothing but her beauty, her European education and some exquisite household linen and old lace", all, which the O'Connors considered to be "assets" (p. 19). O'Brien pits breeding against wealth in The Land of Spices, and, rather than tip the scales to either side, she offers,

instead, qualities such as bravery, talent, intelligence and kindness as the worthwhile attributes of the individual. In this novel she displays an equally dismissive attitude to class, and in fact does, to a certain extent, take sides when she shows that the veneer of Lilian's good breeding and sophistication overlays disloyalty and egotism. The wealthy and suave André-Marie turns out to be the villain of the novel. Bill Morrow, well bred and well educated, is portrayed as an obnoxious ungentlemanly reprobate, while his wife Kitty who had been considered his inferior, - from the "small-shopkeeping element" (p. 15), is depicted as ladylike and wise.

The unit of the family is seen here, with the inevitable expectations of its members, to generate role-playing, which in turn necessitates compromise. Compromise never brings happiness in O'Brien's world; she does not regard it as an admirable arrangement, seeing it often as an immolation, a negation of the 'self'. It is, however, at most times a temporary necessity. O'Brien underlines how such an accommodation prevents personal growth, creating stultifying bitterness and confusion. Julia Morrow's sacrifice of 'home' for marriage has its effects on her psyche, echoing Marie-Rose's situation in The Ante Room. The family as a distortion of loving sustenance is a theme in this novel, as it is in most; operating along patriarchal lines, it undermines the heroine's desire for freedom. The patriarchal argument in this novel is similar to that of The Land of Spices, a

girl does not need third level education, it is wasted on her. Fanny's freedom is curtailed also by her father's secret and selfish love for her. Reminiscent of Anthony Considine's love for his son in Without My Cloak, this love is not strictly paternal. Her father "adored" her (p. 15), and although he did not question the basis for this possessive jealous love, on the day of the wedding he is forced to admit to himself, "in nervous exhilaration, how glad he was that Fanny was to-day the bridesmaid, not the bride" (p. 16). O'Brien underlines the complexity of familial love in all her novels, here it is tinged with some deviance, as is suggested in the fact that Joseph

did not see ... that Fanny was to his ageing, watchful eye what her mother had been once to his illusion. ... He would have sworn that his first and last love was his wife, and after her in equality the fruits of her womb; but this was not so (pp. 15-16).

Fanny, victim of patriarchal demands, must cut short her education now to "be at hand for her father's comfort", and "to do as her father willed" (p. 36). O'Brien points to the puppet-like existence of Fanny, similar to that of her friend Lucille; parent-child relationships are illuminated in the novel through the two girls, supplying a thematic link with The Land of Spices and with the two nineteenth century novels. Only in That Lady is there a beautiful nurturing relationship between parent and child, otherwise what is conveyed is an intricate and complicated pattern of emotion, bonds, expectations and

demands, culminating in frustration, disappointment, and hurt. The heroine must transcend these ties in order to attain personal liberty.

Taking up the theme of education as a means to liberation, O'Brien also sees it as a method of gaining monetary independence, thus eliminating the need for dependence on parental resources. O'Brien conveys the necessity for the individual, especially the female, to stand in the world on her own terms. In 1907 this seems possible, and so is put forward ^{by O'Brien} as the ideal for any middle class girl. Caroline, Molly and Marie-Rose depend on their husbands and on their married state for both sustenance and status. The new possibilities offered by third level education such as a career, produces a new type of female, with new expectations and aspirations. Emphasizing the tension between the older and younger generations as she does in The Land of Spices, O'Brien draws on the bi-focal perspective in Ireland in the early nineteenth hundreds. The older generation held to their traditional attitudes, confident of their worth, seeing them confirmed in their Church. The popular pamphlet issued by the Catholic Truth Society in 1905, carries an article by the Bishop of Ross stating that "it can hardly be wise that girls should devote years of study and labour to the same course of higher education as is followed by boys", continuing with the proposition that it is not "in accordance with the Christian spirit that women should cast off their gentleness and modesty - those sweet handmaids of womankind - and enter into

competition with men in the professions, commerce, and clerky work".³ On the opposite side were the attitudes of the young, inspired by the contribution being made by women in all areas of Irish life at the time. Lady Gregory was active in the Irish Theatre at this period, Alice Stopford-Green had published her history, The Making of Ireland and its Undoing, and, more relevant to aspiring young academics, Mary Hayden had won fame in being granted the Junior Fellowship,^(a) (but was not allowed lecture in history, as a male winner would have been). Hannah Sheehy took her bachelors degree in French, winning the Gold Medal,^(b) she subsequently founded the Women's Franchise League with Margaret Cousins in 1908, while Agnes Farrelly won fame also in becoming Professor of Irish Poetry.^(c) Fanny, the 'new generation' Irish woman begins to speak with a protesting voice, wishing to join the ranks of contemporary Irish women achievers in the academic field. She, like Anna in The Land of Spices, but with more defined motivation, displays a 'non serviam' defiance in the face of the manipulative adult/patriarchal world.

As Kate O'Brien's world is essentially concerned with the nature of Irish Society, religion is always a major consideration. The Morrow's commitment to their Church is illustrated in an extended exposition of the importance of his religion in Joseph's life. His response to his Church is sustained by a deep concern for the maintenance of tradition and custom as much as from

(a) At the Royal University in Dublin, later held Professorship of History at U.C.D.

(b) At the Royal University, Dublin. This was the award for highest marks and performance in the subject.

(c) At the Royal University, Dublin.

"the accident of habit" (p. 9). His is an automatic and non reflective involvement,

he had been baptised, confirmed and married in St. Mary's Church; he had brought each of his six children to be christened there; he had attended its eleven o'clock Mass on almost every Sunday of fifty years; he confessed his sins there once a month, made his Easter duty there, and paid his dues to its priests (p. 9).

The non-spiritual nature of this man's observance of his Catholicism is contrasted in the responses of both his wife and daughter Fanny. Neither can accommodate the nature of organised religion in their lives as they strive for a more personal spiritual communication. O'Brien illustrates how the exterior display of religiosity can hide prejudice. The episode concerning Lady Rawlinson is used to illustrate this, but is given tongue-in-cheek treatment as O'Brien humourously describes how James O'Connor, uncle of the groom, much inebriated from his celebrations, declares to Joseph Morrow, on noticing that Lady Rawlinson, another guest at the wedding, had gone home, "I can breathe easier in your house, now that old-pervert is out of it". He goes on to define what he means by 'pervert', explaining that

she was a Catholic lady ... properly educated by the Sisters of the Holy Child in England. But she married the late Sir Stanley Rawlinson in St. Patrick's Cathedral of this city, sir - a Protestant place of worship, as you may know? That is who she is, and why she is a pervert (p. 26).

The Morrow's reaction to his outburst is one of faintly amused and patronising tolerance until, displeased with

the lack of reaction, James O'Connor announces that Sir Stanley "was a very prominent freemason" (p. 27). The incident at this stage is treated in farcical terms by O'Brien as she employs the register used by Dickens in The Pickwick Papers, recalling the incident when Mr Pickwick falls on the ice;⁵ Aunt Edith Morrow gave a little screech on hearing the word 'Freemason', "'oh no Mr O'Connor', she gasped, 'oh no - not that!' Others of the ladies screeched also 'A freemason?' they cried together, from sharp to very flat'" (p. 27). The satirical tone of the writing, the poking fun at the moral rectitude of the ladies echoes the reaction of the aunts in Without My Cloak when Denis announces that he is Christina's lover. Lady Rawlinson's "act of public apostasy" (p. 27) continues to be discussed until Julia "who was devout" attempts to intervene, only to be overruled by Joseph who "was no less devout", and moreover, "he was the master of this house, where he expected to hear no dictation from anyone else on any law whatever" (p. 28). The episode ends there having served as a complete exposé of the social and religious claims of the middle class merchant family of the period. O'Brien's own perception of them is evident in the tone of her writing.

The minor characters play important parts in this novel in so far as the heroine's relationship with them shapes her life. Unlike Agnes in The Ante Room or Helen Archer and Anna in The Land of Spices, Fanny lives in a world of constant social intercourse; there are sisters,

little brothers, aunts, relations and friends. These secondary characters also supply colour, interest, and prop up the idea of a patriarchal value-system with which the heroine is forced to struggle in her efforts to have choices as to the development of her own life.

Fanny is presented as an individual who has rejected the main elements of Irish society; she expresses a distaste for marriage, and has abandoned the practice of her religion. Her sights are set on a farther horizon than the one she is forced to settle for at the moment. She and Lucille dream of going to the Sorbonne, to satisfy the thirst for education that is the motivating force in their lives. There is much autobiographical detail in O'Brien's portrayal of Fanny. She depicts Fanny's love for her friend Lucille as being nurturing and positive, enhancing the lives of the girls, causing no pain. The suggestion of a lesbian dimension to the relationship and the idealisation of love between women rather than of marriage, points up O'Brien's own preference for relationships with women. She shows Fanny and Lucille sharing a romantic love which brings no betrayal, or calls for no compromise. The acceptance by all the girls' relations of this concentrated and exclusive relationship detracts from what seems to be the prohibitive aspect of it in the context of acceptable friendship, and the tender and erotic moments are witnessed only by the omniscient narrator. Fanny's rejection of the practice of her religion has its origins in O'Brien's own renunciation of organised Catholic

practise. The suggestion that Fanny's talent is literary underscores the parallel between character and author.

O'Brien thoroughly approves of Fanny Morrow. She leaves school to take her place in life, but rejects the mainstream. Fanny is not an assertive, aggressive or manipulative female who wants her own way; she merely possesses an independent mind and a personal moral and ethical response to her milieu. She rejects institutionalisation which she sees as a feature of her country, the pigeon-holing of the individual to support the patriarchal status quo. She has the personal qualities of an O'Brien heroine, and, although she does not get the opportunity to display them to any extent, as 'sisterhood' intervenes and rescues her from the struggle, it is clear that they are already quite defined in her personality.

Travel is introduced here as a motif which transpires to be a catalytic experience for the heroine; encounter with European cities has a metamorphic effect, as does the freedom from country and family. The travel motif is extended and explored more fully in Mary Lavelle; in that novel the entire development of the heroine pivots on her experience of another country. Travel is no longer associated with forced emigration as it is in Without My Cloak, nor indeed with school. By 1907 it is quite acceptable that a young lady, properly chaperoned, may benefit from the experience of other cultures. By the nineteen twenties, however, Mary Lavelle, not only may travel alone, but she is free, and obliged to, earn her living.

Fanny

Although it is with Lilian's wedding celebrations that the novel opens, the camera lens picks out the bridesmaid, Fanny, for special observation. Her appearance is commented on from various sources, establishing her as a "lovely" young woman, in this sense, a typical O'Brien heroine. Bill Morrow, her cousin sees her as "slim and childish", with a "mermaid quality" (p. 12). Samuel O'Connor remarks to his friend Joseph Morrow that Fanny "is lovely", adding "you won't have her long" (p. 20). Later in the novel, the sophisticated fastidious Belgian, André de Mellin, announces that he finds her "ravishing" (p. 102), reflecting that "'she is not yet as beautiful as Lilian ... but when she is thirty, when she is forty, she will almost certainly be the more beautiful of the two'" (p. 103). The biased admiration of her father conveys a somewhat idealised personality, she is his 'gentle maiden', his 'flower of May', patriarchal metaphors for a daughter he regards as a reincarnation of his wife; she is Julia "re-made in terms of a dream he had forgotten" (p. 16). But at eighteen, Fanny is not a defined personality, she is still out of focus, words such as "a wraith" (p. 12), and "misty" (p. 11), a "vision" are applied to her appearance, she is "to any sensitive young man ... the vision - of his dream" (p. 30).

At the beginning of the novel Fanny, the narrator

discloses, has two conspicuous sides to her nature. She is eager to taste life's experiences; although just starting "to look out at life", she finds it "fascinating" (p. 30). She is also a "true innocent" and therefore not ready for adventure or experiment. O'Brien's intention is to prepare her heroine for life's encounters. The focus of authorial interest is that Fanny should be exposed to a kaleidoscope of experiences in order that she is prepared for eventualities, that she can take her place in the world dependent only on herself. Nothing must impair this heroine from reaching fulfillment, full expression of the 'self', from having choices. Fanny is the luckiest of all O'Brien heroines, she will be armed, made less vulnerable, and more immune to any trauma which might arrest the course of her life. Fanny is furnished with a 'cloak' before she steps out into the inclement patriarchal world.

Fanny's life has been secure and uneventful. Like most middle class girls in O'Brien's novels she has been educated in Place des Ormes where her mother, aunt, and sister had also been. Her existence did not warrant any doubts about her future; she does not consider it, until it is threatened. The news that she was not going back to school after Christmas is conveyed matter-of-factly to her on New Years day. Fanny is astounded; her reaction, somewhat like Anna's in The Land of Spices when she is denied Emulation, is a mixture of outrage and dismay. The announcement "assaulted" her, and "shocked her, as nothing hitherto had done" (p. 35). The unreasonableness

of her parents' argument is conveyed and confirmed by the sympathetic narrative voice when it states that "Julia thought it desirable that Fanny should now step into the habits and exactions of home life" as Lilian was getting married, and that "Fanny had therefore no choice" in the matter (p. 36). There had been no consultation with Fanny, no opportunity to bid 'good-bye' to friends and teachers, the "cutting off" (p. 40) was, in the context, brutal, and as such wounded her deeply. The narrative voice suggests the injury to the girl's psyche, stating that "wounds are not forgotten, even by the most loving, even indeed by the most generous". Expecting her mother to intervene on her behalf, Fanny remains "hopefully incredulous" for some days (p. 36). What O'Brien is underlining is the heroine's powerlessness at the hands of her elders at this point; she "was under no vow of obedience to her father - but she was materially helpless against his mandates. If he did not buy her travelling tickets or pay her fees, clearly she would not finish her year at Place des Ormes" (pp. 36-7). Fanny, up to now had not felt the barbs of the patriarchal value system, her life had proceeded in a "fixed, natural, and mainly happy pattern", home and school providing the framework. Now "violently these two harmonious lives had been divorced" (p. 40), and Fanny is left floundering for the moment. Caught in the web of middle class expectations, she is a victim of her class, (as working class girls at the time would have had more personal freedom, out of expediency), she is caught in a certain period of time

when 'ladies' must know and keep their place. While her aspirations fly before her in terms of education and career, her parents attempt to keep her back in their own traditions where children "had been instructed that home was enough" (p. 40). There is no scene, no rebellion, la politesse has ensured that Fanny behaves as a lady; "self-control was not only hoped for from Fanny's class and generation; it was taught and it was mastered, and understood by the moderately intelligent" (p. 36). Pleading that her bachot would give her "a kind of minimum independence" (p. 41), she encounters only the exactions of parental expectations; "we desire our children about us" (p. 41) is the autocratic response she receives. A 'lady' in middle class Ireland, in 1907, trained in la politesse could "only bite her ... lip" (p. 40) in these circumstances. Her helplessness is emphasised in order to underscore her strength of will later when she stoically endures the impediments of her life, and also draws a sketch of the situation of girls at this period of time. Neither Marie-Rose nor Agnes in The Ante Room are depicted as having any desire for personal freedom, the idea was not entertained at that time. If their lives didn't have love they had nothing. It is obvious from The Land of Spices that in the second half of the nineteenth century, in Europe, it was acceptable for a girl to go to University; Helen Archer would have attended had she not entered the novitiate. She in turn insists that Anna Murphy should further her education at University, setting her own attitudes

against those of Catholic middle class Ireland, represented by Mrs Condon. The Morricks are no different; Julia's education in the Place des Ormes where the benign Mère Générale sanctioned individualism, does not imbue any sympathy for Fanny's position. The heroine's world is hostile, although the facility for University is now there. O'Brien, drawing on historical fact, engages the reader's sympathy for Fanny, who, although the Universities Act is only passed some years, is quite reasonable in her request. Educated in Europe where University education for girls had been a norm for some time, and living in Ireland where such a concession has been welcomed by many, Fanny recognises what is hindering her, while O'Brien suggests that it is the inertia, the stasis of this declining middle class merchant world which is the main hindrance to Fanny's liberty, as well as ubiquitous parental selfishness, masquerading here, again, as love.

Fanny, identifying more with the new generation of women, like Lucille, wishes to live "as a fellow man" with her "fellow men" (p. 158), rather than concur with the traditional role of women. She remains in the role of dutiful daughter, but underneath is the typical O'Brien heroine in embryo. Adopting the defenses of 'silence' and 'cunning' as Anna was obliged to do, Fanny does not "speak of private desires" to anyone, least of all to her parents who are, in her estimation "not for speaking to truthfully" (p. 41). Obligated to conceal her true self in an interior world, like Anna, Helen Archer,

Agnes and many more O'Brien heroines who are aware of the hostility of their milieu to their individual 'selfdom', Fanny "was only marking time, ... her mind would not long be contained between the two bridges that spanned the canal at either end of Mespil Road" (p. 37).

The sudden change in her role, from school-girl to school-leaver, and the manner in which it came about contribute to Fanny's first steps in 'growing-up'. She is confused by her new feelings and responses; she is a reluctant and uncomfortable visitor to Glasalla, her grandfather's home in Co. Clare, a place "to which she had gone enchantedly before" (p. 40). Her perception of her world has changed, disillusion has undermined the wonder and joy of childhood. What is underlined here is, that the change did not come about naturally, as it would have, but the forced transformation of Fanny's perceptions is destructive, and, although not as traumatic as the experience of Helen Archer and of Anna, it is nevertheless pernicious. Fanny is now an onlooker, watchful and objective in her appraisal; here in Glasalla her mother is "a stranger" (p. 43), the flash of the lighthouse reveals a vulnerability in her mother's face, showing her as a person rather than in the role of a mother. Enigmatically, the recognition, like the epiphanies O'Brien uses in other novels, causes the heroine, in a suspended moment, to take a step along the path of her development. In that moment Fanny "grew up somewhat"; the narrator is suggesting that the heroine had accidentally seen underneath her mother's "disciplined

countenance", the "doubt - perhaps guilt?" (p. 46).

The 'growing-up' procedure after its initial unpleasant beginning continues in the relative freedom of Europe where, touring with the de Mellin family and her special friend Lucille de Mellin, she experiences the "first tasting of the world's delight" (p. 125). Freedom from the restrictive Irish milieu, the companionship of Lucille, the intensity of new impressions, nourishes her with "solid food for her growth, accretions that were working change from day to day in the very substance of her nature" (pp. 125-6). The travel motif is employed in its conventional manner; in O'Brien's world characters are affected either by their leaving Ireland or arriving there, the leaving always being a positive experience in the development process, the arrival usually engendering confusion and disillusion.

Travel abroad for Fanny proves to be a catalyst. Italy is not just a geographical location, it is associated in literature with gregariousness, personal liberty and adventure. Fanny absorbs all she sees, at times overtaxing her sensibilities. Her response to the Country foreshadows Mary Lavelle's response to Spain in so far as it was surreptitiously changing her, a forcing was in progress, "carrying her forward as soberly and ruthlessly to adult life as every event had seemed to do" since she had left school (p. 126). The change in the heroine is underscored in the confutation of cousin Bill's remark at the wedding, that she was not yet "in focus". Now, echoing his words, the narrator relates

that not only is she now "in focus", but that she is projected, that "light was upon her" and that her dear friend Lucille "could not in the last two days quite recognise Fanny" (p. 81). Fanny expresses the unidentifiable effect Venice is having on her in terms of "Venice is too much" (p. 83). In Kate O'Brien's terms the embryo heroine is developing, expressing herself with the assurance and confidence of the 'new female', speaking out of protest at the role she has been asked to play; she states now "my life is mine, and it will be more or less what I make and feel it" (p. 102).

Italy, the romantic cities of Venice and Verona, the associations with Romeo and Juliet, the sensual architecture, the canals and gondolas, evoke what Fanny identifies as "temptation", stating "I know my catechism and I know the meaning of the word 'temptation'" (p. 100), when André questions her. She is not tempted by his amorous advances, yet as part of her 'growing-up' O'Brien exposes her to the possibility of romance, allowing her to utilise the fastidiousness of her sensibility, and in freedom only accept or reject André's vows of love. She rejects him, earning his exasperated scorn, his hurt pride blames her 'Catholic prudishness'; "it would be a sin to kiss a man, to let a man kiss you?" (p. 133). He taunts her with labels such as "prim perfectionist" (p. 132), "cold heart" and "cold superior, Irish lady" (p. 134). Fanny delivers the kiss much later in the novel, when, learning that she is economically independent, and feeling in control of her life, she kisses him "in pride

and safety", recognising that she is "in fact as well^{as} in desire as in ideal now her own mistress; so she need be no man's" (p. 278). From her autonomous position both as a woman and an equal she regards the kiss as her decision, not her response. Exposure to André is necessary to O'Brien's intention; the manipulative suave self-interest of André's character is fielded by Fanny's instinctive discernment. Her judgement is seen to be well founded when she later encounters the duplicity of his character and is placed in the role of judge of his actions.

In the meantime, what O'Brien explores is Fanny's uniqueness. In O'Brien's novels female heroism is never found in the mainstream, where the status quo breeds stereotypes, and mediocrity prevails. Lucille, the person who knows her best, considers Fanny "very wise and isolated", and "calm at the centre of her imagination" (p. 298). Mère Générale, having observed her over the years, decides that Fanny "will never be capable of everyday disaster" (pp. 160-1). Eugene McCabe, reviewing the novel, sees Fanny as "an intelligent enquiring young girl, full of contradictions, and with a sort of private morality". Fanny's protesting conscience emerged when, at twelve, she confided in Mère Générale who was preparing her for Confirmation, that "she felt no response at all to certain mysteries of [her] faith" (p. 161). At eighteen, she confirms that this is still the case; like her mother before her, she cannot accept "labelled prayers" (p. 242). When her mother is dying,

Fanny cannot join the 'Blue Nun' in prayer, she finds she cannot use prayer "to ask for anything" (p. 238). Unlike ^{the experience of} some of O'Brien's heroines, Catholicism does not serve as a formative influence in Fanny's development, nor does it shape her inner life. Her integrity in this matter is a sign of her intelligence as far as Mère Générale is concerned; knowing that Fanny believes in God and praises him in prayer is enough for her. The climate of 1907 seems far more tolerant than that in which the Mulqueen girls lived twenty-seven years previously. Fanny, living in Dublin, is far from the claustrophobic religious emphasis that life in 'Mellick' incorporated. O'Brien's fiction echoes the well-substantiated fanatical character of Catholicism in Limerick in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Dublin there is no Fr. Tom Considine checking if Fanny had been at Holy Communion recently. Mère Générale's régime in Place des Ormes seems to have been more liberal than the Convent at Mellick where the English Reverend Mother imposed her severity without modification. Helen Archer's lack of love detracted from a more flexible approach to her responsibilities. Mère Générale makes no excuses for her own inconsistencies (p. 160); her response to Lucille and Fanny's desire to be, as she calls it "any kind of 'new woman'" is approving. Knowing the girls, she considers that their decision is "important", is "characteristic", and "legitimate" (p. 163).

Both Fanny and Lucille share one consuming desire,

to "dissociate" (p. 159) themselves from their parents' life styles. Lucille declares to Fanny "I do assure you that I will not live my one precious, small life in the way Mother has lived hers" (p. 159); this sentiment is echoed by Fanny who resolves "I won't live as Mother lived" (p. 268). Rejection of marriage is based on a wide premise - their shared aversion to a domestic role, their desire to travel, to be educated, to be independent, and also, submerged by all these considerations, and hardly recognised by the girls themselves, is an instinctive acknowledgement of the nature of their own sexuality. They are not interested in forming relationships with men, their deep love for each other seems enough. O'Brien draws the relationship as an oblique representation of lesbian love. It is romantic, tender, and at times coy; Lorna Reynolds, in her analysis of the book calls it an "amitie amoureuse".⁶ The blend of shared intelligence, sensibility and ambition cements this friendship, while the beauty of both girls results in mutual appeal. Mère Générale aware somewhat, perhaps more than they are, of the intensity of the girls' relationship, fears that, because André resembles Lucille so closely, Fanny will be drawn into a serious relationship with him (p. 167). Lucille and Fanny share hugs, kisses, embraces, touches; while there is no sexual expression of their love, the lyricism of O'Brien's prose when the two girls are depicted together (p. 204) suggests intimacy of a special kind. John Jordan writes that "to the portrayal of friendship

between persons of the same sex" Kate O'Brien "has brought very extraordinary tact and sensitivity". He suggests that the "element of seriousness" in the friendship makes it somewhat tragic, as "so much mature feeling and sympathy have gone into a relationship which ... must inevitably dwindle into, at best, a series of elegiac memories".⁷ In the meantime, Lucille and Fanny plan their futures together with no intimations of social censure.

In O'Brien's world, out-of-line liaisons, with their obvious compatibility and reciprocal affection are never matched by the ordinary socially acceptable marriage partnerships. Marriage always in O'Brien's novels is, as in The Flower of May, an unsatisfactory arrangement. Fanny's mother has spent her entire married life wishing she were somewhere else other than where her marriage has forced her to live, while her daughter Lilian has allowed her new marriage to degenerate almost immediately into a charade. Fanny is not in search of love, neither is Lucille, who dismisses all considerations other than what is most relevant to both lives; she insists "all we know is that we desperately require education!" (p. 159).

Death and departure are part of the heroine's emotional growth. There is no interior monologue to convey Fanny's sorrow at her mother's death; the reader can only judge by Fanny's tears, her evident sorrow, that she is deeply affected. The experience leaves her "misty no longer", she is "grown-up and visible ... in sorrow" (p. 281). From the point of view of plot, her mother's

death releases her from the role ordained for her by her family; Aunt Edith moves in to Mespil Road to care for Joseph, and Fanny becomes redundant in the now-fractured family unit. There is further liberation for Fanny in her Aunt Eleanor's gift to her of economic independence.

Aunt Eleanor's timely intervention represents the solidarity of sisterhood, as Helen Archer's does in the case of Anna in The Land of Spices. In both cases the older women's experiences help to deflect impediments for the younger girls. Aunt Eleanor's chosen course in life was thwarted in her youth as was Helen Archer's; both compensate for their compromises in setting Fanny and Anna free to choose.

It has been argued tht the 'fairy godmother' aspect of Fanny's liberation is not satisfactory in so far as she gets things too easily; the qualities of her character have not been put to any test, there has been no struggle, no striving, no surmounting of obstacles; what is there heroic about this heroine? I recognise this as a weakness in the novel, and it is conveyed in an article by Val Mulkerns that O'Brien herself found the book troublesome; in a letter to Miss Mulkerns she stated "'I'm half dead with the book and all sorts of annoyances'".⁸ However, in the course of the novel Fanny has achieved what O'Brien intended; she has, in John Jordan's words shed "illusions and twists which might clutter or obscure the greater, more searing pilgrimage in emotion".⁹ She is free to take her place in the world as an independent female, confounding all patriarchal

expectations. As a representative of the 'new woman' she anticipates to an extent Mary Lavelle, but still more, Nell, in Pray for the Wanderer. The educated female remains now in O'Brien's fictional dramatis personae.

... everyone is gathered together at the reading of the novel; it is her wedding day. Lillian's beauty is as Paddy's as Caroline's is as Nell's as Edward's is as Marie-Rose's is as Agnes's is as the Duke's. There is nothing "picky" in Lillian's appearance, which is "radiant" (p. 101). The contrast in their appearances immediately establishes the difference between the two sisters. There is also the contrast between the married and the unmarried sister in O'Brien's novels. In both novels we find the wife happily accepting the unmarried sister is bound to a life of rigorous domestic duties. In the Prayer for the Wanderer the suggestion that the sacrifice is Lillian's, while the unmarried Paddy is free, directly to establish the possibility of a life of her own, and then to cross the opportunity when the time comes, so to speak. Neither of the two novels in the novels dealing with the subject would maintain such aspirations. Lillian's marriage "was without a hitch" (p. 94), but O'Brien does not neglect the ironic nuance as she states that although she had "by the parents' standards, made an excellent match," she is "still born, led, in a sense of thought, by them to take the sacrifice" (p. 101).

... indications of the failure of Lillian's marriage are conveyed by the end of the novel; her mother details

Lilian

Lilian is Fanny's sister, employed in the novel as a foil to the heroine, and to Lucille. She is the reason why everyone is gathered together at the opening of the novel; it is her wedding day. Lilian's beauty is to Fanny's as Caroline's is to Molly's in Without My Cloak and Marie-Rose's is to Agnes's in The Ante Room. There is nothing "misty" (p. 11) about Lilian's appearance, which is "radiant" (p. 10). The contrast in their appearances immediately establishes the difference between the two sisters. There is always the married and unmarried sister in O'Brien's novels. In both novels set in the late nineteenth century the unmarried sister is bound to a life of repetitious domestic duties; in The Flower of May there is the suggestion that the sacrifice is Lilian's, while the unmarried Fanny is free, firstly, to entertain the possibility of a life of her own, and then to grasp the opportunity when the time comes, to do so. Neither of the two Agneses in the novels dealing with the earlier period entertained such aspirations. Lilian's marriage "went without a hitch" (p. 9), but O'Brien does not resist the ironic nuance as she states that although she had, by her parents' standards, made "an excellent match", she is "their lamb, led, in a manner of thought, by them to this fine sacrifice" (p. 10).

Intimations of the failure of Lilian's marriage are conveyed on the day of the ceremony; her mother detects

the unconscious signals in her daughter's "beautiful blue eyes" when they "flash oddly, shadowed and disturbed" (p. 13) as Lilian leaves for her honeymoon. Julia's reflections on this occasion give expression to what O'Brien suggests is the character of this period, that "the world was, in its appearances, designed for men and their pleasures" (p. 13).

Although Lilian is a minor character, O'Brien explores certain themes through her portrayal. As well as using Lilian's character to highlight Fanny's, she also examines the fate of a self-interested beautiful young woman who, egocentric, "her own life-companion and no one else" (p. 16), goes on to suffer the consequences of these very aspects of her character. Underscoring the incompatibility between two such divergent natures as Fanny's and Lilian's, the narrator discloses that Fanny would have "no regrets" when Lilian leaves with her new husband. Lilian's values are not Fanny's, "the elegant travelling bags, these flung-down furs" would soon be removed, "both had their wish now, and no bones broken" (p. 57). Lilian's unpopularity with Fanny is consistent with the opinions of most; Lucille, at school, had "despised" Lilian (p. 188), and cousin Kitty regards her as selfish (p. 16), while Mère Générale admits "I never cared for Lilian" (p. 164).

Adultery, as a theme, is associated with the anti-heroine Lilian, and is confined to the subplot, whereas in both Without My Cloak and The Ante Room it is very much part of the main plot, underscoring the framework of

the sense of sin in women's lives in that period. In 1907 adultery is not alone possible in the life of a Catholic married woman, O'Brien ^eses it as something that materialises without much soul searching. Lilian's adultery on her honeymoon is O'Brien's statement, repeated again, that marriage is a charade and of no value. Irrespective of the quality of person involved in the contract, it is seen as an unsatisfactory arrangement in O'Brien's world. By delegating the subject of adultery to the subplot, O'Brien indicates that the issue is not of major import in the world of the novel; in 1907, the possibility hovers on the periphery of society, no longer unthinkable to the well trained Catholic conscience. O'Brien doesn't treat it in the context of sin, but as more evidence of Lilian's egotism.

When Lilian's behaviour at Glasalla gives certain leads as to her affair with André, the females who buttress her world are indignant; not concerned for the state of Lilian's soul, but, as Fanny expresses it, outraged at the 'trampling' of values such as "hope and dignity" into "the dust" (p. 328) while André's 'sin' is against "friendship" and "hospitality" (p. 329).

In Lilian's story there is the recognisable voice of the author pointing out again the folly of marriage; happiness in marriage is quite illusive, and love outside of marriage yields nothing but eventual regret and sadness. Love between members of the opposite sex is fanciful in O'Brien's novels and is not offered as the ideal goal for women. In the twentieth century novels O'Brien concentrates on the alternatives.

Lucille

The middle class of O'Brien's world pushes out its horizons in this novel to include its counterpart in Europe. Lucille and her family represent a middle class which is wealthy, pleasure-loving, indulgent, and self-indulgent. O'Brien, through the inclusion of the de Mellin family, points to a middle class of industrialized Europe where traditional skills are now adapted to modern facilities, demands, and trends. This family developed from "the building of locomotives and rolling stock" to the manufacture of the modern "combustion engine" (p. 110). The comparison between what is regarded as middle class in Ireland and in Europe is commented on by Fanny in terms of wealth; she remarks to Lucille "of course, we have what I suppose you would call no money at all Lucille" (p. 110). Lucille's home is lush, and spells prosperity in everything; to Fanny's eyes there is a "lordly terrace" and "millionaire steps" (p. 58) compared to the shabbiness of the living room at Mespil Road and the erratic heating system. Lucille's existence is one where money is lavish and luxury the norm.

Lucille's world should have produced, perhaps, someone like Lilian, where the "taking for granted of perfection in small things" (p. 180) and its "blind, easy grace" (p. 180), its grossness, could justifiably have claimed a nature such as Lilian's as an inevitable product. It is Lucille, however, who, rejecting all the

wealth, all the values of her upbringing in true O'Brien fashion, that emerges, protesting that she is different. She stands in friendship and in love and in aspirations beside the heroine, claiming a right to education and to freedom.

Kate O'Brien underlines the suggestion that patriarchal values in their restriction of women's lives know no boundaries, neither geographical nor monetary. Rich girl and poor girl share the same dilemma. Lucille is expected by her father, to lead the "idle pampered life" as her mother has, while her older brother André is busy at business and trade, and her younger brother Patrice is preparing for University. Living with a kind but "imperious father" (p. 61) is problematic to the independent-minded Lucille, but she sees her dilemma with cool conjecture, explaining to Fanny "if I were to run away hysterically and break their hearts - which I couldn't do to them - I could only become a governess or a shop-girl" (p. 163). Although her family is wealthy, Lucille has no material resources of her own, and like Fanny, she needs her own money in order that she may step out of an ordained role into one chosen by herself, for herself.

Lucille's sensibilities recoil from all ostentation and wealth; she "loathed money, and all talk of it" (p. 65), and "detested 'chic', save in its accidents" (p. 239), disliking "the pathetic fuss, of people who were 'elegant'" (p. 240). Her "fortright questioning kind of intelligence" will not be contained in a life style such

as she experiences at home; "we live absurdly" she tells Fanny, adding "I for one will not spend my one human life this way" (p. 64). Declaring that she is "better" than her parents, she recognises that she must exercise her own integrity in the matter of her future, "I can't alter the family way of life, or its assumptions - all I can do is choose a way which will dissociate me from all that, and set me free" (p. 159).

Lucille is perfect. She is beautiful, tall, elegant, and a 'lady'. At no stage in the novel is there a shadow cast on her persona. Even her impatience with her family is tempered by a more mature and less emotional attitude than that of Fanny, who, she claims, has "a cynicism I have not". She loves her relatives "without nuances", she does "not require always to feel with them" (p. 158). Her objectivity, intelligence, and her lovely nature make her a fitting friend for the fastidious Fanny who is still quite innocent and inexperienced in life. The narrator points out that,

because she was so naturally just and balanced, because she never asked too much either of fellow creature or of situation, because her brain dominated Lucille without even quenching her live heart, Fanny had learnt from her, and knew that in everything she could trust her (p. 66).

As well as being her mentor, Lucille is also Fanny's source of love, both giving and receiving. The love between the two girls is generous and unpossessive; Lucille tolerates, "all through the Italian summer", her brother André coming "between Fanny and herself" (p.

249). Her presence at Fanny's side during the illness and at the death of her mother, Julia, supplies the heroine with the strength and solace she needs.

Lucille, like Fanny rejects marriage, and for similar reasons. She also benefits from the 'sisterhood' intervention, and is ensured economic freedom to pursue her dearest wish. Lucille, perfect in every way, defies criticism, aside from a claim that she is too perfect almost to be credible. O'Brien has portrayed an ideal here, with none of the quirks that Fanny is purported to have. Lucille loves her family unconditionally, practices her religion and is the perfect daughter, friend, and sister. She is chic, beautiful, and cultured. O'Brien draws her relationship with Fanny as a compatible and ideal association, harmonious in every way. There is a suggestion in general that O'Brien may be projecting a personal wishfulfilment, and consequently, has drawn a less than credible picture; however she has certainly eulogised the relationship, and seems to offer it as the antithesis to the compromise and unhappiness of marriage.

Julia, Eleanor and The Countess

The older generation of women in the novel is represented by two other sisters, Julia and Eleanor. These are Fanny and Lilian's mother and aunt. There is also a brief and amusing character sketch of Lucille's mother Cecile, the Countess de Mellin.

The universality of female experience is presented more fully in this novel than in any other by Kate O'Brien. There is a focus on the young who reject and protest and on the middle-aged who have not protested, who were not, in their day, allowed even to entertain the thought, and who now live within the system as palpable deterrents to the young who protest that they will not live as their parents lived.

O'Brien presents Julia and Eleanor on two levels. Firstly they are characters in their own right. They are entrenched Irish, Catholic, middle class, belonging to the Catholic "landed gentry class" (p. 19). They lived in "Georgian gorgeousness" in Glasalla, County Clare. They were educated at Place des Ormes in Brussels^{e!}, trained in la politesse, and emerged ladies to their finger tips, controlled, restrained, unprotesting.

Two sisters are portrayed here, each having gone her own way, one married and one not; the married one returns 'home' at every opportunity to her father and to her sister where she reverts to childhood rituals of feeding the cats, and where, when her feet get wet and cold her

sister gathers them between her hands and rubs warmth back into them. The idiom of childhood is stubbornly maintained at Glasalla. This behaviour pattern is reminiscent of Marie-Rose's need for Roseholm in The Ante Room.

O'Brien devotes a lot of attention to the character of Julia Morrow, and through her characterisation she points up various themes that interest her. Throughout her work she plays many variations on the ground theme of parent-child relationship. Here she explores it again in the context of the younger generation's aspirations and also in the context of the parents' difficulties with their role. There is also here the suggestion that the child of promise such as Fanny and Lucille is being played off against the woman who goes along with the values of the Irish patriarchal system. Passivity in those terms always has a price.

Julia is lovely, gracious, and as a lady, is reserved and polite. Fanny, peeved at being denied the opportunity to get her bachot regards this politeness in her mother "as automatic and therefore, perhaps without virtue" (p. 21). Her mother's restraint is "maddening" to the girl who claims that Julia experiences "inhuman bewilderment - if people get expansive" (p. 157). She sees her mother as "more wife than mother - in so far as she was aware of being either" (p. 35), who panders to Fanny's sensitive fretful father; "the plight of his dependent fussy heart really alarms her" (p. 157) Fanny confides in Lucille.

The author never presents Julia's view point, and the narrator, the reader feels, is only going on surmise; from observation and from deductive reasoning. The reader, by now familiar with O'Brien's attitudes to the themes which inform the whole of the novel, can also assess where Julia stands in O'Brien's vision, and where she stands within the main themes. One of these themes is motherhood. In O'Brien's world it has never been the ideal goal for the female. There is rarely a celebration of maternal feeling, especially in the cases of the sensitive spiritual gentle dreamy female characters. Julia is one of these. Incapable of any extreme of human feeling, she is "fond" of her husband and "grateful to him" (p. 23). She loves her family "at a distance" (p. 24). She loves her children "yet with detachment". Recognising that her response to her children is unconventional, the narrator explains that Julia "had never felt, as she gathered many mothers did, that she possessed them" (p. 23). Julia does not resent her situation; on the contrary, she is gratified that she is "normally and safely married", that her family is well, "happy", and she "knew it for an accident" (p. 24). Julia, like Molly in Without My Cloak, cannot muster any enthusiasm for maternity. In the case of both women O'Brien raises the question as to how women can have natural feelings of motherhood when they are subtly forced into that role by society.

Neither Molly nor Julia are archetypal mother figures; their natures seem creative in another direction

altogether. Julia resembles Molly in so far as she is a "dreamer" (p. 42), a spiritual creature who is more in tune, like Molly, with nature than with the "immediacies, the actualities of her life" (pp. 23-4). Julia is inherently an idealist, not of a practical nature; she is sensitive, "isolated ... from the world" (p. 157). This condition is compounded by the fact that for the twenty-three years of her married life she has lived in Dublin, but has never felt at 'home' there, unable to respond to the "rattling conviviality of her husband's town" (p. 17).

Julia's sensibility is always under siege by the tug of the County Clare landscape; her curiosity for life, the narrator declares, "preferred to examine the beautiful clear questions raised by garden, field and sea-shore" (p. 30). Her eyes are always, as it were, on the horizon, searching for the pulse of the light-house which symbolises her heart-beat; when her ^ghaze contracts to her present surroundings she sees dullness, and, paradoxically, mistiness; in this context, the narrator states that Julia is "long sighted".

In her rejection of the present Julia clings to childhood and its associations. She fails to understand adulthood, life stopped for her when she left Glasalla. Selfhood became static, there was no further development, no moving on; marriage has obviously been for Julia, ironically, a barren experience. Julia has played her role with admirable orthodoxy; "she saw her duties and relationships, and she fulfilled and enjoyed them; but

she saw them at a distance which differentiated her, all against her will, from other people" (p. 24). Through the character sketch of Julia, O'Brien endeavours to illuminate the difficult and delicate reconciliation of the sensitively developed individual within the terms of her social existence.

Julia's temperament, essentially artistic, is ill-suited to uncongenial domesticity. Misplaced in marriage, O'Brien establishes the fact that she is misplaced also in Dublin. The lighthouse imagery suggests flashes of light which rescue Julia, at intervals, from obscurity. The Canon at Lilian's wedding remarks "you could say of Julia, I think, that she's never been all here ... never all in Dublin" (p. 23). Since she must be in Dublin, Julia creates, instinctively, her own defensive landscape as a film,

a film which, unwilled by her, her own soul, spun - in dreams, in the night, in her walks, unseeing walks, along the streets - floated always between her and all the people, the dreamt figures with the least apprehended of her adult years (p. 24).

While Julia is physically confined to her adult role in Dublin her spirit is free, and constantly "sped for homelier contact far away" (p. 24). She experiences the same kind of alienation that Helen Archer does in 'Mellick' (The Land of Spices). Feeling out of tune with Dublin, with its demands, she longs for the "faithful place" that is home (p. 25). The narrator points up the compatibility between Julia and her native place in the

statement that Glasalla is "a silent place, silent as she so awkwardly was herself" (p. 25). As her spirit succeeds in bringing that "homelier contact" (p. 24) in her Dublin life, conjuring up the "Golden Rocks", the tide, the wind, the mulberry tree, the images all enter her Mespil Road home, "salvaging her from loneliness" (p. 25) and of course sustaining the general impression of Julia as a 'dreamer'.

Behind the dreamy, gentle 'isolated' exterior there is the quite unexpected 'selfishness' displayed by Julia in her dismissal of the needs of others. She denies Fanny her bachot, and, as the narrator ironically points out, that as "a dreamer", she "would not have fuss about such dull facts as bachots" (p. 42). In the past she has also frustrated her sister Eleanor's plans to become a nun. Due to the fact that she married Joseph and moved to Dublin, turning down two local suitors, Eleanor had to abandon her vocation and stay to farm and look after their father. What hurts Eleanor is the fact, as she tells Lucille, that "never once did she ask me whether I had liked learning to farm Glasalla, or whether I was content in looking after Father"; she states "I always resented that she never once questioned what her choice cost me" (p. 293). Reluctance to face the consequences of her actions due to the egotism of the artist or the selfishness of a constantly indulged nature; whatever the reasons, Julia's "dreamy selfishness" (p. 293) is the only definition that her sister Eleanor could find for this aberration in her nature.

On another level, O'Brien has drawn the character of Julia, this time counterbalanced with that of her sister Eleanor, for the technical purpose of plot. Both lives represent the options offered to the heroine; Fanny can choose Julia's way of life, or that of her aunt Eleanor. There is a suggestion, which isn't followed through, that Julia is a prototype of her daughter Fanny. To Joseph his daughter is a 're-incarnation' of her mother. Mère Générale remarks that "Fanny is almost amusingly like her mother - dear, dreaming Julia" (p. 165). Lucille is stunned at the similarity, "she's the image of you" (p. 168) she tells Fanny. The likeness is emphasised to underline the possibility that Fanny, when all is said and done, may go her mother's way. Fanny has been given the advantage, looking at her mother's life, to have some foreknowledge of the implications of such a possibility. Fanny's decision to reject her mother's role in life for herself emphasises the alternative to a stereotypical approach to a woman's life; O'Brien here champions one that is essentially androgynous. Eleanor represents the latter; she is a woman who farms, enjoys a glass of sherry, smokes her cigarettes, and is independent of any sex-role. Eleanor's life is the alternative that Fanny settles for; her acceptance of Glasalla spells her rejection of the patriarchal ideal as represented by Julia. O'Brien here advocates an adjustment from a gender-based attitude to life and for the introduction of something even more radical than equality of the sexes, androgyny seems to be what she suggests.

Eleanor tells Fanny that she has given her Glasalla "because you are very like Julia" (p. 222). This ironic statement, in its bifurcated meaning, conveys the fact that it is out of love for Julia that she gives it, and also to prevent Fanny looking for position and financial security in marriage. Eleanor is also vindicating her own frustrated ambitions in granting Fanny freedom to pursue hers. Like Helen Archer, Eleanor is drawing on her own experience of living in a different way than the one, perhaps, ordained for her, in the granting of freedom to their young protégées. In O'Brien's world, sisterhood has many shades of meaning.

The Countess de Mellin supplies a lovely sense of light relief to the entire novel. Whenever she appears there is a relaxing of seriousness, and there is frivolity, good humour, and an overemphasis on good food. O'Brien depicts this character with an ironic pen. She is gross, self-indulgent, over fed, over pampered, loved and fussed about. The fact that she is totally oblivious to all this undercuts its offensiveness, as does her lack of any vestige of intelligence. Her simple mind and heart reach out only to the external needs of her children, to her husband, to cuisine and comfort.

The Countess is ^{absurdity} ~~a parody~~ rather than a believable character. She personifies, to a certain extent, all that is excessive. As well as being extremely fat, vain, and fussy, she is also given to extravagant displays of prayerfulness. Lucille, watching "her mother's large form" in the oratory of their home, "bent in faithful

rapture", is exasperated by what she terms her mother's "brainless piety" (p. 70).

Her vanity keeps "Seraphine, grey, thin" at her side, where nightly the maid has to "undress her large, strong mistress". The ritual includes wrapping her "in silk", placing "cushions about her in her dressing-table chair", after which she "stood and brushed her hair gravely, carefully" (p. 71). Lucille sees the absurdity of such a nightly ceremony as "this tyrannical dressing table" (p. 73), but this was Seraphine's security, she needed the money to support her family.

Satire creeps in to O'Brien's tone as she establishes the Countess as a very willing and happy participant in a patriarchal environment. Lucille's mother is what can be termed a 'man's woman', she is "wax in the hands of men"; her enjoyment of men's company not coming from a feeling of comradeship or fellow-feeling, is explained by the narrator, who claims that the Countess "was truly happy only in the society of those to whose thoughts and emotional processes she had no clue. Men were just such things". Her daughter Lucille considers that "the charm of immeasurable silliness" which her mother displayed must have been "very restful" to her father (p. 75). The Countess enjoys all the passivity that goes with her role. Never having handled money or paid a bill, personally, for a cab or an hotel, she is "shocked to discover that her nineteen-year-old daughter managed these functions of male prerogative without confusion and without becoming as it were unsexed by

them" (p. 155).

All her faults and foibles are balanced by an affable generosity. She enjoys an intimate loving relationship with her children who obviously adore her. All her peculiarities and excesses are acknowledged with good humour and are often the butt of their teasing, which the Countess takes with mock annoyance. She is never small-minded nor petty, always dramatic, entertaining, and affable. On the journey through Europe all these qualities never wane, and André, aware of his mother's intermittent discomfort, is forced to announce that "the dear one is being marvellous" (p. 90).

The Countess's tolerance of culture is limited, and on arriving at the Lido from Venice she is "so happy to know that there was not a single work of man which she need admire" there (p. 95). She judges the excellence of all places by the standard of their cuisine.

The kind loving heart of the Countess redeems her in the reader's eyes. She is kind to Fanny, and concerned on learning of her mother's illness; she feels her heart "wrung" for the girl (p. 173). What saves her from caricature is a reluctance by the author to treat her character with any cruelty; she is physically and metaphorically larger than life and is certainly quite unconvincing as a character. For the light relief her portrayal brings to an otherwise serious and almost didactic novel, she must be appreciated.

In this novel, Kate O'Brien has expressed much of the nature of her own temperament, her sexuality, the

complexity of her religious views, and her feelings on freedom and family, love and loyalty. The novel, written about an era when the debate on education for women was in progress, charts the difficulty in breaking with traditional roles in order to satisfy aspirations which demand third level education. The fact that the novel is set in Dublin serves a very slim purpose; the city does not occupy a key role, and is not used as symbolic embellishment or as geographic background. Politics are not at any stage mentioned, although in 1907 political activity was a conspicuous fact of life. The Morricks, like the Considines before them seem insulated by the concerns of their own lives, immune from the contagion of life around them. Emphasis on the contemporary scene is confined to the heroine's desire for further education; this is the focus of the novel, and the 'new' freedom obvious, especially, in Fanny's term in Europe, foreshadows Mary Lavelle's journey to Spain and the effects of this freedom on her.

CHAPTER V

MARY LAVELLE

INTRODUCTION

This is Kate O'Brien's first novel that deals with Spain, a landscape "which was to become as characteristic of the outward world" of some of her subsequent work, as "certain feminine conflicts were to be characteristic of her inward world".¹

The book is set in 1922, the year in which Kate O'Brien, like her heroine, spent some time as a governess with a wealthy Catholic middle-class family in the Basque region of Spain. But there were more immediate reasons, both public and personal, which led Kate O'Brien, in 1936, to abandon the Irish setting of her previous novels and choose a Spanish milieu. First, 1936 saw the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in which Ireland became involved when General Eoin O'Duffy led out an Irish Brigade to support Franco. Secondly, Kate O'Brien was herself back in Spain about this time, accompanied by Mary O'Neill, her close friend. The novel draws on much of O'Brien's own first experience of Spain, and on her observation of her friend's discovery of it some fourteen years later. In its use of the Spanish experience it represents a new departure in Kate O'Brien's work, but in its study of the heroine's emerging consciousness it can

be seen to be a logical development from the concerns of the novels set in the earlier periods in Ireland.

In this novel, Kate O'Brien poses the question as to how her heroine, in 1922, deals with fatal and illicit love. Education as a theme and as a path to freedom is no longer a relevant argument in this period; now it is quite acceptable that a young woman may choose to go on to further education. Mary Lavelle is not in this category, she is twenty-three, engaged to be married and seems to have her life already decided. If the canción which prefixes the novel is read and understood, the reader will approach the heroine's situation with a certain amount of expectancy. The canción, attributed to King Juan II reads

Amor, yo nunca penssé
aunque poderoso eras,
Que podrias tener maneras
Para trastornar la fe,
Fastagora que lo sé.

Love, I never realised
how powerful you were,
That you have ways
of changing fate. (Bairns?)
Fantastic as I know it to be.

This is the key to Kate O'Brien's intention in this novel, this is what she has in store for her heroine; Mary will fall in love and will experience the direction of her life change. As in all O'Brien novels, love has its price; it is in Mary's suffering, in the pain which her decisions cause, in the moral stand that she eventually takes, that she is seen to develop, arrive at maturity and become truly heroic.

There is much autobiographical material in this novel, as much perhaps as in The Land of Spices. O'Brien's own growing love for Spain and her subsequent devotion to that country is charted here. She depicts a heroine who leaves home for the first time to take up a post, to earn a living, in Spain. O'Brien traces the effects that the outward landscape of Spain has on the inner reaches of the heroine's mind and heart. There is no stock situation of the exile abroad. Mary's presence in Spain has a dual effect; she appears more vulnerable but at the same time is more autonomous. These are the conditions necessary for Mary's new experiences and for her growth. This growth is also possible as a result of Mary's nature. While she is sensitive and intelligent, she is without Fanny's clear-sighted determination, without her single-mindedness and caution; she is, in fact, more open to experience.

Spain is chosen as the location for the extraordinary changes which 'assault' the heroine. In Spain, Mary is not entirely on foreign soil. The Catholic ethic is strong there, she shares the values of religion, and a certain philosophy of life; she suffers little dislocation in this context, and shares the rules of Catholicism with the family in whose home she is to work as governess. This fact is also important to the plot, as the sharing of Catholic values with Juanito is the pivot of Mary's dilemma.

This is a novel of adultery and of romance, but it is also a novel about love of place. The travel motif is

employed in this novel, expanding its use in The Flower of May and making it integral to the plot. The travel motif in Mary Lavelle is of prime importance in the development of the heroine. Its force is seen in the episodes in which Spain forces its landscape and its culture on Mary's sensibilities, causing confusion and pain in the heroine who is bewildered at the way in which Spain is changing her. Mary is older than Fanny, and readier for commitment, time is running out for her if she is to be 'saved'. Fanny's experiences abroad are acknowledged as a 'dress rehearsal' for her life as an adult. Mary, already an adult, receives from Spain a consciousness of the power of her sexuality, the power of her womanhood, which eventually leads to a readiness in her for sexual experience. This is the first time that an O'Brien heroine is defined through love of place as well as through her surrender to romantic passion. O'Brien has written that "fatal attraction between persons is an old poet's notion that some of us still like to believe is possible and occasional, though not probable - and Spain seems to me to be the femme fatale among countries".² Spain and 'fatal attraction' are the catalytic elements which O'Brien employs for her heroine's development. Mary's experiences in Spain form the basis of an open investigation which O'Brien carries out, of the psycho-sexual development of a girl who, Irish, Catholic and betrothed, goes through a 'forcing house' which culminates in a change of direction for her. The change involves the revocation of her marriage plans

to John in 'Mellick', evading what Lorna Reynolds regards as the "unexamined life",³ and becoming like Isabel Archer, "a young woman confronting her destiny"⁴ in true heroic terms.

The main theme of the novel is, as the canción states, that love transforms. Love is used more broadly here than in other novels, love of place awakening the possibilities of romantic passion in Mary. Adultery is a theme in this novel as it is in most of the novels dealing with earlier periods. In O'Brien's world, and more especially in this novel adultery points up the charade that marriage invariably is, and it challenges orthodoxy and religion in the cases of the protagonists. In Mary Lavelle religion and its place in life is taken for granted. Unlike Agnes in The Ante Room, Mary suffers none of the self-reproach, the terrible guilt, the sense of sin, the abject desolation that seemed fitting and convincing in the religious climate depicted in that novel. In 1922, in O'Brien's opinion, given the right circumstances, forbidden love is consummated, although both Mary and her lover recognise the suffering this will cause, recognising that the gravity of sin is, as always, seen in its consequences. Mary sees the reality of her situation; there is no fantasy here, no wishing, no hoping; she accepts that as Catholics she and Juanito can have no future together. Lilian in The Flower of May, as her character is devised, could be expected to be arrogantly heedless of the rules of her faith and of society or, indeed, of anything that interferes with her

egoism, but Mary is unlike her; Mary is 'good'. Lorna Reynolds points out that "O'Brien shows that 'good' Catholics can be torn in allegiance between human needs and religious duties".⁵ Kate O'Brien challenges orthodox morality when she places love before everything. She suggests in the novel that love can rival religious feeling although the tension between the two causes pain and suffering. However, O'Brien shows love to be the stronger impulse.

Mary Lavelle, by her act of choosing the 'personal ethic' over the rules of her religion, is seen to be a danger to the world of the novel. The book was banned due to the fact, as Reynolds expresses it, that "the Censorship of Publications Board took alarm at the audacity of an Irish girl daring to exercise individual judgement ... choosing to do something which she and they regarded as a grave sin".⁶

O'Brien also includes lesbian love, this time clearly identifiable. It is a subject that interested her and with which she deals obliquely in other novels. Agatha Conlon, remorsefully and ashamedly admits to Mary that she is in love with her, as a man would be (p. 285). In terms of forbidden love, Conlon's love for Mary is also out of the question, its realisation more improbable than that between Mary and Juanito. The admission awakes Mary to the possibility that all 'fatal attraction' causes pain, seeing herself and Conlon as fellow sufferers. Love, then, in its many forms is the pivot on which Mary's development takes place but, as in all

O'Brien's novels, the power of beauty is not to be underestimated. It is through Mary's beauty that love enters her life, it is her beauty that captivates both young and old, man and woman.

All O'Brien heroines are recognisably beautiful. Caroline, Molly, Agnes, Fanny, Christina, Lucille, Mary-Rose, all have stunning beauty. Mary Lavelle is different; she is perfection. To Don Pablo she is "the old eternal poetic myth of girlhood" (p. 67). Mary Lavelle is different as the novel is different - O'Brien chooses to continue her examination of the condition of womanhood, but in this novel she narrows down the scope of her study to one individual. It is the only novel the title of which refers unambiguously to the heroine. No images or symbols are employed, no preconceived or ironic associations such as are evident in 'The Flower of May' or 'Pray for the Wanderer'. All that happens in the novel is associated with the novelist's plans for Mary. Spain as protagonist causes the scales to fall from the heroine's eyes, sometimes with cruelty and violence, but as a necessary expedient; Mary must be rescued now, while in Spain. The other novels show the impossibility of such a catharsis taking place at home in 'Mellick' where the rules of society and Church shackle, quench, inhibit and condemn.

The narrator gives a picture of Mary's life at home which follows the recognisable pattern of self-sacrifice and obligation. The banality and restriction of her life within the patriarchal conventions of her world is

compounded by a father who does not appreciate nor love her and by an aunt who is non supportive, a toadying "yes" woman for her brother. Mary is trapped by family duty, undervalued by both father and aunt. Being engaged to John gives her some hope of escape and also a means of economic support, when they marry. Mary is amenable to her situation, she is gentle, subordinate, and not in the least rebellious.

As a member of the Catholic middle classes of 1922, her father, a doctor, is not wealthy; Mary seems to be poorer than Fanny, whose father was in business. O'Brien always displays an interest in the social status of the middle classes as she charts them through the years, and also likes, as she does in The Flower of May and in this novel, to point up the economic disparities between the Irish middle class and its exact counterpart in Europe. In Mary Lavelle, where the professions seem to be struggling economically in Ireland, in Spain, Don Pablo and his son Juanito are prosperous, unconcerned about money and enjoying an easy life-style. Mary's own life style, of "mending", "[making] cakes and [running] errands" (p. 26), going with John to the tennis club on occasions, is dictated by patriarchal values. O'Brien's repugnance for such, for a life which she terms "nothing glamorous or amazing" (p. 27) is obvious through all of her novels. Education rescues Anna, Fanny and Lucille; Agnes and Caroline are left floundering, trapped, while in 1922, as it is 'suitable' for a middle class girl to take a post as governess, O'Brien sets Mary on the road

to freedom, on the pretext, expressed ironically, of embarking on "the errand of keeping alive" (p. x), for, in O'Brien's perspective, the alternative is 'death'. Mary's powerlessness at home is illustrated by the fact that when she pleaded with her father, years previously, that the hundred pounds which her god-mother had left her should be used for her "training for any sort of employment" (p. 26), he dismissed the idea as "'absolute waste ... unless a girl is downright plain'" (p. 26). When she points out to the cautious John that "millions of people married and brought up large families on considerably smaller earnings" (p. 33) than he had, she is told to wait, he knows best. Mary cannot move, as it were, without male sanction. O'Brien utilises the idea of a sisterhood again here as she does in other novels, when the nun in the Convent unwittingly tells Mary about the post of governess in Spain. She wonders if Mary knows of anyone who may be interested. Mary's excitement at the prospect of going to Spain is balanced by guilt; she goes to bed full of the idea, but "shaking, tearful, ashamed of herself and profoundly excited" (p. 35). Her Convent education, her years of domesticity, and her engagement to John have left Mary completely unaware of her 'selfhood'. She is even unaware that she is an adult. The constriction of her life, in the narrator's perspective, is symbolised in the "stunted fig tree" (p. 21) which stands in Lavelle's neat back garden, and in the "restricted view" (p. 21) from the living-room window. On the window seat, the narrator reminisces that

Mary, at twelve years of age pledged her life to freedom; "she would wander always, be a freelance always, belong to no one place or family or person ... her main idea had been to be free and lonely" (p. 27). Now, when the opportunity presents itself for travel, reflecting that "figs grew and ripened in Spain" (p. 35) Mary decides to go.

The decision is not inconsistent with Mary's character. Although she is meek and agreeable and self-effacing, the reader learns that this girl has a sense of adventure, that she operated as a 'dispatcher' for her brother in 1919, "cycling to villages and farms near Mellick on errands for him or his flying column" (p. 25). This was a hazardous practice and one which many women engaged in at the time, as they were deemed to be less suspicious messengers and less likely to be searched than men.

In this novel O'Brien continues many of the themes that she introduces in the novels set in earlier years; now they are in a new context. The twentieth century is well under way, attitudes to employment for women in the middle class world have changed, as have attitudes to religion, involving sin, guilt and obedience. Religion itself and its demands remain much the same, and in fact become more political and dictatorial as the 1930s approach, but the laity has changed, keeping in step with society, and women, especially, have changed as concessions are forced from a patriarchal structure. Marriage as the only logical outcome to a girl's life has

been ruled out by Fanny and Lucille, they want something more from life, and marriage as a possibility for Mary Lavelle is disposed of as a death to the 'self'.

There is the suggestion that O'Brien here, in her heroine, has attempted, or intended to, depict an ideal. It is quite likely that the prototype for this character is Mary O'Neill, the English artist whose friendship with the author began during the period when O'Brien was a teacher, and Mary O'Neill was a pupil, at a Convent in Hampstead. This friendship remained close and loving until O'Brien's death. When O'Brien introduced Mary O'Neill to her beloved Spain, her protégée, we are told in the travelogue Farewell Spain (1937), became as involved with the country as O'Brien herself was. The travelogue is illustrated by O'Neill and in it is an account of her reaction to the bull fight' - very similar to that of the heroine of Mary Lavelle. The artist Mary is eulogised in the character of Mary Lavelle and O'Brien conveys her own convictions obliquely in her portrayal of Conlon's response to the heroine's beauty. In all likelihood Conlon represents O'Brien herself. It would have been impossible at the time, in 1936, to write a novel about lesbian love and set it in a period contemporary with her own life. Banning would have been certain, and furthermore, it would have offended her family. However, in identifying such love she exercises some honesty and integrity within the limits of her own judgement. The ironic outcome was, that Mary Lavelle was banned anyhow, not for the mention of lesbian love, but

for what one could consider much less controversial reasons.

Eavan Boland claims that *Mary Lavelle* is one of O'Brien's "finest books",⁸ and Vivian Mercier acknowledges that it competes with The Ante Room in excellence.⁹ It, above all consolidates O'Brien's belief in the ethic of personal relationships. As women's roles in society change, her heroines become gradually more unorthodox, taking into consideration their almost unchanging Catholic training and religious environment. *Mary Lavelle* brings the theme of "the twinship of the capacity for suffering and the capacity for generosity in emotion"¹⁰ one step further in becoming Juanito's lover. In previous novels dealing with 'fatal romantic love', O'Brien's depiction of the struggle between the two systems of value could be seen as identical to what Charlotte Brontë expresses as "conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat", when *Jane Eyre* decides to leave Rochester. In Mary Lavelle O'Brien removes the restraining hand and allows passion to have its moment.

Mary

The narrative opens with an account of the violation to Mary's modesty as customs officers rummage through her personal possessions which she had packed neatly in her trunk. The intrusion is conveyed in short breathy sentences, indicating Mary's distress as "official hands plunge deep among these necessities" (p. x). The 'necessities' indicate something of her personality; there is "a work-box, a little manicure set, nothing to be ashamed of. But chemises too, and nightdresses" (p. x). The episode anticipates the manner in which Mary's ordered orthodox life is going to be held up for examination before very long, as her traditional values come under siege and are disordered during her stay in Spain. At this point, at the beginning of her journey, the narrator confides that Mary is quite unaware that this journey will change her, she is unprepared, as "she does not know that so long as heart and clock are moving a life cannot stay still" (p. xi).

Mary is on her way to Spain, leaving home, family and fiancé, seizing the opportunity ^{to} of "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" (p. 34). The reader is given notice of Mary's eventual metamorphosis; she is "an individualist ... capable of dream and unfit to march with earnestness in the column of female bread-winners,

or indeed in any column at all" (p. xi). It is predicted, then, that this journey to Spain will be ^{cathartic} ~~catalytic~~, and that the orthodox course of Mary's fate will be deflected.

On her arrival in Spain, installed in her quarters, it dawns on Mary with "a private shock" (p. 20) that she is grown up. Until now she has been unaware that she is in that somewhat undefined region called adulthood. Her roles as daughter and fiancée have prevented any re-valuation taking place in her life up to now. ~~It is~~ From the standpoint of 'adult' ~~that~~ Mary's character develops.

Mary is like wet clay in the hands of the potter/author. She knows nothing of life and understands nothing about the nature of love; that it is as much a disruptive as a binding force. Her response to John's love has been "conventional" (p. 31), "careful" (p. 28); kissing him she had "found in fact no more than a passing discomfort and guilty sensation of relief as each kiss ended" (p. 32) while, theoretically, she knew that kissing should be "a pleasant privilege between two who loved" (p. 31). Perhaps Mary's life would have remained unexplored and conventional even in Spain were it not for the quality of her beauty. Her beauty intimates to Don Pablo, her employer, the fatality of mythological figures suggesting "untaken Aphrodite", or perhaps Isolde or Grainne; anyhow it is "pagan", not of the mortal category, nor of the "bread and butter world" (p. 167).

In Spain, Mary suffers some disquiet initially as she realises that her whole relationship with her world

must be redefined. While (ironically) "she welcomed the adventure of invisibility", she realises that her role puts her not only in charge of others but also of herself. She is for the first time in an 'active' role, mistress of her own life in a "curiously obliterating occupation" (p. 72). Mary's interest in her new surroundings is immediate; the narrator adverts to her discovery of the "unlooked - for Spain" (p. 74); her curious observation of the "bullock-carts", "the men in blouses, and Andalusian wet-nurses; and tall-housed mining villages, and eucalyptus groves, and the yacht of the King of Spain" (p. 75), - a litany of detail is absorbed, unsorted and haphazard, but forming impressions in Mary's sensibility. A week earlier she had written to John "there is wine on my table always, but I haven't had the courage to try it yet!" (p. 9); now, seven days or so later, the narrator discloses that Mary "had begun to drink wine at dinner" (p. 75), had begun to understand the geographic and cultural lay-out of Spain; in other words, Mary Lavelle was swiftly becoming integrated in her new surroundings. In fact, the narrative voice confirms the idea when it states that she "felt attached, and might even smile at tourists ... she felt a little at home" (p. 75). It is in this mood of uncautious complacency that Mary is caught off-guard, and experiences what can be identified as an 'epiphany', a series of which O'Brien employs in the novel for the "laying on of knowledge" (p. 101). These force Mary, one by one, into a new kind of awareness, setting her feet

"on the edge of a different field of exploration" (p. 101) than a geographical one. This particular epiphany, the first, is heralded by "an unexpected solemn movement in her heart" (p. 75) as she gazes on the Church of San Geronimo before which she sits, on her day off. Noting the "great facade", the faded colour of "the buff stone" of its walls, and "the ornaments ... gently scrolled and wrought on its aged surface" (p. 74) she feels something like "premonition ... oppressing, puzzling" (p. 75). The intensity of this experience leaves her rooted to the spot, feeling "as if she might never move again" (p. 75). The gravity and the significance of the occurrence is conveyed in terms of something irreversable and ominous; the catalysis is conveyed by the narrator, who states that Mary

felt not sadness but the inability to ward it off; not love but something like resignation to its possible pain, something like understanding of it ... it was as if what she looked on thus accidentally were ageing her, as if it were imposing knowledge (p. 75).

Mary's new experience of life is further expanded when she meets the 'misses', the group of Irish governesses who gather in Altono at the Café Aelmán in order to stare at, and try to gain the attention of a group of English engineers who also frequent the Café. These women constantly compare notes about their positions, exchanging bitter complaints of their respective employers and about Spain in general. Mary finds herself bewildered and completely out of her depth

with her countrywomen; it is a new experience for her to be "sitting for the first time in her life among wage-earning women" (p. 94). Their attitudes, their habit of passing "personal comments" at each other, and "their use of surnames tout court" (p. 92) are all unacceptable to Mary, for "such things were simply not done in the world that Mary knew" (p. 93). The narrator identifies the origins of this mixed bunch of women; they, like Mary, "came, undoubtedly from impoverished wings of that not easily definable section of society, the Irish Catholic middle-class" (p. 92). Kate O'Brien is, in fact, recounting her own experience, for while in Spain, "on Thursdays or Saturdays, she went to Bilbao and met up in the Swiss Café with an abundant group of misses, the majority of them Irish, who maintained an unending discussion on aspects of their profession".¹¹ The narrator implies that Mary's meeting with these women not only shocked her sensibilities, but that the "bewildered impressions" gleaned from this group suggested to her "some reflections on her own sex" that were as new to her as "the experience that gave them shape" (pp. 94-5). Mary is visibly shaken, she is one of 'them' and thus her self-image of an "obscure and simple creature" (p. 138) is changing in this company of women who are "too lonely, unimportant and unamused to be graceful or gracious ... too poor to be decorative" (p. 94). Although these new experiences bewilder and tire her, she feels free.

The big bed-room of her own with its three large windows and her own balcony give Mary a sense of freedom

that she hitherto had not known. The scene she looks out on is beautiful and friendly - the little harbour of Cabantes with all its fishing activity. Mary has "time to observe and meditate". At this point the narrator states that "left to herself anywhere, bereft of the family setting and the Irish back-cloth, bereft of the dominating authority of John, she might have put out unexpected shoots" (p. 106). Mary had "grown up somewhat" (p. 101) since coming to Spain. The term 'growing up' is used all through the novel in relation to Mary's development. In Conlon's room, looking down on the Church of San Geronimo, Mary, remembering that first 'epiphany', considers that Spain, the "scene, the sky and the people" are all "agreeable to her" (p. 106). Through her "impersonal, accidental contacts" with all whom she met, Mary, in fact, "felt justified lately in her rather sweeping conviction that she liked Spanish people" (p. 105). It is this 'liking' that tempts her to taste a slice of Spanish life that, even before she came to Spain, she was determined to avoid; she had agreed with John that she should never attend a bull-fight. But that was before she had taken "some trouble to learn Spanish" (p. 106), before she became involved with "the immediate life of Spain" which became "attractive as Spain grew more attractive" (p. 107) to her. It is her puzzlement with the "inconsistencies in the Spanish character" (p. 108) which sanction such an activity as the Corrida, that leads on to Mary's accepting "to her own astonishment" (p. 109) Conlon's invitation to attend the bull-fight.

The graphic description of Mary's experience of the Corrida is recounted with all its ritual and carnage and also in terms of the heroine's perception of the event. Mary, isolated in the crowd, "outside herself" (p. 115) bears witness to "death made into an elaborate play, for money and cheers" (p. 115). Lorna Reynolds suggests that Mary has "had a revelation of the possible pain of life and its control through the patterning of art".¹² Mary's mixture of revulsion and fascination at the "burlesque, fantastic, savage" (p. 116) slice of Spanish life causes further dislocation of the 'self' that is familiar to her, and "all that she had known of herself was shocked" (p. 116) by this, which, the narrator confirms as the "most disconcerting experience of her life" (p. 129). In language that suggests lost innocence and usurpation, it is stated that the bullfight is "the gateway through which Spain had entered in and taken her" (p. 128); her submission is expressed as inevitable and pre-ordained, "its truth knocked and she admitted it" (p. 116). The 'epiphany' of the bullfight is yet another "moment of truth" when old values are split open; although cruel and crude it was "more vivid with beauty and all beauty's anguish" (p. 116) than anything she had ever before encountered. It is a symbolic representation of the imminent pain and transport that she will experience when she falls in love with Juanito, and which will lead to her ultimate submission to him and to Spain. The catharsis wrought by the bullfight, and all its implications, is underscored in the observation that from

this point on Mary "looked out on the Spanish scene with wider and more shadowed eyes" (p. 129).

After the bullfight, Mary, recognising its impact, and acknowledging it as a factor now in her disloyal and objective criticism of John (p. 138), endeavours to dismiss it by forcing into the foreground of her mind images of home, conjuring up the "rain on the sycamore leaves ... Aunt Cissy at the drawing-room window ... a Benediction bell ... an eager step, like John's" (p.142), and immediately feels "alien, dejected, out of tune" (p. 142). Mary experiences a sense of panic, she feels she is exposed and vulnerable, that she is changing too quickly and too radically, so instinctively she retreats to the 'safety' of thoughts of "the rainy street of childhood ... where true love waited for her, where she had given her pledge of lifelong love" (p. 142). This sentiment takes on ironical significance when, at this low point of Mary's spirits she meets Juanito, her pupils' brother, who would, in time, usurp that 'true love' and integrate her still further and irreversibly into Spanish life.

Mary Lavelle's attraction to Spain seems as intense as what, apparently, one can detect from O'Brien's writings, the author's was. Juanito, personifying all that the heroine loves about Spain, inevitably captures her heart. She does not realise that her feeling for Spain has prepared her, as it were, for this moment; she is puzzled by the fact that "for some unsearchable reason, inevitably and instantaneously", she had "liked

him" (p. 185). The theme of fatal love now takes over, and the sentiments of the cancion, of how love can transform fate, become the significant element in the realisation of the theme.

The love story is conveyed by means of episodes each of which hastens Mary towards womanhood and awareness, each causing her to feel "the pursuing tides of adult, vulgar, unexplainable wretchedness overtake her frightened heart" (p. 239). On the evening of Juanito's arrival their eyes meet as "the evening sun, pouring in at the landing windows, lighted each very sweetly for the other, as with a fatal halo" (p. 145). Later in the evening Mary is obliged to join the family to listen to the flamenco records that Juanito has brought. The association that the music releases of the open-air dancing in the Plaza San Martin, a habit of Spanish life that Mary has become enchanted with, coupled with Juanito's presence, causes feelings verging on alarm in Mary. The alarm mounts with the throb of guitar and saxophone and with the increasingly intimate drawl of the singer's voice. Something is suffocating her, she cannot identify it, she wants to escape, "to be at home" (p. 157).

Mary has no terms of reference by which to identify her feelings, for nothing as yet had "disturbed her senses" (p. 181); so, when Juanito stays, allowing his wife and child to travel on alone to their holiday destination, and when he enters the school room on an unconvincing pretext, Mary does not wonder. However, as

her young pupil Milagros recites her choice of poem which happens to contain the sentiment "come live with me and be my love ..." (P. 179), Mary notes Juanito's reaction and "she took its danger and felt it, could almost have had the courage to name it to her thudding heart, for an illuminating second" (p. 180). This episode arrests the action of the novel, for at this point it is necessary for the narrator to remind the reader that what is happening Mary is happening to a "well-trained Irish Catholic" (pp. 180-1). In order to underline the anarchical nature of love between Mary and Juanito, the "orthodoxy" (p. 180) of Mary's religious and moral training is underscored, as is her ignorance as to the implications of romantic passion. The narrative voice states that "in spite of this accidental personal immunity from the more severe tests of human frailty, Mary knew by hearsay - from confessors, from school retreats, from missions, from the exhortations of the Catechism - that she was a sinner, a weak thing of flesh", but Mary, it is also stated, is "no fool", and is aware of the "tricky sixth Commandment" (p. 181). At this point, then, the narrator indicates that Mary's orthodoxy is not intimidated by "enigmatic glances" (p. 180) such as she receives from Juanito in the school room; she regards her "novel and ridiculous state of mind" (p. 181) as "an attack of being a fool" (p. 182). On further reflection, Mary acknowledges that she had responded to "the Spanish look, the Spanish mask which was a masculine uniform, ... and meant nothing personal

in it from the wearer" (p. 184), yet she recognises that she had "inevitably and instantaneously" (p. 185) liked Juanito and she must now "strangle" this "brief folly" (p. 184). Mary is not prepared for the pain she experiences when she hears of Juanito's departure to join his family. Like all O'Brien heroines in their dilemmas, Mary prays, her supplication echoes that of Caroline, Christina, and Agnes. "God help me! oh help me, help me please" is her prayer (p. 186).

The next episode brings affirmation from both Juanito and Mary of their attraction for each other. Fleeing in anguish from the house in order to avoid Juanito's leavetaking, Mary takes the train to Altono, with "a wild pain in her heart that terrified her". On her journey she prays to God for a palliative, "teach me to love John as I should" she pleads (p. 186). Sitting in a cake shop having a cup of coffee her panic lessens, she "calmed down" (p. 187). Later, as she watches the open-air dancing Juanito finds her, and they both dance together "to the raucous music" (p. 189). Mary, by this act, is drawn further into Spanish life and custom, the girl who "often standing there had wondered what it would be like to be one of them" (pp. 188-9) is no longer an onlooker, she is integrated, she is also now in love with Juanito. No words have been said, but each receives from the other a confirmation of their feelings.

Spain has nothing to offer Mary in terms of a deterrent to her feelings for Juanito; even the statue of Our Lady of Allera before which she goes to pray, instead

of the aesthetic saintly figure to which she is accustomed at home, is "a lovely pink-cheeked Virgin", which seems "as if dancing". This Spanish image is "baroque and happy, with rings on her fingers and a rakish coronet on her head. A lovely inattentive creature before whom to lay a prayer" (pp. 195-6). Mary looks to herself for resources, deciding "to live outwardly ... to keep the mind fussed and a little tired" (p. 202). She endeavours to "smother panic" with "irrelevancies" (p. 202). Knowing that it is not an "entirely honest" thing to do, she uses her letters to John as a "source of refuge" (p. 203).

Spain takes a further grip on Mary as she journeys through the province of Castille to Madrid. She is escorting her charges on a visit to their aunt. The landscape which she views from the train gives her "absolute pleasure" (p. 214). / From her reading she knows Castille to be pure, without Arab influence. / She had "gathered up ... a fair collection of other men's impressions of Spain" (p. 215). Spain had already drawn her into an emotional commitment, "she had fallen day by day ... a little more and a little more in love with it" (p. 214). She is almost afraid to experience Castille, for, the narrator discloses, Mary's "intuitions insisted" that "here if anywhere she would find the Spanish heart" (p. 215). The 'Spanish heart' encompasses Spain and Juanito; for her, "sudden infatuation with Castille", the narrator forbodes "could only be the omen of trouble" (p. 218). Mary's discovery of Castille blinded her to the

implications of her further involvement with this country, "the absolute rightness, absolute goodness of it made her recklessly light-hearted" (p. 216) to a degree when she dismisses her love for Juanito, at this point, as "a schoolgirl crush". The narrative voice points up Mary's 'addiction' when it comments that she "went on tippling at her mania" (p. 218), tempting fate in fact, secure in the presumption that the "whole absurdity must blow over any minute" (p. 219). From the moment Mary arrives in Madrid her dilemma increases, as the episodes that hasten her full irreversible commitment to both Spain and Juanito crowd in, by their intensity quelling any resistance which may have arisen from reflection. The narrative carries Mary swiftly from her visit to El Prado museum where, confronted with so much great art all at once, she agrees, ironically, that "there's something to be said ... for sudden, exhausting encounter" (p. 227), and on to her second bullfight and to the subsequent tea party, in honour of her birthday, at Juanito's apartment. Having withstood this ordeal "with a good grace", Mary decides that "now her real business in Madrid was done" (p. 237). However, the next day, seated in a little café in Toledo, the narrator's premonitions seem justified, for Mary admits to herself that "she could bear no more of Spain. She must close her sensibilities and grope her way home as decently as possible" (p. 238). With this acquiescence the question arises, "was she in fact, for all her bluff, grown up and in a woman's dilemma? Was she unsuitably, illicitly in

love?" (p. 238). She shares this dilemma with other heroines, with Caroline, Christina, Agnes and Lilian, but here in Spain, Mary has recourse to none of the constants, the tangible deterrents which other O'Brien women have. She is subject to "the pursuing tides of adult, vulgar, inexplicable wretchedness" (p. 239), without home, family, Church, priest or confessor to remonstrate with her. Feeling their absence, she longs for "the blessed mists and rain" of Mellick, for home, where "old rules were absolute" (p. 239). She considers herself to be mutilated, to be damaged, in a sense, by what she has endured; this is underscored by the narrator's comment, that Mary "had not known that life and travel and experiment could maim one thus" (p. 240). It is in this mood of isolation and misery that she raises her eyes to investigate the shadow which, symbolically, shields her from the sun. Her doubts and weariness dissipate on discovering Juanito standing in front of her, and she is "helpless against pleasure" (p. 241).

Mary's growth now enters its final phase. She and Juanito speak of their love for each other as they drive to the hills above Toledo. They admit its unpracticality, recognise that pain and confusion are attendant on it. Mary declares that it is "not suitable or manageable", it is "a dream" (p. 247), "a nightmare interlude" (p. 239), and they will never "be given the chance to mix it with reality" (p. 247). Mary takes the initiative and kisses Juanito, much to his "astonishment"

(p. 248). The kiss brings the recollection of John and "the distaste with which she suffered his hungry mouth" (p 252). Mary's recognition of the significance of such disloyalty brings with it the realisation that now "she had cast her lot" (p. 252). She knows now what love is, and "the orthodox order of her own life" is in disarray. She also recognises that what she can expect from such disorder is "loneliness for herself" (p. 253). There is the ebb and flow of orchestrated emotion which assaults Mary's stand; from declaring stolidly "we are not going to maim and maul each other, Juanito, in the name of love" (p. 254) she, moments later, collapses in his arms crying "I can't bear it! oh, Juanito, I can't bear it!" (p. 256). At this point the narrator announces that "the gates were down at last" (p. 256). Reserve, politeness and resolution are dissolved by Mary's sorrow. Their love has a "sweet rightness" (p. 256) which connects it immediately with Mary's love of Castille, which, for her, had an "absolute rightness" (p. 216). Juanito and Spain blend in Mary's emotions and, in elegiac tone, it is suggested that Mary's love must reach a "logical end", that "her surrender" is imminent (p. 257). This refers to Mary's decision to surrender her virginity to Juanito, here in Spain. She recoils initially from the situation, although deciding that "the central sin against Catholic teaching would be her affair and Heavens" (p. 257); she decides that it would hurt Juanito in so far as the act would, she considers, "injure his peace of mind and his self-respect most savagely" (p. 258). What is notable

here is the absence of any overwhelming sense of guilt or of sin. Mary's decisions come mainly from a private morality and from the love and desire she has for Juanito. There is no intrusion of Catholic doctrine, no question of confession, the sacraments, retribution. Mary has dismissed, obviously, any qualms of her conditioned conscience in favour of the dictates of her heart. If Mary is a credible representation of the young Irish girl of the mid-nineteenth century, then it is certain that she is well tutored in the pitfalls of 'sins of the flesh'. The popular pamphlet at the time issued by the Catholic Truth Society carries an article entitled 'The Idol of Pleasure' in which there is outraged condemnation of what is termed "the worship of the senses", the "unreasonable surrender to passion"¹³ and a warning that "degradation and decay follow remorselessly in the track of the unclean sin".¹⁴ Mary's experience of Spain has given her a personal ethical stand; while acknowledging her religion and its dictates, she makes her own choice, unlike the O'Brien heroines that have gone before her, she chooses heart over conscience.

O'Brien has indeed transformed her heroine. She is hardly recognisable from the modest orthodox girl of the opening chapters. Mary knows now that "what each man calls his own reality advances on him and shapes itself as much from without as from within, from accident as from preconception" (p. xi). She also knows now what the narrator pointed out she was ignorant of at the start of her journey, that "so long as heart and clock are moving

a life cannot stay still" (p. xi).

On their way back to Madrid, weary from emotion, Mary and Juanito find themselves unequal to the heroics of farewell. Juanito bids her "'hasta luego'" which in colloquial terms is "good bye", but literally means "until again" (p. 266). The significance of the correct usage of the words is clear when Juanito turns up at Cabantes on hearing that Mary is going home.

There are two further episodes which occur before she leaves Spain, sealing her "growing up" process and opening her eyes still further to the grief and elation accompanying love. On hearing of her intended departure Conlon confides in Mary that she is in love with her, admitting "I like you the way a man would ... I never can see you without - without wanting to touch you" (p. 285). Mary Lavelle's response to Conlon's admission is one of empathy; she sees herself, Juanito and Conlon as victims of "bitter, unforeseen exactions" (p. 286), of the "tangle" of their "longings" (p. 286). She cries for Agatha Conlon's pain, identifying with it, for like Agatha, she is "fantastically and perversely in love" (p. 296).

The final episode comes the day before Mary is due to leave Spain. When Juanito again, as if by magic, finds her in a café in Altono and drives her to his childhood picnic place, Mary decides to abandon all her former noble considerations and to consummate her love for Juanito before she leaves Spain. She assumes the role of active partner, speaking in an animated and

purposeful manner she expresses the way in which she sees her existence now; "its been fantastic, my time in Spain. Its been a mad, impossible thing dropped into my ordinary life". She reminds Juanito that this 'time' is now at an end, and she will have to resume an "ordinary" life again. She then reveals to him her decision, "I want you to have me first - just for this one time, up here where you used to play when you were a little boy, nothing else will content me, however long I live - if you refuse me this" (p. 306). "Romantic passion" (p. 305) is raised from the definition of "unclean sin" to different proportions when O'Brien interjects here "woe to the sunless heart that has never been its dupe" (p. 305), as she acknowledges that "years and experience tear it harshly or amusedly to bits; knowledge, asceticism and sensuality agree in mocking it; convention shakes its head, theology frowns and science analyses the most extravagant attraction", yet, she states, those who have "endured it", "would not have escaped it" (p. 305). Mary is seen to briefly consider the "traditional claims" on her, but quickly decides that "this one claim" is Juanito's (p. 308). Juanito and Mary became lovers and Mary is "content" (p. 312). Mary Lavelle's 'growing up' is now complete. She has been fully integrated with Spain.

It is understood that the intensity of the experience of her four months in Spain will, in time, be assimilated by Mary, but there has been a violent and relentless 'educating' of the girl by Spain. The

experience has forced her to confront the 'moment of truth', and through her acknowledgement of such, there has been a subsequent breaking of moulds and an upturning of values. The symbol of the bullfight has been translated into reality, with all its exactions; the chant-like commentary takes on the role of Greek chorus as it substantiates this,

there were truths that were indefensible, truths that changed and broke things, that exacted injustice and pain and savagery, truths that were sins and cruelties - but yet were true and had a value there was no use in defending (p. 344).

As death and departure are always elements in the O'Brien heroine's growth, the death of Don Pablo, which is quite unconvincing in terms of plot, is included here as if for the sole purpose of having Mary exposed to such an occurrence. The entire episode is like a coda, and creates an awkward and drawn-out ending for the novel.

Mary has come full circle. She has achieved her childhood dream of being "free and lonely" (p. 27). O'Brien has explored the possibilities of her heroine's life when she is removed from what O'Brien deems to be Joycean 'nets', home, family and Church. She also rescues Mary from the option of orthodox marriage. O'Brien's own opinions on marriage are quite clear in all her novels; Fanny and Lucille in The Flower of May are her mouthpieces on the subject. She not only directs Mary's path from the direction of marriage but also causes Juanito to renege on his seemingly happy

marriage. Radical love, although illicit, is what O'Brien seems to advocate, and to the extent of abandoning values inherent in society and in ones religion. Mary's response to romantic love is that of an evolving O'Brien heroine responding to the new role the female has in the Ireland of her time; no longer passive, she makes decisions about her life while acknowledging the 'sin'.

The novel ends on a note of hope; Juanito bids Mary "'hasta leugo'" yet again (p. 342). In this, there is a suggestion that improbable as it may appear, there might be some future for their love.

Mary Lavelle is returning home to an Ireland that is due to become absolute in its orthodoxy and unflinching in its crusade for sanctity and 'morality'. The late 1920s and 1930s was to be an era which was influenced by the ideology of De Valera, and by the feverish increase in activity within the Church to promote a social code to correspond with the religious one. This 'crusade' was to be affirmed in the Constitution of 1937. The new 'régime' is the subject for discussion in O'Brien's novels dealing with that period. What will endure for Mary Lavelle, in spite of everything, is her love for Spain; O'Brien states, that she herself remained in love with that country for her entire life, "with curious fidelity".¹⁵

CHAPTER VI

PRAY FOR THE WANDERER

INTRODUCTION

This novel was written in almost immediate response to the banning of Mary Lavelle. It is set in 1937, the year in which it was written, and it explores the concept of individual freedom in the context of the Ireland at that time. The novel is first and foremost a protest at what Lorna Reynolds terms "the new Calvinism in Irish society",¹ which O'Brien wished to expose as censorious and detrimental, especially to the writer.

In order to express her views she employs Matt Costello, a writer who is banned in Ireland, his own country, as her voice. This novel is anomalous in that O'Brien takes a man rather than a woman as protagonist for the first time since Without My Cloak. It links immediately with Mary Lavelle in the contrast set up between the protagonist who leaves Ireland, develops moral stature through a broader experience away resulting in a liberating vision of life, and, the protagonist who returns from abroad to Ireland, temporarily at least disillusioned with the 'liberated' life, prepared now to see the stability of Ireland with approval. This treatment of Matt is to some extent a satiric and polemic device, and through his perception, O'Brien underlines

both the attraction Ireland's values has for the returned exile and also the complacency, and the cruelty of intolerance he sees in Irish society. O'Brien points also to the influence of the Church, condemning the attitudes it has inculcated and continues to do, in the majority of the Irish people in this period. Father Malachi declares to Matt that "the Church ... is to control its members to the end of their eternal salvation, and by God's authority", while Matt considers that the "abrogation of 'control' is the darkest and most hideous arrogance" (p. 187). 'Control' is what the dual authorities of Church and State used in the 1930s, one power reinforcing the other, harnessing the approval and support of the new, educated, section of the population. With De Valera as chief whip, the Catholic community was persuaded to believe that it was a unique and wonderful thing to be Irish and Catholic.

An ideology was fed to the people, forming the basis for a 'normality' of life. O'Brien sees De Valera, as "a more subtle dictator than most", who implemented this ideology by endeavouring to put "the minds of his people in chains". Matt, the protagonist, sees 'Dev' as the choirmaster for the present population of Ireland who are "singing the new theme of captivity". The image of 'singing in their chains' is applied to the present generation, conveying O'Brien's ironic treatment of the female characters who are happy and content with their lives, lives which both Matt and the authorial voice denounce as blighted by "absurd and terrible obedience"

(p. 40). De Valera, the instigator of this 'serfdom' came to office in 1932; he was noted for his "puritanical morality",² and in general considered "a devout Catholic of conservative views".³ By 1937, 'Dev' had gained a formidable reputation; he and his party showed themselves to be carriers of Catholic values, ostentatiously supporting Church events such as holding a state reception for the Eucharistic Congress in 1932,⁴ and attending the centenary celebrations of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, held in Paris in 1933. He equated 'Irish' with 'Catholic' in all his propaganda broadcasts and speeches, ^{seeming to} ~~thereby ignoring~~ any minority religions in Ireland. The Constitution of 1937 underscored his attitudes, and Bromage, in her biography⁵ emphasises the fact that this Constitution was the creation of one man, De Valera. Corish considers that the Constitution "was permeated not only by Catholic moral viewpoints but also by what had crystallised as 'Catholic social thought', or Catholic social teaching'".⁶ In the novel, Matt regards De Valera as a "clever man" in so far as he had succeeded in enshrining Irish Catholic principles in the actual law of the land by means of this "tricky constitution" (p. 41).

The title of the novel sets in motion the associations of traditional ritualistic prayer. The hymn is an invocation to Our Lady, Star of the Sea; the title of the hymn is "Hail, Queen of Heaven", and, because of its rich imagery and melodious air, was a great favourite in Irish congregations right up to the introduction of

the folk Mass, when more popular tunes were used to attract the interest of the younger generation. The last line of the hymn is "Pray for the Wanderer, pray for me", and is ironic in its implication; Matt is the wanderer, the outsider, who because he is in exile, and because his integrity is born of personal liberty, needs prayer, needs to be brought back to the fold by Irish Catholic standards. Although O'Brien uses the association ironically here, the words have more sombre and nostalgic significance now, as they appear carved on her grave stone where she lies, in exile, in England.

The women of this novel are two-dimensional characters, employed as mouthpieces for the stereotypical values of their day. The two women are, as often found in an O'Brien novel, sisters, one married and one not. They personify the personality of the environment which Matt identifies and reveals to the reader. O'Brien represents, through the two female characters, the socio-historic dimension of women's existence in the Irish middle-class Catholic world of 1937. The novel interprets life in Ireland at this period through the perception of the returned writer, the outsider.

As a documentary, Pray for the Wanderer is, as John Jordan points out, best considered as a novel of manners.⁷ Una and Nell are women of their time, they are defined within their society, participating, unprotesting. They are more or less what they seem; they live their reality, there is no submerged, covert, private landscape to their lives, there are no depths to

be revealed by either an omniscient narrator or through interior monologue. No one protests now but the artist, who regards his native country, "De Valera's island" (p. 148) to be "under the drug of memory and tradition", which demands the "surrender of ego and integrity to nurse an implacable theory of the common good" (p. 148). It is as if, thoroughly disillusioned and defeated, O'Brien has abandoned womanhood to mediocrity, conformity, and the contentment that comes from smugness and stasis.

(Every character in the novel is stereotyped, representing a certain view point, speaking from a certain perspective. There is very little action; the characters on the stage of Irish society perform strictly within the role, each speaking his part without much interplay of personality. (

The novel is defective as such; as Reynolds indicates, it has "the flimsiest of plots"⁸ and is best evaluated as "a documentary on the confessional Ireland of the time".⁹ This Ireland has conditioned the two women, Una and Nell, quite thoroughly. Applying the framework of history, as young women in the nineteen twenties they would have lived in a period when the ideals of the Irish State were being constructed on a base of censorious measures; the Censorship of Films Act in 1923, two years later in 1925 legislation forbidding divorce, and in 1929 the Censorship of Publications Act completed the dictatorial gestures which curbed any inclination towards personal integrity in the populace.

Liberation was deemed to be a concept contrary to the common good. Matt/O'Brien considers that "this atmosphere of active Catholicism, decorum, taboo and self-discipline" (p. 105) is death to the 'self'.

Colm Toibin claims that "the spectre of the 1937 Constitution haunts Kate O'Brien's Pray for the Wanderer"; he also makes the point which Matt makes in the book, that at the time, there was an awareness of a much greater restriction on personal liberty in the cases of Germany and Italy.¹⁰ Without being blinkered then, the novel takes issue with the elements of Irish life with which the artist is at odds. It exposes the environment in which Una and Nell, unseeing, live out their lives. (O'Brien's disillusion with her native country at this time colours the portrayal of these women; there is no question of their straining for individual expression aided by a sisterhood; they are, instead, 'part and parcel of the Ireland which censors writers on the slimmest of pretexts, sanctimonious in its decisions, puritanical and prudish in its vision. |

Una

Una represents the ideal wife and mother, and is the epitome of the values embodied in Article 41.2 of the 1937 Constitution which states, "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved". Una fits into the system, she goes along with the rules and regulations of Church and State; at no stage does she protest, even against the corporal punishment which is cruelly meted out to her young son Liam, at school. Una is a far cry from other married women, from other mothers, in O'Brien's novels. There is no restless independent spirit yearning for something better, something different, as there is in Caroline (Without My Cloak), nor is there the bewildered frustration of Marie-Rose (The Ante Room). There is nothing of the 'dreamy' Julia (The Flower of May) in Una; Matt surmises that she is "without a fantasy life, without a day-dream" (p. 89).

Una lives in a large comfortable house; there are lawns stretching down to the river where fish are plentiful and from which herons rise to seek the shelter of sturdy well-rooted poplars. O'Brien suggests that this haven of peace and contentment is a metaphor for the Ireland of the Catholic middle classes of 1937. Orthodoxy, tradition, continuity, are presented as the values inherent in such a world; new ideas and avant

garde influences which attempt to infiltrate its defences are met with suspicion and dismissal. The head of the household is Will, Una's husband, who, O'Brien states ironically, is "a citizen of the Irish Free State, and a family man" (p. 3). Will considers that "there's been a little too much personal liberty everywhere" (p. 24).

Kate O'Brien depicts Una as a character of manners; she is subservient to her husband in issues such as who she votes for, and is irritably cut off when she voices her opinion on politics; "what do you know about it" Will demands (p. 25). There is no blatant or critically dismissive appraisal of Una's orthodoxy; the ambivalence of O'Brien's attitude to Una is conveyed through Matt's confusion as to the values he sees inherent in Ireland, at the same time stifling and stable, the antithesis of the discomfiting 'liberty' of London. His perception of Una is that she has reaped happiness from a life of giving, nonassertiveness, and conformity to the rules of her world.

Una is beautiful, details of her appearance conveyed through male perception are expressed in imagery verging on cliché; she is a "rose", fragrant and lovely, "innocently seductive" (p. 5), while Tom assesses Una's life to be a "spectacle" of "decent human nature enjoying itself decently" (p. 85). Una is no threat to the patriarchal values of her time and is held in approval by the male characters of the novel.

Una's life is spent performing the traditional duties of wife and mother. Her role is essential to the

substance of life being promoted in Ireland at that time. She does not see herself as a victim, but as a participant, regarding her life-style as worthwhile. She sees marriage as the ideal state, and wishes that her sister Nell was also married. With the knowledge that O'Brien, at no stage of her life, held marriage to be ideal, rejecting it herself, and portraying it repeatedly as an inhibiting state for women, it is quite legitimate to assume, by her apparent approval of Una, that she is but adopting, tongue-in-cheek, the view point of contemporary society, for ironic purposes. The narrative voice points to Una's blind acceptance of her life when it states that this woman "was no man's martyr and had no idea that there was need for a martyr in the cause of domestic happiness", while in the same paragraph it adds that Una is "completely subservient to Will" (p. 89). Una's unconcern for her position in society comes from an unquestioning disposition as well as from a conditioned response to her role; she "would regard herself as a free creature, a self-directed and normally selfish woman" (p. 89). At no stage is this 'normal selfishness' detectable. Her non-participation in life outside her home, and the limitations of her involvement with concerns outside of her family, is pointed up gently by O'Brien. The reader is aware of women's participation in politics at this time, it is apparent that Una's role in life is modified by the seemingly benign cocoon of domestic happiness she lives in. By 1936 a total of six women were elected to the Free State Senate, and in 1937

Mrs Redmond debated on the Constitution, advocating a change in the wording of Article 41, demanding that the clause should include all women in and out of the home.¹¹ Will prefers to have Una in the traditional role, uninvolved with what he would consider to be male topics.

The insularity of Una's life is underscored when Matt, the travelled, aware, and sensitive artist points out that the cocoon in which she lives isolates her from the reality of the world about her; he reminds her that there is a less fortunate section of humanity, but Una replies that she herself is happy and can't see why "millions of others" cannot be likewise (p. 206). Una makes the point to Matt that "life is worth living, on most terms", to which he replies "thats a conviction of the sheltered, and you've always been sheltered". Una's voice is that of the stereotype when she claims "we're still Catholics here, you know, and believe that man is a spirit, and that it is our duty to go on propagating him to the glory of God" (p. 214). Una, expecting her sixth child is also voicing the right wing stand on a controversy which raged just two years previously - in 1935, when, as a result of the Church's condemnation of all family planning; section 17 of the Criminal Law (Ammendment) Act prohibited the sale, advertising, or importation of contraceptives. Una will always follow the rules, and in so doing, feels secure. She is distrustful of brains or cleverness, and feels safer in her own non-intellectual existence. There is no development of character in the case of Una, there is no

struggle; society approves of her and she approves of society as she understands and knows it. Una's and Will's marriage is depicted as perfect and happy, but this is through the vision of Matt who has been disappointed in love and whose plans for marriage to the leading lady of his play were suddenly and hurtfully destroyed by her decision not to leave her husband. Marriage is what he longs for. Una's marriage, with its "accident of perfect mating" (p. 89) in his eyes, with its sense of continuity, its love, is idealised from the centre of his wounded and lonely heart. Una is part of his poetic vision of his native land, "this uncrowded landscape, flowing peace" (p. 284).

Nell

Una's sister Nell is thirty-three years old. She is a spinster, and like Mary Lavelle she is part of the female work-force, not doomed to a life of domesticity like the unwed sisters of the novels set in earlier times. In 1937 the position of women has changed dramatically, mirrored in Kate O'Brien's world. The concessions granted to women as documented in the novels, especially the concessions concerning education, set the wheels in motion; University education became a possibility, and spinsterhood was seen as a commendable state - as in The Flower of May. It is no surprise to find that the spinster character in 1937 is a career woman with an M.A. degree, driving a car, smoking, and well travelled. Nell seems quite satisfied with her single state and finds plenty to occupy her.

The narrative voice maintains that Nell is "an unswerving faithful Catholic and a virgin" (p. 165). A sardonic tone is detectable in the assurances given to the reader that Nell did not "merely accept the Church's rules - she understood them - and understood ... that human nature for which they were framed" (p. 166). The churlish Tom lists her activities with, one suspects, slight exaggeration, exasperated as he is by what he considers her over-involvement with her religion; she is a devotee of such organisations as "Legions of Mary, and Catholic Actions and Knights of Saint Joseph" (p. 73).

O'Brien, in stereotyping Nell, is underscoring the whole new structure within the Catholic Church in Ireland which would not have been so widespread in the time of Mary Lavelle, but which grew to enormous dimensions in the 1930s. The Legion of Mary, founded in Ireland in 1921 was organised in the manner which its name indicates; the recruitment of 'soldiers' of the laity to promote devotion to Our Lady. Meetings were held, and prayers recited from a special handbook. As well as having a devotional function it also had an apostolic dimension.

O'Brien here also refers to the implementation of the Pope's social teaching as incorporated in Pius XI's encyclical on 15th May 1931 entitled Quadragesimo Anno; Catholic Action was the result of this, and in the year in which this novel is set - 1937, the hierarchy established a Chair of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Action at Maynooth College. "The Knights of St. Joseph" are recognisably the Knights of St. Columbanus formed in Dublin in 1922 to counter discrimination against Catholics by Freemasons and others.

Tom, employed as the voice of the intelligentsia, satirist of the new 'régime', feels only contempt and cynicism for all this new authoritarian Catholicism, seeing the passive acceptance of all authority as "the world's disease", which, in the Irish context, is expressing itself "in the inflammation of that Jansenism that Maynooth has threatened at us for so long" (p. 75). Nell's morality, in Matt's opinion, suggests "not simplicity, but of the skirts drawn back from the mud"

(p. 107) kind, typifying the double-standard morality he sees to be characteristic of Ireland at the time.

The layers of Nell's personality unfold in an unhurried manner and with a definite design. She is defined mostly through the viewpoints of those around her. Nell, as a product of her conditioning is not condemned, but the conditioning itself is held up to criticism. Nell herself, the narrative voice states, "has a cool and ranging mind and accepted certain categorical imperatives as much because she was convinced of their general rightness as because all her blood was Catholic". Conditioning, meaning 'the modification of response by acquired reflexes' is what directs Nell. The question is posed as to whether Nell is governed by "emotional and religious inhibition" (p. 166), or is she, in fact, governed equally by "her own intellectual workings" when she asserts that she would "surrender virginity" only for marriage. On this subject, she has definite views; she considers that love-making without the obligations of the natural social unit of the family is anarchic, "anti-social selfishness" (p. 166). Nell pays lip-service to what she terms "emotion", stating that "you can only be yourself through emotion, and can only establish understanding and release authentic knowledge of yourself through the medium of feeling" (p. 163). Her tone is clipped, and her statement is exact scientific jargon, suggesting that Nell's knowledge of 'emotion' is more text-book and theoretical than actual.

It is likely that Nell has forgotten what love is like. Twelve years previously she had been engaged to her first cousin Tom, but due to her discovery that he had fathered an illegitimate child, "shocked and hurt" (p. 167) she terminated their romantic relationship. The fact that she considers her action now as "idiotic prudery" (p. 272) indicates that Nell has grown somewhat in those twelve years. The narrative voice maintains that Nell "knew that in missing love she was missing the thing she needed most", but her standards are high, and she could only accept love if "it visited her on her own terms" (p. 167). It is obvious that Nell has not been a victim of the more extreme genre of romantic love which usually visits the O'Brien heroines. This is the difference, and this is the stumbling block between right and wrong when the O'Brien female is in love. Passion, one feels, would soon eradicate Nell's cool intellectualism and her 'religious inhibitions'. She never felt it, and so remains a virgin and unmarried, dismissing Matt's sex-appeal as "notations of the senses" (p.165). Matt detects that for Nell there is "only a good way of living or a bad way. You must either be for or against the Ten Commandments" (p. 110). Nell, as stereotype, speaks for De Valera's idealism; committed to the social good she "despised pleaders of 'privelege'", and dismisses what she terms "individualists", scornfully. She also holds forth on the controversial issue of contraception, considering it a "crude materialistic ethic" (p. 166) though, paradoxically, she

also abhors "unchecked fecundity" (p. 167) seeing its consequences demographically. O'Brien depicts Nell endeavouring to respond to the world around her, but limited in doing so by the effects of an apprenticeship served in the doctrinaire milieu in which she has grown up and become an adult. At no stage does Nell aspire to any values other than those inculcated by De Valera's ideals for Ireland.

Nell's relationship with Matt, and the fact that he "appealed" to her, re-awakens her capacity for love. Now, when Matt proposes to her she is taken aback, not expecting it, expecting instead from a 'banned' writer a proposal "to have her for mistress" (p. 251). The narrative voice compels the reader to consider what this would have meant to such a woman; "her Catholic integrity would have been mortally injured by such a surrender to a mood of release and victory - such collapse before the vulgarity, 'sex-appeal'" (p. 251). Nell's love story ends with utmost correctness; the fact that Matt's attentions had "disturbed her" (p. 250) leads her back to Tom's side. Admitting to him that she had become "practically a flint in self-defence" (p. 275) as a result of the deep hurt she felt at his betrayal, she sees him now transformed. He is transfigured for her in the glow of the reconciliation, he appears now "rich and formal in feeling, very traditional, every inch a man" as she looks into his "lighted face" (p. 277). The satirical nuance of this 'epiphany' is obvious, the 'happy-ever-after' ending reinforcing the stereotypical

portrayal. Nell is not developed as a character; she is not brought that 'one step further than the accepted conventions of the time' because the 'time' is too stifling, and its idealism too well and thoroughly marketed to allow for either Una or Nell to fully appreciate their positions as individuals.

Una and Nell embody the Catholic middle class values of this era, and conform to the idealism of De Valera regarding the role of women. The protesting female is silent now, made mute by De Valera's patriarchal dictatorship. He has also silenced the writer, subjecting him to the exile necessary to exercise his artistic integrity. O'Brien's message is clear; and in her portrayal of Una and Nell she illustrates the fact that Ireland, in 1937, breeds stereotypes, albeit seemingly happy ones. Morality is imposed, there is no assertive protesting conscience. The line "God save Ireland" presents itself to Matt who wonders if this country, ruled by dual dictators persisting in a crusade to imprison the thoughts and minds of his people, is worth saving (p. 284). O'Brien suggests that its citizens are already in captivity, but do not know it./

Contemporary Ireland comes in for further criticism in the next novel, The Last of Summer when, again, through the eyes of an 'outsider', O'Brien reveals an Ireland on the eve of the second world war, where power and vanity and smug intollerance are interrelated, where all love is frustrated, and where even familial love is blighted. Religious fervour is expressed only by the

insane. The novel gives a very unappealing picture of Ireland, focusing on pathetic vanity, the abuse of power, and the illusion of love. In this Ireland of the late nineteen thirties nothing can happen, there is decay rather than growth. With The Last of Summer O'Brien completes her examination of the female in the context of the chronological and socio-historic procedure of her novels.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST OF SUMMER

INTRODUCTION

This novel, a subtle repudiation of "the self-protective, self-satisfied Ireland that confronts the outbreak of the second world war with the armour of amused neutrality",¹ conveys a very unattractive picture of Ireland in the late 1930s. It was published in 1943, and was written from a sense of frustration and disillusion due to the banning of her previous novel, The Land of Spices (1941). / Both The Last of Summer and Pray for the Wanderer (1938) are what Lorna Reynolds terms as "asides",² for they were written as exposés of Ireland from Kate O'Brien's perspective as a 'banned' author. /

In both novels the device of the outsider is used to throw into relief an established system of values. The 'stock-taking' of Irish society obvious in Pray for the Wanderer is continued here. In this novel, Ireland is disintegrating and fragmenting economically, and also in terms of spirit, resolve, judgement and standards. Integrity is frowned at, the Catholic landed gentry is proud but shabby, and children, once educated, are leaving the land, looking towards Europe. The world which O'Brien has constructed in her fiction, from 1860 to 1939 had its counterpart in fact; she has notated the

wealth and glamour of the Catholic merchant princes of 'Mellick', their self-interest and extravagance, and has charted the fading of their 'golden age' which shaded into the professions, and business of a new nature. The evolution of the Catholic middle class has been O'Brien's canvas and her primary focus has been the female within that changing environment. The freedom to choose is the holy grail for all her heroines. Society, at times, cannot be thwarted due to the intangible subtle veneer of reason and right it has placed over dogmatism. In Pray for the Wanderer O'Brien has shown both Una and Nell as perfectly nice women, well-meaning and intelligent, who, in their own estimation, live their lives as free human beings, while the objective authorial voice decodes the elements of their indoctrination which both women fail to decipher; they are secure in their support of the status quo. Society in 1939, as depicted in The Last of Summer, seems a confirmation of Matt's criticisms in Pray for the Wanderer.

Kate O'Brien, intent on matching fictional events with the accidents of historical time and place, has replaced the comfortable farm house of Will and Una with a household reflecting both past glory and present decay. The Kernahan family of Waterpark House, "fighting a slow vanguard action against the government of Eire", are not nearly as wealthy as they were two generations before. O'Brien points to the situation in Ireland which was caused by the intensification, due to the 'economic war', of the effects of the world economic depression of the

1930s. The consequences for the Kernahans and their ilk were the fracturing of such traditions as they held dear. The keeping of bloodstock "for which the Kernahans were said to have a particular flair" is now uneconomic, for the Kernahan fortunes are contracted, due, obviously, to what can be understood as Fianna Fail's policy of the implementation of tariffs employed to aid industrial development in Ireland. The 'vanguard action' that the Kernahan household was engaged in left their stables empty, except for "two very expensive stallions" and some "brood mares"; these were kept because (a slightly ironic narrative voice states) "Tom's heart was in this tradition" (p. 59).

Decay and dilapidation are strong images in this novel. They are employed in the description of the actual environment in which most of the action takes place. The Kernahan home, Waterpark House, is an imposing building with stables, lawns, and out offices, - indicating a once-thriving and industrious establishment. The gates to the house now "needed paint and its pillars were mossy", they led to a "neglected drive", the lodge "looked wild and poor" (p. 7), while the house itself "was dilapidated". The shabbiness is noted through the perception of Angèle, the French girl, who is visiting the house where her deceased father grew up and lived before he left for France. The house represents for her, "silence, pride and shabbiness" (p. 8). With photographic attention to detail O'Brien moves inside the house, where, in focus is a drawing room, with "white

walls, a ringing chandelier, much furniture and many curious old objects" (p. 9). Moving further inside, the inner room reveals walls of "dim gold" papered "a long time ago". There are "heavy" and "frayed" curtains, "faded at their edges by the sun and hands of many years" (p. 49). The sense of past splendour is reinforced by the use of the past and plu-perfect tenses, pointing up the disparity between the 'then' and the 'now' in terms of the social and economic status of Waterpark House. The merchant princes and the family business dynasties have faded, the 'Big House' of the rich business-man has gone, and O'Brien in this novel catches the last splendour of the Catholic landed gentry as they, too, succumb to a changing Ireland. Waterpark House must have once resembled its urban equivalents, 'River Hill' and 'Roseholm'; now it is nothing but a sign of the times.

There is nothing redeemable in the inhabitants of the Kernahan home; they each, in their own way, reinforce the sense of incongruity seen in Tom's struggle against the forces that threaten his traditions. He stubbornly maintains the Kernahan interest in bloodstock in the face of a changing economic agricultural climate. The inhabitants are, in Reynold's estimation, "a gallery of grotesques".³ The matriarchal Hannah Kernahan is the head of the household, there is her toadying old retainer Dotey, her parasitic brother-in-law Corney, and, in a house in the yard, lives Bernard the mad priest, with his relations. The young people of the novel are just passing through this environment; it is only a stop-off

for both Martin and Jo before they pursue their chosen careers. Angèle, their French cousin, spends a ten day interlude here. Tom, on the other hand is part of the scene, running the farm under the thumb of his mother, Hannah. Tom is portrayed as a victim, a spider in the web of yet another 'net', this time, perverse possessiveness masquerading as maternal love. This 'love' treacherously and stealthily ensnares Tom's emotions, informing his attitudes, and leaving him a shell, a weak but gentle and bemused robot in the hands of a clever, cunning, and manipulative dictator. The Kernahan's world symbolises O'Brien's perception of Ireland; in microcosm it contains the seemingly benign despotism that leads to self-deception, which is the creed by which most of its inhabitants survive. Those who wish to escape, like Jo and Martin, are already seen to be scarcely acceptable to the matriarch who either barely acknowledges their existence - as in the case of Jo, or who dismisses their philosophies as slightly eccentric - as in the case of Martin.

Within the framework of the novel as a social commentary, and against the backdrop of the milieu O'Brien has constructed, she has devised two female characters who order the course of the plot. The central figure is Hannah, in her late forties, a widow, and mother of Tom, Martin, and Jo. She is an autocrat in her world both from the circumstance of her husband's death, and from her very nature. The only passport out of the environment she has designed for her family seems to be

education. Martin has been to University, as has Jo. This gives them the freedom to accept the travelling scholarships offered to them. In Jo's case she doesn't wish to further her studies, choosing instead to become a nun. Martin, acknowledging the confining and uncompromising milieu which home and country presents to him, uses the analogy of the Irish mode of traditional dance to express his opinions, "we're a prim, stiff-backed lot" (p. 100) he claims; earlier, to illustrate the same point he had drawn Angele's attention to the picture of a prancing horse which hangs in his home, declaring that it is completely out of place in such a setting, since it is "imaginative and free" (p. 54). Jo is less critical of her environment, less assertive, she understands, yet wonders at, her mother's nature. She half concedes to Martin that she, too, is "escapist" (p. 193), her one wish being to enter the novitiate of the Compagnie de la Sainte Famille in Brussels. The reference to this Convent strikes a familiar bell with readers of Kate O'Brien, and reinforces the sense of 'world' in her entire opus.

Although Jo is religious, she is so in a quiet, inconspicuous way. There is a minimal degree of attention to religion in the course of this novel. Religion has nothing to do with the censoriousness of the climate which O'Brien wishes to underscore; in fact, religious fervour in this novel is the preoccupation of a mad man. Prayer, supplication, the sense of retribution, which were so much part of the heroine's world in novels

set in an earlier period, are now all and exclusively relegated to the ramblings of poor Bernard, the deranged priest living in the grounds of Waterpark House. Obsession with feast-days and religious images now find expression only in the bemused and wild mutterings of the lunatic.

In O'Brien's 'world' adherence to the religious code very often impedes the expression of forbidden love. Love is the theme of this novel, but love in this environment is neither wholesome nor approved of. Religion, as an obstacle, is not required. There is the suggestion that this family has been begotten without love, that love once had possibilities in this house, but circumstances forbade its development. The house is dogged, as it were, by the lack of what O'Brien sees as romantic, true, passionate love. The only love that exists here, and flourishes, is that of the distorted possessive and jealous kind. The theme of romantic love is introduced to highlight the impossibility of its growth or its realisation. It is neither fatal nor even intense; love, in this novel, is offered as an 'illusion', a dream, it is insubstantial, it doesn't have the power to change lives, nor divert the course of fate. Love is now an ephemeral interlude in ones life, or it is not romantic at all, but a perversely possessive emotion.

O'Brien has brought the female and the heroine as far as 1939 in her fictitious world, here she stops; this is the end of the road for the Irish middle class woman in O'Brien's work. It is as if the contemporary female

is no longer interesting, no longer a challenging subject. The female herself has ceased to challenge the social order, she has blended with society and is therefore of no further interest. O'Brien's heroine has been cowed at last, no longer is she fighting for the expression of her personal ethic, nor is she protesting her needs as a woman. At the time of writing this novel O'Brien herself had settled for exile; Ireland, such as she saw it, was a lost cause. Her next novel is set back in 1907; contemporary Ireland yields no protesting heroine.

There are many tensions in the novel which are reminiscent of other and earlier novels; the concept of youth and age is explored here, and, unlike the situation with Denis and Anthony in Without My Cloak or with Fanny in The Flower of May, or Anna in The Land of Spices, age in the novel, wins the day. In this world of stasis, with the emphasis on hankering after bygone days and the holding on to traditions, youth does not stand a chance. There is also the tension of good and evil contained in the narrative. They are represented in the manner of the morality play; in this novel evil has the 'victory' as the title of chapter fifteen indicates. There is the contrast between the generosity and meagreness in human relationships, and there is the tension between the outsider Angèle, representing an exotic and strange world, and the world she threatens.

The novel is not considered successful. John Jordan dismisses it as inferior to the rest of O'Brien's work,

regarding it as a novel of manners only.⁴ It is true that both in this book, as in Pray for the Wanderer, there is no longer a preoccupation with the definition of women through private emotional experience. Female sensibility in Angèle is without the passion to fight for her lover and take the consequences, and in Hannah it decomposes into a destructive force. The familial love explored by O'Brien in Without My Cloak, between Anthony and Denis, is developed to a greater extent here between Hannah and Tom, showing the perversity of its over-indulgence. This theme has been touched on in most of O'Brien's novels, and is an area of her fiction which is not gleaned from immediate personal experience. Her own relationship with her father seems to have been loving and nurturing; he died when she was eighteen, and her memories, as she recalls them in various parts of her writings, are warm and positive.

On one level the novel seeks to reveal an unsavoury censoring Ireland, and on the other it focuses on two women pitted against each other; novelty, freshness and youth against tradition, age, and cunning, innocence against wiliness. O'Brien leaves little hope for the positive impulses of Angèle in the Ireland of 1939, and sends her back to Europe, where she, if not in blood and name, then in nature, belongs.

The evolution of the plot is bound up with the imminent approach of war in the late summer of 1939 - hence the title of the novel. The threat of Europe from without is counterbalanced by the threat of the European,

Angèle, to 'neutral' Ireland. The suspense caused by both presences is well worked, but there are parts of the plot which, due to O'Brien's manipulation of events, are quite implausible. The triumph of the novel is undoubtedly the character of Hannah, who protects her 'world' from all comers, fights to keep it unchanged, and wins.

Angèle

Angèle, the heroine, arrives at the railway station of the village of Drumaninch, presumably in County Clare, without giving due warning to her Irish relations. She tries to convince herself that she has a certain right to be here, announced or not; her father was a Kernahan of Waterpark House who as a young man had gone to France, married a French actress, and never returned. Angèle, their only child, now in her twenties, is here out of curiosity - to investigate her roots and to meet her relations, and, in particular, to assert her racial heritage, the part that was missing, and indeed needed, by an artiste. The narrator explains that Angèle has been travelling in England with a theatre company, and, on impulse, decides to break away from her friends and journey to this remote village which was so much part of her father's mythology, and thus of her own childhood. Leaving her luggage at the station, unsure of her reception, as she had never been in contact with these Irish cousins even when her father died, she sets out to walk the short distance to the house.

Following the route recommended by the railway porter, Angèle walks down the silent street. Almost immediately she encounters the censure of rural Ireland in the guise of a little girl who asks her cheekily and with innocent cruelty, "what happened to your lips?" (p. 5). Angèle's lipsticked mouth is what has prompted the

remark, and the attitude that Angèle detects behind it is conveyed in her response. She, the stranger, immediately feels defensive, cautious, she "felt an accidental expression of something which had vaguely oppressed and surprised her ... in the Irish air - an arrogance of austerity, contempt for personal feeling, coldness and perhaps fear of idiosyncrasy" (p. 5). The symbolism that Angèle detects in the "insult to her reddened mouth" (p. 5) surfaces as reality as the plot progresses. In the context of the symbolism in the child's remark, Benedict Kiely has seen an indication of "our Irish censorious instinct, the balefullness behind the laughing Irish eyes, the devil not little and not dancing; that sneering little child will do very well. She learned the art from her elders".⁵

Angèle's sensibility is disturbed by the experience with the child, and now in a negative and disdainful mood she knocks at the door of her father's home. It is at this point that the two protagonists of the novel meet. Hannah Kernahan is presented as an outline against the glaring sun-filled window, a silhouette only, an image, quite featureless to the visitor. This imagery is sustained for the rest of the novel; Hannah remains blurred and enigmatic, never revealing her true nature completely. 'Aunt' Hannah shows only the bare surface of her personality to this stranger, who stirs up a painful past, and who threatens to such an extent, life, as it is lived under her roof.

Hannah had kept the 'past' sealed off successfully,

for nobody knew of Angèle's existence. The dual surprise at Angèle's arrival in Waterpark House - the Kernahans' to discover that they had a French cousin, and Angèle's to realise that nobody was told by Hannah that she even existed, - causes moments of awkwardness and embarrassment all round, and raises many questions in the minds of those involved. Hannah's attempts to dismiss, as it were, her 'frenchness' by calling Angèle 'Angela' - "its easier to say in English" - is resisted passionately by her niece "Ah, but I hate it in English!" (p. 11) who finds herself under threat from these English-speaking Irish cousins. She is an innocent in this setting, "her knowledge of English life was only of recent months, and limited to flats, hotels, and the week-end cottages of film people", otherwise her only experience of life had been limited to the "fixed traditions of French bourgeois and family life" (p. 45). Angèle is at a disadvantage and feels more like a trespasser than a visitor; however, she is persuaded to stay by her curious and bored cousins; she might brighten up life for a while.

Following the pattern of all O'Brien heroines, Angèle is beautiful, and again, her type of beauty is not easily categorised, and calls for some consideration; her uncle Corney sees her as "beautiful, in a queer sort of way" (p. 64). Underlining her adherence to the O'Brien pattern of beauty, her looks recall Mary Lavelle in so far as she is "a great change from bread and butter", and Nell, in that "you might say she's caviar". Dr. O'Byrne sees the possibility of a romance between Angèle and her

first cousin Tom, and indeed sees the immediate threat to his daughter Norrie's marriage prospects to the heir of Waterpark House. He, however, takes a candid male view of the French girl, regarding her as "attractive in the way of suggesting that she would be exotic and distinguished anywhere" (p. 156). O'Brien allows the sophisticated travelled Martin to comment also on his 'new' cousin; to him she is "lovely - she's the curious kind of thing one need never tire of" (p. 196). Even the Bishop comments on the girl's appearance; for him she is "too pale, thin and exotic, with far too much red on her mouth; too delicate looking ... a preposterous wife indeed, for a farmer" (p. 211). The narrator informs us that Angèle is a virgin; in the context of the theatre world, where, it is suggested, love and casual sex are assimilated naturally into the everyday concerns, she is unusual. The narrator attributes Angèle's lack of sexual experience to certain elements in her nature which set her apart; "because she was observant and reflective, she had at least a vicarious knowledge of it, and a normal desire to test its value", but her "private, half-ashamed inhibitions" would first have to accept love as being "worth the racket" (p. 94).

Angèle, as an actress, knows that she must experience love, passion, and pain, for "what she wanted to accomplish could not arise from a cold centre, from loneliness and emotional uncertainty" (p. 95). She has been deeply affected by her parents' death, and it is suggested that the intensity of that grief has never been

counterbalanced by a complimentary degree of love, or by any "positive feeling" that would help heal, and perhaps eliminate, the wound. Love as a healing agent is seen here again, but this time it is also offered as an element in creativity, an agent in opening up artistic possibilities. As in Helen Archer's case, time has not proved to be very effective in erasing the pain, Angèle "had perhaps been only too well taught by example not to forget, not to be cheap" (p. 95). It is with euphoria, then, that Angèle receives Tom's declaration of love; "she could not think. She was brimful of joy and fear" (p. 112). She sees her opportunity now to grasp this experience which is essential to her as a person, and as an actress, and she decides "I love him; I love him enough" (p. 127). Never in any romantic encounter in O'Brien's entire opus has such a statement been made by either party, never has love been so subdued and so tractable, so lacking in passion. The "enough" is commented on by the narrator who adopts the role of authority on the question of love. There is at this point, a break in the narrative for a philosophical aside from the author/narrator who advances the opinion that Angèle's "enough" is an indication of blindness, "she did not know that this was almost never true". She states that Angèle waited for love until it could be a "conscious choice", rather than a "hit and miss" (p. 128) situation, but now, Angèle had "reached that moment of committal beyond which lie most of the miseries and deceptions as well as all the most natural happiness of

human lives" (p. 127). The improbability of this relationship developing is conveyed in the "enough", but also in the fact that she didn't yet know what Tom "wanted"; "she didn't know him yet. She had never talked to him alone - until to-night. But he said he wanted to keep her here for ever" (p. 130). She is conscious that "there would be trouble with Aunt Hannah ... a life of trouble" (p. 131).

Angèle sees her world now transformed, her identity obliterated; "she would cease to be an actress, now. And she would cease to be French" (p. 133). The enormity of the sacrifice Angèle would have to make in marrying Tom is not lost on the reader, and the outcome of Angèle's relationship with her first cousin is already foreshadowed in the knowledge of the unacceptable adaptations she would have to make, coupled with the reader's knowledge of Hannah Kernahan's nature. Angèle finds herself now in a role that is unrehearsed; reality is replaced by a dream-like state in which "the familiar complications of herself ... were gone, it seemed" (p. 130). The "it seemed" is, like "enough", underlining the instability of Angèle's situation; and the narrative voice takes on an ironic tone which colours the otherwise earnest timbre, predicting the outcome of the romance - "everything she knew and had been would go and she would begin all over again, like a pioneer, like an exile. She would live in this lonely, quiet place, with a handful of odd and ageing people; in love with Tom" (p. 133).

The sustaining of the 'dream', of the illusion, is

achieved with imagery; Jo, who is unaware of Angèle and Tom's love notices a change in her French cousin, that she is now like a "creature of air and water" (p. 168), and, on hearing of the engagement, cannot interpret the news in tangible realistic terms; Angèle is not real,

the innocence and purity of her eyes, the intelligence of her high, wide brow, and the whole exaggerated grace of her seemed angelic in this moment, ... and of the nature of a dream. It was no wonder if Tom, the innocent dreamer had come to full desire in such a myth (p. 171).

Angèle herself "could not escape from the sense of dream ... it was still as if each actual moment just failed to become real" (p. 172). An objective Jo sees the relationship between her brother and cousin as "a mistake", a "romantic impasse" (p. 178). Tom is also on a cloud of unreality in the context of his love, he "tried to grasp, through a bright haze of joy, the reality of what he had brought to pass" (p. 179).

The dream begins to shatter as Angèle begins to question the impulse of her love; is she in love with Tom because he is a Kernahan of Waterpark House? What if Tom were just anyone, - "a chance acquaintance" (p. 180). Jo suggests to Angèle that she is "escapist", to which she replies that this could be so, but that it was more likely that she was "selective", "after all, no life can contain everything you want - you've got to choose" (p. 193) she declares, thus throwing some light on her previous reasoning that she loved Tom "enough". As Angèle defends her engagement to Tom, she also manages to

erode the euphoria of her initial reaction to it. The 'dream' is disintegrating and the mood at Waterpark House is changing. Hannah and Martin take on attitudes of quiet outrage at the speed with which Angèle and Tom make their plans. The radio news of imminent war intensifies the atmosphere of menacing threat. The personal Kernahan war gets under way and Angèle is under siege; Aunt Hannah uses vindictive teasing and full blown sarcasm as weapons. From Hannah's accusation, "after all, Angèle, you've taken your own romantic revenge - now haven't you? - by captivating Tom and carrying him off?" (p. 205), there is a step-by-step progression effecting departure for Angèle. She begins to feel more and more 'the outsider' and her presence is revealing several aspects of Irish life encapsulated within the Kernahan world. The vain attempts to obtain an immediate dispensation to marry, the riling remarks of Martin (himself supposedly in love with Angèle) who proclaims that "anyone who wants to see France again in the near future had better get packing - married or unmarried" (p. 202), and finally, the Bishop's suggestion that she return now to France and that she should return at some future time to marry Tom, all speed up Angèle's decision. War is coming nearer and nearer and the atmosphere in Waterpark House is becoming more and more hostile as Hannah works on Tom, subtly weaning him away from the idea of marriage to Angèle who, in her turn, is quite aware of what is happening. She confides in Martin "she's doing things to him in these last days, ... that I

can't get hold of. She seems to say nothing definite, and yet - he's changed, in a way I can't account for. He's lost confidence, he's puzzled". Martin confirms Angèle's suspicions with the plain statement "She hates you. ... She'd hate anyone Tom loved" (p. 230). The battle is fought with nuance and innuendo. Emotive terms like "sense of obligation", "hate to give you pain" (p. 240), "she was loyal to you", "trapped" (p. 241) are all attributed to what Hannah implies is the compromised position of Angèle as her son's fiancée, and Tom listens to his mother, as he always has, and trusts her judgement. She assures Tom that she knows how Angèle feels, enumerates the vagaries of artistes, and begs him to "think it over" (p. 241). As the narrator ironically points out - Tom doesn't need to think anything over, "the thinking had been done for him. ... Mother had done her best to spare him. She always would" (p. 242). As a result, Angèle is told by Tom to "go home, love, and forgive me" (p. 247). Hannah's careful work is identified by Angèle in Tom's conviction of his own unfairness for expecting her to stay and be his wife. Sensing the futility of argument, she just replies "I'll go home ... only because I'm beaten. ... You win Aunt Hannah" (p. 247).

Angèle shows none of the resolve of Mary Lavelle, in fact she recogni^ess that she lacks the courage to fight for Tom, regarding herself as a "coward" and a "cad". She still loves him, but, the reader concedes - 'not enough'. The ubiquitous O'Brien themes apply to Angèle's

leavetaking; departure, frustrated love, and the transmutation of the heroine are all present. Angèle departs, wiser than she was when ten days earlier she arrived, a 'painted' exotic, to inadvertently cause havoc in the quiet, ordered orthodox life of the Kernahan family. Angèle has been denied the freedom to choose; however there is an implication that her experience may be the element which will help her to exalt future stage performances, establishing 'Angèle Maury' as a star of the theatre.

With Matt in Pray for the Wanderer, Angèle shares the fate of the artist in the context of Ireland. O'Brien has drawn a picture of an illiberal, self-complacent, puritanical society characteristic of Ireland in the 'thirties and 'forties of this century. Angèle falls victim, as does Matt, to the climate of censure in a land where, as Reynolds states, "powerful people are smug, vain and narrowminded, and the gentle are weak and pathetic victims".⁶ Through an exploration of an 'outsider's' brief experience of Ireland, O'Brien has made her comment on Irish society of that period.

Hannah

She is seen initially as a 'female shape' (p. 14) against the light from the bright daylight glaring through a large window into the dark and dim room in which she sits. The reader is introduced to her at the same moment as is the heroine, but as the narrative progresses the reader is at the advantage of having much more insight into the character of 'Aunt Hannah' than Angèle does.

On her arrival, Hannah receives Angèle in a gracious unruffled manner, although in hindsight it is probable that she was shocked and very alarmed at her arrival. After the initial introduction she disappears from the narrative, her presence is kept in mind through Corney's references - either vocal or ruminative. He tells Angèle that her Aunt Hannah "is the best and cleverest of women", but that she "has her blind spots" (p. 53). In his silent consideration of her attributes the irony of his assessment is conveyed in the rhythm of the passage and in the repetition of the word 'Hannah', "Hannah was a great support to Tom of course. Everyone said he couldn't run the place at all without Hannah ... Father Gregory thought Hannah a saint, 'a walking saint, Tom', Corney had heard him say, 'that's what your Mother is. And no man could have a greater blessing than that at his side'" (p. 60). The narrative voice underscores the irony with the remark that "Corney wasn't a judge of

saints, but anyone could tell that Hannah had her wits about her, and knew her own mind". Corney had once been "sick with hopeless love for Hannah" (pp. 60-1) as had his brothers Ned and Tom. The rivalry had caused the age-old situation of brother turning against brother. Corney had relinquished the competition early on and in the end Tom did likewise, leaving her to Ned, with the warning "you wanted her Ned. But take my advice and get over that, she's lovely ... and so is steel Ned. Hollow-ground steel". Corney recollects the scene, how his two brothers had "fought and shouted all day" (p. 63) before Tom finally left. This information conveyed to the reader shades in to a certain extent various aspects of the outline Hannah presents at the beginning of the novel. The author allows Corney to ramble on, as if conversing with his dead brother, and at the same time furnishing much detail of Hannah's character. He refers to his brother Tom's hasty leavetaking; Angèle's arrival brings the whole episode back to him, he remembers "it was the devil of a jilt all right, and the O'Reillys in their draper's shop so proud of their beautiful daughter landing a Kernahan" (p. 64). The general perception at the time was that Hannah had been 'jilted' by Tom, suggesting that her subsequent marriage to Ned was nothing but expediency; he was second best, she had to compromise. Hannah's response to Angèle's arrival is all the more remarkable for its composure in the light of the knowledge that Corney conveys.

Hannah is a complex woman. O'Brien underlines how

thwarted love and a life of compromise translate into what is recognisably a psychosis, such as is detectable in Caroline (Without My Cloak), in Agnes (The Ante Room) and, in varying degrees in other females in the novels. In Hannah it is seen in its mature stage, hidden with a veneer of control, gentleness, and rectitude. Tom's feeling for his mother is based on love and loyalty, he responds to her attentions, and sees himself in the role of her protector. When his father died he "was very glad to be a man for her sake" (p. 78). Tom feels defensive of his mother, for he, more than his younger brother and sister, remembers much of her earlier married life "about which she herself was reserved". He remembers that

married life had not been agreeable to her, and that his father had been wild and violent sometimes; he remembered his sudden oaths and shouts. She had lost children, one in childbirth and one, a little pretty daughter, at eighteen months old (p. 79).

The reader learns of Hannah's past through the reminiscing of the narrator, Tom, and Corney. The suffering she may have experienced seems to have entrenched more firmly the 'steel-like' element in her nature detected by the older Tom Kernahan; there is no evidence that it made her more sensitive, more empathetic.

Tom's love has another dimension also, it involves admiration, "from his first years she had been a beauty, grace and goodness personified ... always she pleased his eyes as no other woman did" (p. 80). / The suggestion of

romantic filial attraction is not new in O'Brien's world, it is there between Anthony and his son Denis in Without My Cloak and in The Ante Room between Teresa and Reggie. In The Land of Spices it is detectable in the relationship between Helen and her father, as it is in The Flower of May in the attitude of Fanny's father towards her. The adult is always the manipulator of such a relationship, taking advantage of the vulnerable position of the offspring, and trading on the natural love and loyalty of the young person. / Before Angèle's arrival Hannah and Tom fulfilled each other's emotional needs, Tom responding to the attention of his pretty mother.

Hannah Kernahan is presented as something of a curiosity in her community. She lives in the seclusion of Waterpark House, aloof from the life of Drumaninch. The narrator condenses, with obvious irony, the extent of Hannah's dealings with life outside the gates of her home; it seems that

Mrs Kernahan disliked going to Drumaninch village on foot and indeed never did so. She said that the halting and chatting with this one and that which it necessitated was a bore. ... She went to Mass at her parish Church every Sunday, and scattered her charming smile on friends and neighbours at the chapel gate, before she got into the Ford again and was quickly driven home (p. 112).

The fact of her reclusive existence is further heightened in the language and tone of the passage

she might be seen leaning out of the car to have a passing word with Dr. O'Brien, to ask old Sadie Ryan how she was, or to command Mrs Geary to Waterpark House for a day's scrubbing or carpet beating. But she never walked about the village casually, as other people did (p. 112).

She uses Dotey as her messenger, and even in relation to this indispensable and loyal companion, Hannah is removed and detached, "she did not understand her at all, or think it necessary to do so" (p. 113). Dotey doesn't mind, she knows she is set up for life in Waterpark House "only because her cousin Hannah liked to play the lady, liked to have leisure to look pretty and at ease for her son, and for her priest admirers, as cheaply as possible" (p. 115). O'Brien elaborates on this aspect of Hannah's character, and she attempts to explain the nature of this egotism, this self-imposed segregation, the rejection of the 'outside world', stating

indifference to everything and everyone not directly or very nearly connected with herself made her inhospitable - not because she was mean, but because she was cold towards whatever was not the direct concern of Waterpark House. Temperamentally she wanted nothing that she could not own, rule and absorb (p. 151).

The supreme matriarch appears in Hannah, her despotism and her dictatorship coloured by her own personal experience create a figure which is the female colossus, bestriding her world, "requiring only for her happiness the fantasy she had made of herself, and the belief of her modest entourage in that fantasy - above all, the belief in it of her son Tom, who was both its source and

its proof" (p. 152). For the reader, Hannah has some of the mystery of a Miss Havisham, and some of the same tragic elements have subscribed to her psychosis. Three brothers were deeply in love with her, two of whom fought over her, leading to one of them disowning his inheritance and taking flight to France, never to return. He was the one Hannah loved and wanted, and, according to Dotey, "he had never been forgiven" (p. 115) for his deed. She married Ned, called her first son Tom, and the episode was never mentioned again within her world.

When Angèle arrives, stirring up both personal and local memory, Hannah hides her confusion, but a silent battle ensues. Dotey broods on the formidability of Hannah as an opponent, "she knew her cousin's values ... and she knew them to be intransigent. Whoever threatened them would get no easy passage" (p. 117). It is Dotey, her messenger, who brings Hannah the information that Tom has slipped a note under Angèle's bedroom door. What follows is sheer alarm for Hannah, conveyed by the throbbing panic-stricken heart-beat detectable in her interior monologue - "she wanted to think, but knew that she was not able to think effectively yet. ... She would think - and settle things according to her will" (p. 139). As the realization of what may be happening sinks in, her alarm increases, "emotion seemed to sway and lap within her like a sea, and made her dizzy. Tom, Tom. What was this danger that threatened him, and so threatened her, and all her care of him, all her understanding, all their quiet, united, harmonious loving

life?" (p. 140). O'Brien underscores the romantic nature of the relationship between mother and son and at the same time puts into relief Hannah's psychosis. Her son is her Tom reincarnated, he is the surrogate for her lost love-life, the compensation for her pain, she "thought with passion of the long, quiet years of devotion that bound Tom's life with hers; that justified and pacified a heart which no other relationship had ever fed" (p. 141). To the prosaic, down-to-earth Dr O'Byrne, the relationship is "as selfish a case of mother-love as has ever come to my knowledge, so help me!" (p. 143). The idea of her son being involved in "romantic passion" (p. 159) sets off in his mother a series of resolute and frantic decisions; "her folly would not be repeated in her son. He would not be humiliated as she had been - nor she be robbed of him by Tom Kernahan's daughter" (p. 159).

Hannah's outraged sense of ownership must be kept under control for her own purposes. From this point in the narrative Angèle's and Hannah's roles are reversed, Hannah becoming the actress, Angèle the deluded. When Tom finally comes to his mother to share his good news he takes her hands, crushing the freshly-picked mignotte which she is holding. The aroma of the crushed little flower floating up activates Hannah's memory, evoking a little garden behind her parents' shop, where, as a young girl her dreams of "a life of space and privacy and romance and power" (p. 163) were woven. Here she dreamed of being the mistress of Waterpark House as Tom

Kernahan's wife, but any Kernahan had to suffice eventually. Now, confronted by Tom's expectant happiness she struggles for composure, to be what he expects - "mother, perfect, unfailing". She is surprised to feel tears spring to her eyes, but she "did not weep for grief" (p. 165), only for her former humiliation and loss. However the words that find their way to Tom are what he wants to hear, "if that's what you want, if it's your happiness - then it's mine too. You know that Tom" (p. 166). She, in turn, hears what she wants to hear, "your're perfect, perfect always" Tom replies, as "his whole heart praised her and adored her" (p. 166).

Hannah's successful deceit of her son fills her with power, their conversation "left her feeling powerful and calm" and the "compassion" (p. 167) she feels for Tom at what she sees as "his ingenuousness" (p. 165) immediately "melted into a sensation of power" (p. 167). In this state of heightened awareness and invincibility Angèle is no threat, she is only "a sign, an x standing for a quantity in Tom that she must discover and reckon with" (p. 167). Hannah now sees her task as the exorcism of Angèle from Tom's plans, from his expectations, and from his life.

To those who are not under her 'spell', Hannah's act is recognisably that; Jo decides that "her mother was giving a truly marvellous performance" (p. 169), that "no one could see falseness in Hannah at this supremely hard and unlooked-for moment" (pp. 169-70); she was indeed acting "impecably" (p. 189). At times though, she is

taken unawares, as when she hears that Angèle and Tom, had already seen the Bishop regarding the dispensation that first cousins must obtain in order to marry; she "felt alarmed - and outraged" for she had thought that "the two foolish, dreaming lovers were still no more than foolishly dreaming" (p. 199). When Tom is out of the way the veneer slips, and Hannah proceeds to hurl fiercely personal remarks at the vulnerable Angèle, clothing her taunting words in creamy sarcasm, reducing Angèle to tears (p. 205). Jo, watching the scene "marvelled at the unperturbable gentleness" (p. 205) with which her mother wounded so deeply. Hannah's next move is to focus on Tom. When Angèle is in the local hotel for a drink with Martin, she uses the circumstances offered as a spring board for her strategy. She proceeds to impress on Tom that Angèle is more Martin's type than his, that she is "worried for the poor child" (p. 238); is Angèle not asked to pay too high a price for love, is the sacrifice not too great? Hannah also raises the question of Angèle's commitment to the relationship as she assures Tom that "artists are creatures of quick, warm feelings and sudden dreams", and "they are not to be held to their dreams" (p. 241). His mother acknowledges Tom's obvious bewildered grief and administers to him with the platitude "you'll be very unhappy for a bit - and I've made you so. But better that than misery for good, the awful misery of making her unhappy" (p. 241). Tom, his face wet with tears, accepts his mother's word, his self-esteem undermined, his attempt at an independent life

frustrated. He acknowledges to himself that he is, as Martin hurtfully called him, a "great complacent fool" (p. 242). This episode both highlights Tom's weakness, his gullibility, and also his mother's treachery. Tom is indeed a mouse caught in a trap, he is the victim of the benign despot, and is happy in his chains. Power as a corrupting force is a dominant theme here, even when it is consolidated in female hands. Hannah is the villain of the piece, the matriarch brought to formidable proportions by O'Brien's vision.

Irish middle-class women have experienced a dramatic evolution in Kate O'Brien's fictional world; from Caroline in Without My Cloak in the 1870s, through a graph of social and political change, to Hannah Kernahan in 1939. One skein links all O'Brien heroines and protagonists; they are all good-looking, unorthodox, single-minded, and suffer the pain of thwarted or forbidden love. The 'individual protesting conscience' expresses itself in different ways and to different degrees according to the circumstances of the women's lives. The dilemmas vary and the characters are defined against the author's own vision of morality and ethics. Nineteen thirty nine produces Hannah Kernahan in O'Brien's world; Ireland in this period has, as it were, spawned a type of monster, albeit in a benign skin. She represents O'Brien's own vision of her native country at the time, a vision coloured by O'Brien's own sense of non-conformity and by Ireland's rejection of her as a writer. She sees it as claustrophobic and stunting

place, where the Hannah Kernahans survive, but where the artist either conforms or flees. O'Brien at this stage speaks through Angèle, who, at her departure states "I don't expect to come back ever" (p. 253). Kate O'Brien eventually did return and wrote a further novel about Ireland, but set it back in 1907; at this time of her life contemporary Ireland held no attraction for her. In terms of the chronological treatment of the novels the heroine fades out with this novel, probably due to the fact that O'Brien no longer could write freely about themes that interested her; censorship was waiting to condemn. As Reynolds expresses it, "she said what she had to say through the medium of the past".⁷

CONCLUSION

He believed in impulse, pursuit and danger, high fences and blind riding, the courage to race life as it flies. It was because of all these faiths that his greatest faith was in personal liberty - a faith that had finally driven him out of the Church, but which made it impossible for him to find any resting place in contemporary life.¹

O'Brien writes this of Matt, the exiled writer, in Pray for the Wanderer and, as Lorna Reynolds points out,² it is an assessment applicable also to Matt's prototype, Kate O'Brien, and to a certain extent to her heroines whose aspirations are towards freedom of the 'self'.

The thesis has shown that personal liberty is the central need of all her heroines, and that this need expresses itself in the personality of the female characters according to the period of Irish life in which each novel is set. O'Brien demonstrates how freedom is denied by Church and Society. The codes of establishments are set against individual needs, youth is set against age and repression against love.

The themes O'Brien explores display the complexity of the social framework in the lives of the heroines. Nothing is simple for them; the rules of society and Church complicate their existences rather than furnish them with form and meaning. Each heroine reacts to her own dilemma in a different way, according to her own nature and also according to what is convincing for the period in which she is set; some break free, while for

others such a possibility is unheard of and they succumb to their roles, their sense of duty taking fright at the 'high fences'. No matter what the outcome, there is unhappiness and compromise, sometimes bitterness, or there is a bitter-sweet sadness and a new perspective on life; happy endings are rarely found in Kate O'Brien's fiction.

By taking the novels in the order of their chronological settings it has been possible to see a pattern of evolution in the heroine of O'Brien's Irish middle-class 'world', and to examine the changing role of females in general in the light of socio-historic observation.

Caroline, heroine of Without My Cloak introduces the theme of passionate romantic love. She suffers from the absence of such love and yearns for it, 'Jim and the children', the social unit of family, do not fulfill her; on the contrary, it is a net curbing her restlessness until, finally, she breaks free, fleeing to England, to her liberal-thinking brother, Eddy. There the 'self' finds expression, and she finds the kind of love she had desired. O'Brien assures the reader that in 1870, "it wasn't easy" for "a lady" (p. 146) to run away from her husband or bring disgrace on her family name. Predictably then, Caroline's strongly conditioned conscience undermines her bid for freedom, usurping the passion of the moment, arresting the exchange of a touch or a kiss. She returns to her former existence, guilty from her disloyalty, and more conscious than ever of what

is missing from her life. Caroline has tasted passion and the expression of mutual desire; now she sees her life stretching ahead, empty and loveless. The compromise she must make for the sake of society's expectations takes its toll. O'Brien shows how the once lovely, gay, hopeful Caroline degenerates into a bitter, touchy matron. The extent of her bitterness is seen when she joins the other Considine women in their outburst against Denis's first love. Caroline fumes maliciously, spluttering out her disgust at what she enviously recognises as pure passionate emotion.

Agnes, heroine of The Ante Room is unmarried, but she too is impossibly in love. The object of her ~~desire~~^{sire} is her sister's husband. Illicit love can have no future, especially this one, and she suffers deeply both from guilt and disloyalty. It is through her guilt that she is defined; the sin of her unspoken secret desire overwhelms the devout conscientious Agnes. She reverts to an interior world where she pathologically nurses her romance in a fantasy existence, reality cannot accommodate it.

The fatal quality of Agnes's love for Vincent is presented as tragic, and as such, ends in Vincent's suicide. Agnes is left with nothing; there was no consummation, only a touch, a kiss - all ephemeral. The pain and suffering are no more nor less than those of Caroline; due to the difference in their personalities, Agnes's secret and private loving, her restraint, her silent supplications to Our Lady, and her inner

desperation conveyed through her interior monologue, make her suffering seem more intense than Caroline's extravagant hopes for miracles, or her displays of piety before the altar of Our Lady of Victories. Both Caroline and Agnes have passive roles in their worlds; they but respond to an existence where sensibility is worthless, where family name, business, and religion are all that matter, forming the outward patriarchal shell of an intense female world of needs, desires, and from O'Brien's perspective, rights.

Moving to a novel of a later setting, in Mary Lavelle the heroine also loves a married man; adultery is a sin for both of them. Mary's conditioning made the sin of the flesh the most unacceptable transgression of all. Mary, unlike Caroline and Agnes, decides to consummate her love. Without the complication of her lover being her sister's husband she can more easily see the dilemma as just hers and Juanito's. She is also living in a different era; the role of women has changed dramatically from what it was in the late nineteenth century, Mary is in Spain earning her own living, economically independent and removed from all the associated authority figures of family and local clergy. Mary, engaged to be married, learns in time the difference between cosy affection and passion. Although there seems no future for Mary's illicit love, no more than for Caroline's or Agnes's, she returns home fulfilled to an extent; she has not baulked at the 'high fences' of Catholic teaching, and by choosing a personal ethical responsibility, she has

gained, and will keep always, the 'moment of truth' of her passion for Juanito.

Mary's homecoming is accompanied by sadness and the pain of parting, but bitterness is missing. She has no regrets, there is no sense of incompleteness. O'Brien approves of Mary Lavelle's decision, 'faith in personal liberty' has its price, but in its compensatory effects it is seen to be worthy of the personal cost.

These three heroines are all depicted as women who need love, have an appetite for love, and who, without it, are emotionally stunted and unfulfilled, their loving natures denied expression through passion. For Caroline and Agnes thwarted love finds ways of twisting the personality. With Mary Lavelle there is no distortion, only hope and growth; having gone beyond the conventions of her time she has gained emotional insights which transform her way of looking at life; O'Brien suggests it has all been worth it.

Marriage, in O'Brien's 'world' is a vulnerable institution, easily fractured, constantly under threat from love and passion rather than incorporating them. Adultery - a thought, a desire, in the nineteenth century develops into a realisation in 1922 when Mary Lavelle, a good Irish Catholic girl becomes a femme fatale.

The freedom to choose, whether it be a lover or a career, remains the focus for O'Brien. In The Land of Spices education and career are the needs of the young heroine. Age is benefactor to youth, and Anna is released from the path patriarchy would have her take.

There is a sense of victory and celebration at Anna's imminent entry into University, mirroring the triumph Irish women experienced when the Royal University opened its doors to them, and later when they had their choice of the National University of Ireland.

Fanny, in The Flower of May also yearns for an education, but this time the entire novel centres on this obsessive need in both herself and her friend Lucille. Her parents' denial of her wish intensifies her determination. Fanny's choice of future does not include marriage; she rejects the role ordained for her by the patriarchal attitudes and values of her parents. Being a young woman of her day, she recognises that there are other options; the militancy of the women's movement in Ireland at the time is represented in Fanny's protesting conscience. She wants a life of her own and sees it to be her right. Age, as well as being restrictive is also beneficent to Fanny. From her Aunt Eleanor she receives the economic help she needs, making her independent of her parents and setting her on her chosen path. Both Helen Archer and Eleanor suggest the emphasis in society at the time on female solidarity. The suffragette movement underlies the new expectations of both Fanny and Anna; they live in a different Ireland to that of Marie-Rose, Agnes, Caroline or Molly. The emphasis on sin, confession, retribution, has shaded into a personal unmediated relationship with God. The female self-image is no longer that of the patriarchal image of women; in the early twentieth century, an O'Brien heroine is not

passive, and in the context of her wishes, she achieves her objective.

Love is an objective never ^{satisfactorily} achieved, without it all individuals are deficient and unfulfilled. Helen Archer's emotional life is one of spiritual struggle, one in which her conditioning names her father's deviant sexuality as a 'sin', and where love is cancelled by that judgement. Reaching out to the defenceless young Anna, she discovers emotion and tenderness, which in their turn soften the harshness of her convictions, thereby easing her back into a life of feeling. Her development as a central character culminates in her protest at the relentlessness of her conditioned response to her father's homosexuality, seeing it now as an error, and decrying the arrogance of one human being judging the soul of another. Love is seen to restore her to love.

Love is not always a positive emotion in O'Brien's fiction; it is at times selfish, possessive and stultifying. Age is allied with power and the abuse of power when Hannah Kernahan decides that Angèle, the heroine of The Last of Summer will never take her son away from her. Hannah's love for Tom is presented as neurotic to a degree; he is the compensation for another Tom, who, in her youth had been in love with her and she with him. After a family row over her he left, leaving Hannah to the brother she did not love, however in shame and embarrassment at being 'jilted' she married the unloved brother, and named her first son Tom. Her relationship with her son is delicately balanced between

romantic and maternal love; Tom is presented as his mother's victim, blinded by her manipulative caring. She thwarts his attempts at an independent life with Angèle. The younger woman is no match for her wily elder; romantic love is arrested once again by familial love, but here the feeling is that the distortion and impulse behind Hannah's actions are a perversion of love.

Love as a theme is central to all O'Brien's work. It can be a foolish emotion, selfish, demanding and sustaining. The minor women characters all prop up the notion of love in its many guises and functions. They also broaden and extend the perspective of O'Brien's Catholic middle class world beyond the focus of the heroines. By the portrayal of stereotypes, of mothers, sisters, friends and relations, she builds up a picture of a cross section of female experience, and also succeeds in highlighting the unique qualities of the heroines, their beauty, intelligence, emotional energy and their expectations of life. O'Brien does not confine herself to just one era of time in which to examine the lives of women, she chooses instead to set her novels at different key periods in history, charting the development of the role played by women in Irish middle class Catholic society, indicating their changing needs and attitudes with the mutation of their world. She underlines, however, that although they respond and demand according to their natures, and to the way they relate to their lives, the need for love and freedom is their constant expression in a patriarchal value system.

O'Brien portrays women as ideals, stereotypes, downtrodden passive failures and sanctimonious matrons, but she consistently points accusingly at the system, at the joint elements of Church and society which insidiously direct and restrict women's lives. Only heroines transcend such restrictions in O'Brien's fiction, and at a price.

There is a group of married women woven through the novels, supporting and illustrating the themes that interest the writer. Molly in Without My Cloak and Una in Pray for the Wanderer are family women. Although each lives in a different era, they have, in common, an unquestioning support for the status quo. O'Brien demonstrates the fatality of such an existence in extreme and dramatic terms where Molly is concerned. Although she was not, by nature, a maternal woman, Molly bore as many children as years she was married, and eventually died in childbirth. She was bewildered by motherhood, but gentle and non assertive, she complied with her role because she loved her husband, and she considered constant pregnancies were the price she must pay for love. O'Brien blames the Church's stand on marriage for Molly's death, and also society for closing its eyes to the toll such patriarchal values take on women. Passionate love within marriage does not appear in subsequent O'Brien novels, the writer has made her statement at Molly's grave side.

Una is happily married; cosy and secure in her family unit. Her fate is death of the spirit, death of

awareness. Blinded by comfort and middle-class insulation, she never peers beyond the sanctuary of her own immediate environment; she is immune to the condition of humanity in general, and is not interested. Una is a stereotype representing the values of middle-class society at that period. Both Molly and Una are victims of the structure of society; they do not raise their voices in protest, they are both submissive to their men and bear as many children 'as God sends'.

Marriage for Lilian and Marie-Rose spells disillusion. Marie-Rose (The Ante Room) pathologically retreats to childhood attitudes to prop up her emotional needs, while Lilian takes the contemporary solution, and promptly has an affaire, with a dashing young Belgian. Both Lilian and Marie-Rose are set off against their sisters in order to highlight the heroines' unique qualities. Marie-Rose's frivolous empty-headedness underscores Agnes's serious intelligence while Lilian's ostentatious beauty and displays of 'chic' underline Fanny's unusual undetermined loveliness, and her natural dignified demeanor.

Rosie's (Without My Cloak) marriage has not merely failed her, it has actually disfigured her. The proud buxom Rosie of the early chapters of the novel, after some years of marriage to a drunkard, is a begging drudge, debased and ravaged, almost unrecognisable. She doggedly defends her husband; society at that time expected a marriage to last; Rosie, faded and broken, must make the best of things.

Among the older generation marriage is also seen in a doubtful light; Teresa Considine (Without My Cloak) pours affection on her afflicted son, Reggie, while her diffident husband hovers in the background of her life. Husbands, in O'Brien's world are either innocuous, weak, or just uninteresting appendages to women's lives. Julia (The Flower of May) has never accepted her role as wife, preferring to remain a daughter and living spiritually back in Clare, in her childhood home.

Mothers have a dubious function in the novels; this may be due to O'Brien's own experience - her mother died when she was only five. Helen Archer is a mother figure in Anna's life in The Land of Spices, as Anna's actual mother is a weepy unhappy woman, demoralised by her husband's drinking and dominated by a mother who wields the power of the purse strings over her poverty-stricken daughter and grandchildren. It is suggested that excess of mothering has ruined Reggie (in The Ante Room), although Teresa's love is depicted as well-intentioned and generous, unlike Hannah Kernahan's whose interest is in control and coercion. Age, when it has not been complicated by either marriage or motherhood lends itself to magnanimity; as in the cases of Helen Archer and Aunt Eleanor. It defends the young and promotes personal freedom.

Love between females is glorified in O'Brien's work. It is the only kind of relationship that succeeds in her fiction. The idea of a sisterhood is central to the themes of the early twentieth century settings, familial

love, love between sisters is nurturing and sustaining, while it can also be absent as between Fanny and Lilian in The Flower of May; in this novel Fanny's emotional needs are fulfilled by Lucille's love, neither girl seeks further sustenance.

In O'Brien's entire opus, and particularly in these 'Irish' novels, the liberty to love or choose is essential for fulfillment and for development. When these requirements are denied, neurotic states set in and the individual's sensibilities are marred. Mechanisms such as fantasy, cunning, silence and apathy come into play, changing the individual's healthy personality. The heroines all either attempt, or succeed in, following their own lonely paths towards personal choice, stepping out of the mainstream of society to do so. They protest at the unnaturalness of the restriction to love, the inhibition of choice. Isolation and sadness is often, if not always, their lot, but O'Brien suggests that such is the inevitable outcome of maintaining a moral stand. Happiness is a condition of the 'blind' in O'Brien's fiction.

This examination of the novels in the sequence of their settings has made clear that O'Brien saw the value of using historical detail to provide atmosphere and colour, but also as a dynamic element, historical understanding contributing to the action of the novels.

Charting the lives of Catholic middle class families, O'Brien employs historical events to form a central element in the reality of her novels, while her

own perception of these events underlies the imaginative elements of her fiction. Placing the female in a definite society at a specific period, she traces the development of the role of Catholic middle class women in a society, which, through the ages, remains patriarchal and restrictive. She shows how the female herself, specifically the heroine, develops a new attitude to her life and demands that society acknowledge her rights as an individual, but always with close consideration of the socio-historic implications of the time. No other writer has traced the role of women in Irish Catholic middle class society, nor has written about the evolution of this class from the era of urban merchant princes to that of decaying Catholic landlordism. The reader is allowed, in retrospect to "witness the disappearance of a class while retaining our affection for it",³ this surely is one of O'Brien's main contributions to Anglo-Irish Literature.

FOOTNOTES

Due to the unavailability of first editions it has been necessary to use reprinted texts as Primary Source Material in the cases of

The Ante Room (Arlen House, Dublin 1980)

The Land of Spices (Millington, Dublin 1973)

The Flower of May (Companion Book Club, London 1955)

INTRODUCTION

1. See Lorna Reynolds, 'Kate O'Brien and the Pursuit of Love and Freedom', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, ed. John Liddy (Limerick, 1981), p. 19, also Vivian Mercier, 'Kate O'Brien', Irish Writing, 1, 1 (1946), pp. 99-100 also John Jordan, 'My Ireland', University Review, 111, 2 (1962), pp. 72-4 and John Jordan 'Kate O'Brien - a note on her themes', The Bell XIX, 2 (January, 1954), p. 59.
2. Austin Clarke, 'The Land of Spices', The Bell, 2, 1, (April 1941).
Hubert Butler, 'That Lady', The Bell XII, 5 (August, 1946).
Vivian Mercier, 'Kate O'Brien', Irish Writing 1, 1 (1946).
For further references see Bibliography of critical material.

3. Desmond Hogan, introd., Kate O'Brien, That Lady (London, 1985).
Tamsin Hargreaves, introd., Kate O'Brien, Mary Lavelle (London, 1984).
Eavan Boland, Preface, Kate O'Brien, The Ante Room (Dublin, 1981).
Eavan Boland, 'Kate O'Brien', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, pp. 46-8.
4. This took place on March 23, 1981, in Limerick, and was granted at the instigation of Alderman Jim Kemmy.
5. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait (Gerrards Cross, 1987).

CHAPTER ONE: Without My Cloak

1. Book review by R., The Dublin Magazine, vol. VIII, no. 2 (April-June 1932), p. 88.
2. F.S.L. Lyons refers to the economy of the ports in nineteenth century Ireland in Ireland since the Famine (1971; rept. London, 1973), p. 55.
3. Terence Brown, Ireland a Social and Cultural History 1922-1979 (London 1981), p. 135.
4. L.P. Curtis Jr., 'The Anglo Irish Predicament', Twentieth Century Studies, ed. G. Almansi (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 59.

5. Lyons, p. 23.
6. Eavan Boland, Preface, Kate O'Brien, The Ante Room (1934; rept. Dublin, 1980), p. ix.
7. John Jordan, 'Kate O'Brien - a note on her themes', The Bell, vol. XIX, no. 2 (January, 1954), p. 57.
8. Advertisements for the new gas - lights appear in The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator (Limerick, June 1, 1860). The publication also carries the notice that "Carrick-on-Suir is lighted with gas for the first time this week".
9. Hubert Butler, 'That Lady', The Bell, XII, 5 (August, 1946), p. 444.
10. John Jordan, 'My Ireland', University Review, III, 2 (1962), p. 73.
11. For a study of these writers see Janet Madden, This Dark Country: Irish Novels by Irish Women 1875-1925, Doctoral dissertation, U.C.D., 1983.
12. Eavan Boland, 'Kate O'Brien', Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 4.
13. J.J. Lee, 'Women and the Church since the Famine', Women in Irish Society, The Historical Dimension, eds. Margaret mac Curtain and Donncha Ó'Corráin (Dublin, 1978), p. 40.
14. Desmond Fennell ed. The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland (London, 1968), p. 251.

15. O'Brien refers to these details of her mother's life in her autobiographical book Presentation Parlour (London, 1963), p. 27.
16. Caroline's insistence on the possibility of a 'miracle' ties up with the fact, that at that time in Ireland popular belief in miracles was heightened by the occurrence of a major miracle at Lourdes on 16th September 1877, and by the apparitions at Knock in January 1880.
17. Mrs Dominic Hennessy is considered "fast" although "she seemingly did her duty by her husband". The question was, "with no marriageable daughter", why did she "fill her house with English captains and subalterns?" (p. 147).
18. George Moore, A Drama in Muslin (1886; rept. Gerrards Cross, 1981), pp. 137-138, also p. 15 and p. 3.
19. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 51.
20. W.B. Yeats, 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London, 1950), p. 66.
21. Desmond Fennell, p. 151.
22. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex (London, 1968), p. 11.

23. Patrick Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience (Dublin, 1985) p. 201. Pointing to the extent of Church domination as a peculiarly Irish experience, he suggests that "what was in general law exceptional, became the norm in Ireland".
24. Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 53.
25. Reynolds, 'Kate O'Brien and the Pursuit of Love and Freedom', The Stony Thursday Book, pp. 20 and 22.

CHAPTER TWO: The Ante Room

1. Benedict Kiely, 'Kate O'Brien, Prayer and Departure', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 6.
2. Eavan Boland, Preface, Kate O'Brien, The Ante Room, p. xi.
3. Kiely, The Stony Thursday Book, p. 6.
4. Sydney Janet Kaplan, Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel (Chicago, 1975), pp. 1-2.
5. Boland, Preface, The Ante Room, p. vii.
6. Boland, p. ix.
7. John Jordan, 'Kate O'Brien, a note on her themes', The Bell, pp. 53-9.
8. Patrick Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience, p. 205.

9. Corish, p. 214.
10. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 119.
11. Desmond Fennell, ed. The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland, p. 150. This point is also explored in Corish, p. 201.
12. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex p. 11.
13. Fennell, p. 211.
14. Margaret Lawrence, We Write as Women (London, 1937), p. 199.
15. Fennell, p. 251.
16. Lorna Reynolds, 'Kate O'Brien and the Pursuit of Home and Freedom', The Stony Thursday Book, p. 20.

CHAPTER THREE: The Land of Spices

1. Although this work has not been published in its entirety, extracts of it have appeared in various publications such as The Tablet, (December 1976), The Sunday Press, (January 2, 1977), and The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 28.
2. Kate O'Brien, 'Memories of a Catholic Education', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 28.
3. O'Brien, 'Memories of a Catholic Education'.

4. The nature of this training is explored more fully in Mary Carbery, The Farm by Lough Gur (London, 1938).
5. A Convent Boarding School in Limerick owned and run by the French Order of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. It had branches in centres in Ireland such as at Bruff, Co. Limerick and at Bunclody, Co. Wexford. These were popularly considered to be 'snob schools'.
6. Kate O'Brien, My Ireland (London, 1962), pp. 112-113.
7. Kate O'Brien, Farewell Spain (London, 1937), p. 81.
8. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1914, repr. London, 1977), p. 46.
9. Ibid., p. 222.
10. Ibid., p. 75.
11. Ibid., p. 222.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Flower of May

1. Margaret macCurtain, 'Women, The Vote and Revolution', Women in Irish Society, The Historical Dimension, p. 48.
2. Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 133.

3. Most Rev. Denis Kelly, Bishop of Ross, Women's share in the Industrial Revival of Ireland (Dublin, 1905), p. 17.
4. Margaret macCurtain, pp. 47-9.
5. Charles Dickens, The Pickwick Papers, ed. James Kinsley (1937, repr. Oxford 1986), p. 455.
6. Reynolds, p. 88.
7. John Jordan, 'Kate O'Brien - a note on her themes', The Bell, p. 56.
8. Val Mulkerns, 'Kate O'Brien, A Memoir', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 51.
9. Jordan, p. 54.

CHAPTER FIVE: Mary Lavelle

1. Eavan Boland, 'Kate O'Brien', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 47.
2. Kate O'Brien, Farewell Spain, p. 227.
3. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 101.
4. Reynolds, p. 61. She acknowledges O'Brien's conscious or unconscious paraphrasing of Henry James, who writes of Isabel Archer, "conception of a certain young lady affronting her destiny".

5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. Ibid., p. 62.
7. O'Brien, Farewell Spain, p. 141.
8. Boland, The Stony Thursday Book, p. 47.
9. Vivian Mercier, 'Kate O'Brien', Irish Writing, 1, 1 (1946), p. 92.
10. John Jordan, 'Kate O'Brien - a note on her themes', The Bell, p. 59.
11. Jose Maria el Areilza, 'Mary Lavelle', El Pais (Madrid, 13 March 1985), translation by John Liddy, Journal of Old Limerick Society, no. 22, ed. Jim Kemmy (Limerick, 1987), p. 13.
12. Reynolds, p. 100.
13. Rev. M. Garahy, S.J., The Idol of Pleasure, Idols of Modern Society (Catholic Truth Society pamphlet, Dublin, 1923), p. 13.
14. Garahy, 'Idols of Modern Society, Idolatry in the mire' (C.T.S., Dublin 1924), p. 7.
15. O'Brien, Farewell Spain, p. 227.

CHAPTER SIX: Pray for the Wanderer

1. Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 75.

2. Mary Cogan Bromage, De Valera and the March of a Nation (London, 1956), p. 228.
3. J.H. Whyte, Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1979 (Dublin, 1971).
4. Irish Independent (June 22, 1932).
5. Bromage, p. 249.
6. Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience, p. 247.
7. John Jordan, 'Kate O'Brien, a note on her themes', The Bell, p. 59.
8. Reynolds, p. 76.
9. Reynolds, p. 78.
10. Colm Toibin, Letters from the new Ireland, Martyrs and Metaphors (Dublin, 1987), p. 14.
11. Maurice Manning, 'Women in Irish National and Local Politics 1922-77', Women in Irish Society, The Historical Dimension, pp. 95-7.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Last of Summer

1. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, p. 79.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
3. Ibid., p. 81.

4. Jordan, The Bell, p. 59.
5. Benedict Kiely, 'Kate O'Brien: Prayer and Departure', The Stony Thursday Book, 7, p. 9.
6. Reynolds, p. 81,
7. Ibid., p. 82.

CONCLUSION

1. Kate O'Brien, Pray for the Wanderer, pp. 218-9.
2. Lorna Reynolds, Kate O'Brien, A Literary Portrait, pp. 37-8.
3. Seamus Deane, 'Irish National Character', The Writer as Witness, ed. Tom Dunne (Cork, 1987), p. 104.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books by Kate O'Brien

<u>As Music and Splendour</u> (A Novel)	1958
<u>Distinguished Villa</u> (A Play)	1926
<u>English Diaries and Journals</u> (Belle Lettres)	1943
<u>Farewell Spain</u> (A Travel Book)	1937
<u>Mary Lavelle</u> (A Novel)	1936
<u>My Ireland</u> (A Travel Book)	1962
<u>Pray for the Wanderer</u> (A Novel)	1938
<u>Teresa of Avila</u> (A Biographical Monograph)	1951
<u>That Lady</u> (A Novel)	1946
<u>That Lady</u> (A Play)	1947
<u>The Ante Room</u> (A Novel)	1934
<u>The Flower of May</u> (A Novel)	1953
<u>The Land of Spices</u> (A Novel)	1941
<u>The Last of Summer</u> (A Novel)	1943
<u>Without My Cloak</u> (A Novel)	1931

Other Writings

- 'A bus from Tivoli', Threshold, 1, 2 (Summer 1957)
- 'A fit of laughing', The Bell, XVIII, 4 (July 1952)
- 'Andantino', Irish Writing, 27 and 28 (June and September 1954)
- 'As to University Life', University Review, 1, 6 (Autumn 1955)

- 'Aunt Mary in the Parlour', University Review, 111, 3
(1963)
- 'Changing Ireland', The Spectator (May 18, 1934)
- 'Children', The Spectator (July 4, 1952)
- 'Connemara', The Spectator (November 16, 1951)
- 'Conversation in a country lodging', The Spectator (June
21, 1940)
- 'Fathers Christmas', The Spectator (November 23, 1950)
- 'From one generation ...', The Spectator (October 8,
1943)
- 'Irish Writers and Europe', Hibernia (May 1965, rept.,
The Stony Thursday Book, 7, 1980)
- 'Ivan Turgenev', University Review, 1, 2 (1957).
- 'McCarthy's Place', Blackwoods Magazine (October 1963)
- 'Memories of a Catholic education', (a fragment of
O'Brien's unfinished autobiography, The Tablet December
4, 1976, rept., The Sunday Press, January 2, 1977, and
The Stony Thursday Book, 7, 1980)
- 'Moscow unforeseen', New Statesman (January 17, 1964)
- 'Shannon Airport', The Spectator (September 19, 1947)
- 'She roaring on Waipapa', Blackwoods Magazine (July 1964)
- 'Singapore has fallen', The Spectator (February 27, 1942)
- 'Rome Relaxed', The Spectator (August 16, 1963)
- 'The Art of Writing', Lecture delivered to the Graduates
Association, May 2, 1963, University Review, 111, 4
(1963)
- 'U.C.D. as I forget it', University Review, 111, 2 (1962)
- 'Writers of Letters', Essays and Studies, IX, ed. Sir
George Rostrevor Hamilton (London 1956)
- 'Yeats comes Home', The Spectator (September 24, 1948)

Works about Kate O'Brien

Boland, Eavan, Preface to The Ante Room (Dublin 1980)

'Kate O'Brien' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7 (1980)

Butler, Hubert, 'That Lady' in The Bell, XII, 5 (August 1946)

Clarke, Austin, 'The Land of Spices' in The Bell, 11, 1 (April 1941)

de Areilza, Jose Maria, 'Mary Lavelle' in El Pais (March 13, 1985) and translated by John Liddy in The Old Limerick Journal, 22, ed. Jim Kemmy (Christmas 1987)

de Muth, Clement, and Harold C. Gardiner, 'Two American Opinions on 'That Lady', in Irish Bookman, 1, 6 (January, 1947)

Deevey, Teresa, 'Teresa of Avila by Kate O'Brien' in Irish Writing, 18 (March 1952)

F. (P.), 'Farewell Spain' in The Dublin Magazine, XIII, new ser., 1 (January-March 1938)

Feehan, Fanny, 'Kate O'Brien and the Splendour of Music' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7, (1980)

Flynn, Brendan, 'A meeting with Kate' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7 (1980)

- H. (T.), 'My Ireland' in The Kilkenny Magazine, 8
(Autumn-Winter 1962)
- Hargreaves, Tamsin, Introduction to Mary Lavelle (London
1984)
- Hogan, Desmond, Introduction to That Lady (London 1985)
- Jordan, John, 'Kate O'Brien - a note on her themes' in
The Bell, XIX, 2 (January 1954)
- 'Kate O'Brien, A Passionate Talent' in Hibernia
(August 30, 1974)
- 'Kate O'Brien, First Lady of Irish Letters talks to
John Jordan' in Hibernia (May 11, 1973)
- 'My Ireland' in University Review, 111, 2 (1962)
- 'Kate O'Brien' in The Stony Thursday Book, 3
(Summer 1976)
- Kemmy, Jim, 'Kate O'Brien's Limerick' in The Old Limerick
Journal, 17, ed. Jim Kemmy (Winter 1984)
- Kiely, Benedict, 'Kate O'Brien, Prayer and Departure' in
The Stony Thursday Book, 7 (1980)
- McCabe, Eugene, 'The Flower of May' in Irish Writing, 25
(December 1953)
- Mercier, Vivian, 'Kate O'Brien' in Irish Writing, 1, 1
(1946)

- M.L., 'The Ante Room' in Irish Book Lover (September-October 1934)
- Mulkerns, Val, 'Kate O'Brien, a memoir' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7, (1980)
- Murphy, C.B., 'Sex, Censorship and the Church' in The Bell, 11, 6 (September 1941)
- Nichols, B., 'Without My Cloak' in Saturday Review (London, December 19, 1931)
- O'Faolain, Sean, 'Standards and Taste' in The Bell, 11, 3 (June 1941)
- O'Toole, Michael, 'Kate O'Brien's Limerick' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7 (1980)
- P.F., 'Farewell Spain' in The Dublin Magazine, XIII, new ser., 1 (January-March 1938)
- R., 'Without My Cloak' in The Dublin Magazine, VII, new ser., 2 (April-June 1932)
- R., 'The Ante Room', in The Dublin Magazine, IX, new ser., 4 (October-December 1934)
- Reynolds, Lorna, 'Kate O'Brien and the Pursuit of Love and Freedom' in The Stony Thursday Book, 7 (1980)

Kate O'Brien, A Literary Talent, (Gerrards Cross 1987)

'That Lady' in The Dublin Magazine, XXI, new ser., 3 (July-September 1946)

Robinson, Kate, 'Without My Cloak' in Hibernia (November 1986)

Ryan, Joan, 'Class and Creed in Kate O'Brien' in The Irish Writer and the City, ed. Maurice Harmon, Irish Literary Studies 18 (Gerrards Cross 1984)

Ryan, Joan, 'Women in the Novels of Kate O'Brien, the 'Mellick' Novels' in Studies in Anglo Irish Literature, ed. Heinz Kosok (Bonn 1982)

T. (P.C.), 'Pray for the Wanderer' in Irish Book Lover, XXVI (November-December 1938)

T.H., 'My Ireland' in The Kilkenny Magazine, 8 (Autumn-Winter 1962)

Whitebait, William, 'The Last of Summer' (The Play), New Statesman and Nation (June 17, 1944)

Backgrounds to Social and Cultural History

Almansi, G., ed., 'The Anglo-Irish Predicament' in Twentieth Century Studies (Edinburgh 1970)

- Bromage, Mary Cogan, De Valera and the March of a Nation
(London 1956)
- Brown, Terence, Ireland, A Social and Cultural History
1922-1979 (London 1981)
- Corish, Patrick, The Irish Catholic Experience (Dublin
1985)
- Daly, Mary, The Church and the Second Sex (London 1968)
- Dunne, Tom, The Writer as Witness, Historical Studies XVI
(Cork 1987)
- Fennell, Desmond, ed. The Changing Face of Catholic
Ireland (London 1968)
- Garahy, Rev M. S.J., The Idols of Modern Society (Dublin
1923)
- Kelly, Most Rev. Denis, Bishop of Ross, Women's Share in
the Industrial Revival of Ireland (Dublin 1905)
- Lyons, F.S.L., Ireland since the Famine (1971, rept.,
London 1973)
- MacCurtain, Margaret and Donncha Ó Corráin, eds. Women in
Irish Society: The Historical Dimension (Dublin
1978)

Toibin, Colm, Letters from the New Ireland: Martyrs and Metaphors (Dublin 1987)

Whyte, J.H., Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1979
(Dublin 1971)

Other Works Cited

Bromage, Mary Cogan, Literature of Ireland Today,
(Pamphlet; rept. from The South Atlantic Quarterly,
XLII, 1 (January 1943))

Brontë, Charlotte, Jane Eyre (London 1847)

Carbery, Mary, The Farm by Lough Gur (London 1938)

Dickens, Charles, The Pickwick Papers (1937, rept. ed.
James Kinsley, Oxford 1986)

James, Henry, The Portrait of a Lady (London 1881)

Joyce, James, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
(1914, rept. London 1977)

Kaplan, Sydney Janet, Feminine Consciousness in the
Modern British Novel (Chicago 1975)

Lawrence, Margaret, We Write as Women (London 1937)

Madden, Janet, This Dark Country: Irish Novels by Irish Women 1875-1925, (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, U.C.D., 1983)

Moore, George, A Drama in Muslin (1886, rept. Gerrards Cross 1981)

Yeats, W.B., Collected Poems (London 1950)

