

Sexuality and Religion in Kate O'Brien's Fiction

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“[T]he residue of all emotional experience tends in spirits large enough to be at last of natural and universal value, whatever the personal accidents of its accretion.”¹ This observation was written by Kate O'Brien (1897-1974), in her travelogue, *Farewell Spain*, about the artist El Greco. Whilst not all of O'Brien's characters can be described as “large spirits” on the scale of an artist like El Greco, the “accretion” and “residue” of emotional experience drives the plots of most of O'Brien's fiction. Any reading of O'Brien's work must ask whether or not “universal value” can be derived from such close attention to emotional patterns or whether each is of an individual cast with little or no relevance to wider truths about women's lives. In a post-structuralist world, critics are sceptical of claims to universal value, and any attempt to see fiction as a version of history or “truth” must also fail. However, an argument can be made for reading the emotional “accretion” and “residue” of experience in O'Brien's work as an aestheticisation of disquiet with ideological perspectives that presume middle-class women's homogenised acceptance of their prescribed roles. By focusing on the individual experience, O'Brien's novels, the literary critic Adele Dalsimer wrote in *Kate O'Brien: A Critical Study*, “quietly protest against the fates of middle-class Irish women who are sheltered, stifled, and forced into prescribed roles as wives, mothers, or spinsters.”²

O'Brien created novels that were traditional in form but subtly radical in content, thereby dramatising a questioning of the lives of women that were determined by the particular modes of femininity advocated by Irish society and Church teaching. In particular, the individual emotional experiences depicted by O'Brien, are formed by the collision of sexuality and religion. In her memoir, *Presentation Parlour*, O'Brien admitted that she was “never much interested in political deviations and always concerned as to persons and their private

decisions.”³ In her fiction, these “private decisions” frequently have wider implications, and are made within the framework of the social, cultural, political and religious *mores* that pertained especially to women’s lives in the early twentieth century. In that regard, O’Brien’s female characters will be analysed in the context of moral dilemmas associated with female sexuality, in order to explore how her work mediates the contribution of the Catholic Church⁴ to constructions of women’s sexuality, and to gender roles. Gender differences were reinforced by the education curriculum, which emphasised the religious and domestic aspects of a girl’s education.⁵ The 1937 Constitution, which mirrored closely the role of women as promulgated in papal encyclicals, concentrated on women as mothers only, and ignored single women.⁶ Sexuality, for married women, was contained within a Catholic discourse that dealt with the duty to procreate and the evils of contraception.⁷ The State imposed Catholic teaching with the 1935 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, Section 17, which prohibited the sale, advertising or importation of contraceptives. Sexuality, therefore, was not deemed to be a topic or experience that should be of concern to the single Catholic woman, and if discussed, the focus tended to centre on the problem of unmarried mothers.

O’Brien took the unusual step, for her unmarried heroines, in portraying sexuality as a moral conflict within the context of romantic love. Also, the conventional path of love and marriage does not transpire for O’Brien’s single heroines, which in itself is a protest against a society that situated the family as the most important unit in that society. Ironically, O’Brien’s model for the theme of moral conflict was taken from the experiences of St Teresa of Avila (1515-82). In her biography on St Teresa, one of the most famous nuns in Church history, O’Brien discussed the conflict between spiritual and earthly love in the context of Teresa’s life experiences.⁸ Nuns were particularly important to O’Brien as examples of professional, independent women. This was as a consequence of her early schooling (O’Brien was sent to a French-run convent boarding school at the

age of five after the death of her mother), and the fact that she had aunts who were nuns. Exposure to an alternative way of life, that of the convent, allowed O'Brien to see a role for women other than that of marriage and motherhood. It was a life that could be lived at a distance from the nuclear family, and the convent also provided O'Brien with an alternative world where women could achieve their potential and satisfy both the need for adventure and spiritual fulfilment. St Teresa made a strong impression on O'Brien's imagination, as during her first year as a nun, while seeking a cure for illness at the home of her uncle, an attraction developed between Teresa and her parish priest. The latter already had a lover. However, Teresa fought this attraction and O'Brien recounted that Teresa's friendship and influence brought the errant priest back to "his vows and his priestly obligations."⁹ O'Brien admired Teresa's strength of character and wrote: "It was love, human love and her idea of it, which was the chief enemy between her and her love of God". (44) This type of complex internal dynamic is experienced by O'Brien's heroines when they fall in love.

Thus, in O'Brien's work, the moral conflict between earthly and eternal love is depicted within Catholic confines. In his study of religious themes in Irish and French literature, *Crosscurrents and Confluences*, critic Eamon Maher writes that the heroines of O'Brien's fiction "break free of their Catholic upbringing to do things that could imperil their eternal salvation."¹⁰ He continues: "The raising of these issues was a bold step at a time when a Jansenistic distrust of the flesh was prevalent in Ireland and when the Censorship Board was particularly active."¹¹ By making sexuality in almost all its forms intimately related to sin, the Church could control sexuality and thereby, the minds of its followers.¹² In O'Brien's work, this conflict is dramatised by the characters' agonising negotiation between human emotion and Catholic ideology in the realm of sexuality. When the peasant girl Christina Roche consummates her relationship with Denis Considine, the highly favoured son of the rich merchant Anthony

Considine, in *Without My Cloak*, her feelings are vividly described. She finds, to her surprise, that she cannot bring herself to “feel” the sin of loving Denis. Being

conscious, as a well-trained Catholic, that she was gambling an eternal heaven for a fleeting one, and newly aware with a shock that made her smile that it was possible to commit what priests call mortal sin without the faintest sense of guilt, she gave herself up, with the catechism’s “perfect knowledge and full consent”, to her desire for Denis.¹³

The full import of the term “mortal sin” should be considered here in order to appreciate the daring nature of Christina’s decision. The Penny Catechism states that “mortal sin” is so called because “the word mortal means deadly, and a sin is called mortal because it takes away the supernatural life of the soul which is sanctifying grace ... They who die in mortal sin go to hell for all eternity.”¹⁴

Christina is the first of O’Brien’s single women to transgress Catholic sexual boundaries. Christina’s view of the world, and of her religion is simple and straightforward, and she accepts that there will be either retribution or consequences for her “sin”. The ending of the affair, therefore, is inevitable. Although Denis follows Christina to New York, after his uncle Father Tom has forcibly separated them, Christina realises that Denis has fallen out of love with her. On perceiving this, and going against her own feelings, she frees him from their affair. By doing so, Christine displays a strength of character that is lacking in the aforementioned Anthony, who completely fails to allow Denis to live outside the mantle of his smothering and demanding paternal love. In *The Ante-Room*, Agnes Mulqueen’s loyalty to her sister, Marie-Rose, overrides her own desires and she does not consummate her relationship with her brother-in-law, Vincent. Thus, her renunciation of love for her brother-in-law accords fully with her sense of family loyalty as well as with her Catholic training.¹⁵ St Teresa had demonstrated that personal strength could overcome attraction to another, and O’Brien gives this same strength of character to Agnes as she does to Christina. Thus, for Agnes, romantic love is secondary to her Christian and social duty and

that, combined with sisterly love, proves to be the deciding factor in the decision to end the affair.

In the novel *Mary Lavelle*, Mary is the first of O'Brien's single middle-class heroines to commit the mortal sin of copulation before marriage. She does so in a foreign setting, which removes her physically and psychologically from an Irish cultural context. Mary has gained a year of freedom before marrying her fiancé, John, by taking up a position as governess to three girls in Spain. She becomes the lover of the married son of her Spanish employer, in full knowledge of it being a sin, and in the expectation of retribution. Mary decides: "The central sin against Catholic teaching would be her affair and Heaven's."¹⁶ Mary and Juanito pay a heavy price for their affair as Juanito's father, Don Pablo, experiences the throes of death while Mary and Juanito are in the throes of love. Mary makes the decision to return to Ireland. She succumbs to the training of her upbringing by denying herself the possibility of a life with Juanito. There is no doubt too that Mary will tell her fiancé John of her unfaithfulness, as her strong moral code will not allow any other alternative. This will, of course, have an impact on her future. The novel ends with a vivid evocation of her unpromising future: "she would take her godmother's hundred pounds and go away. That was all." (344). Like Agnes, Mary is possessed of a strength of character that allows her to make the correct moral contemporary decision rather than one that is personally fulfilling. In *That Lady*, the taking of a lover is deliberately initiated by the widowed Ana de Mendoza. It was in "one of these moods of search for a personal position that she had been moved to the sudden and for her startling action of taking Antonio Perez for her lover. It was at least, as she had said to him that night, a decision of her own."¹⁷ Again, like many of O'Brien's female characters such as Christina Roche and Mary Lavelle, Ana finds it difficult to feel like a sinner, "marvelling only at how unsinning and unsinned against she felt in her life of sin." (193)

In O'Brien's final novel, *As Music and Splendour*, the collision between sexuality and religion is further developed. Rose Lennane, who is working as an opera singer in Italy, makes a similar decision to Ana's about her suitor, Rene, and "asking God to forgive her, 'saying a prayer', as she told him, she made him take her, she became his lover."¹⁸ Later she reflects that her decision,

which had been all hers, had been for her a good one; for, whatever conscience searching she might do, and often did, in terms of her Catholic teaching and of the catechism, she did not confuse its answers with the natural good and help and peace she had drawn, as a woman and as a singer, from her first experience of love. It was a sin, and she could face that; but it had also been, and still could be, a blessed and irresistible sweetness, a true explanation of life, for better or worse. (270)

Rose's thoughts on lovemaking surprise her. She reflects:

No delight that her senses could bring her would ever, she was now persuaded, overcome her certainty of wrong-doing when she made love; but neither would that certainty dissuade her from a necessity she found so sweet, in herself and in her lover. (320)

Rose's thoughts capture the conflict between sexuality and Church ideology. In the same novel, Rose and Clare Halvey's friend, Luisa, decides to live with her lover and fellow Spaniard, Iago Duarte. She tells Clare of her decision and they begin to talk of faith. Clare assumes that Luisa does not go to confession. Luisa explains why she feels that she cannot do so:

I'm doing something which I don't regard as a sin and so I *can* have no purpose of amendment. But of course I know it's a sin in the view of the Church, and therefore I can't ask for the Church's absolution – I don't go to confession, naturally. (142)

On the other hand, Clare goes to mass, despite not being "in a state of grace" because, she explains, "it's a discipline. I think things over at Mass, and I read my Missal..." (253) This reflects the current of ambiguity that runs throughout the

novels with regard to Catholicism. Despite O'Brien's affirmed agnosticism, there is a sense that she envied those who had faith. In the same novel, Clare says: "I suppose that I have in spite of myself what Grandmother calls 'The Faith'. If I have, I'm glad. I imagine I'd be lonely without it". (142) On the other hand, the difficulty of living up to the expectations demanded by Church ideology are also evoked by Clare. She tells Duarte:

I am not what is called a good girl, Iago.
I find you good.
Neither I nor the Church agrees with you. But since none of us is
good – . (339)

While the dictates of the Church are depicted as difficult, the succour and support, as well as the promise of eternal life provided by the notion of a spiritual world, is also evident. This ambiguity is evoked by Clare's comment: "at Mass I'm always sharply reminded that being happy isn't what we're here for!" (253). O'Brien's single characters do not find long-lasting happiness. Without the promise of eternity, such unresolved lives can only be seen as tragic. But, for O'Brien, the enormity of an imagined eternity far outweighs the reality of the earthly world. Again, Clare says: "I don't think I'll ever be the slave of the Penny Catechism, but at the same time I'd find it hard – if I ran into a serious moral conflict – I'd find it hard to decide that I was right and the Eternal Church wrong!" (142)

For O'Brien's women, while the freedom to love is testing as an experience, it also brings responsibility. On the other hand, the experience of love, whatever its rights or wrongs, are crucial to the emotional development of her female characters. As Nell Mahoney voices in *Pray for the Wanderer*, "You can be yourself only through emotion, and can establish understanding and release authentic knowledge of yourself only through the medium of feeling."¹⁹ Agnes, in *The Ante-Room*, argues forcibly for the consideration of a human dimension to the moral dilemmas experienced by O'Brien's single women. Reflecting on the turmoil she is experiencing, Agnes muses: "But God could surely take some

fraction of responsibility for the needs He planted in His helpless creatures?”²⁰ Furthermore, Agnes, we are told, “folded her hands, amazed to the point of weariness by the irresponsibility, in human terms, of a God who claimed human sensibilities and had, in fact, become man.” (276-7) Romantic love presented a dilemma for O’Brien’s heroines, therefore, that was not easily resolved within Catholic confines. Love, in O’Brien’s fiction, is not a sustainable emotion. Mary Lavelle, when explaining her view of love to Juanito, her married lover, voices this as follows: “That it’s a perfectly unreasonable illusion – and must be borne as that. It’s of no use. It’s not suitable or manageable. It blurs things, puts everything out of focus. It’s not a thing to live with. It’s a dream.”²¹ A similar view is expressed in *As Music and Splendour* in a scene where the singing *maestro* talks to Rose and Clare’s colleague, Tomas, about love. Signor Giacomo says:

I have nothing to say against love-affairs, or falling in love, or what you will, Tomaso. What could I say? And I don’t care who or what is the object of anyone’s passing or eternal love – love as you please, a nun or a goat or a Chinaman. Fine! But only let it be love conducted normally, and kept in its right place among the realities!²²

The theme of the irrelevance of the love object, as well as the theme of conflict between love and the demands of Catholicism in the context of homosexuality and lesbianism, is also raised in O’Brien’s novels. She raised the subject of the significance of a writer’s sexuality in the account of her travels in Spain, *Farewell Spain*. In relation to El Greco O’Brien wrote: “He is said to have been homosexual, but that suggestion can be of little use to us in considering his work. More mighty than he have been touched with that peculiarity...”²³ This implies that, for O’Brien, the sexuality of the artist or writer is not important in the context of their work. In his biography on O’Brien, *Kate O’Brien: A Writing Life*, critic Eibhear Walshe writing of O’Brien’s homosexuality, concludes on the evidence uncovered that “the web of interconnected relationships in her life is the only reliable biographical material available for an evaluation of her sexuality.”²⁴

If O'Brien's views on the significance of El Greco's sexuality with regard to his work are applied to the author herself, it may indicate an important reason for not declaring her alleged lesbianism, besides the unfavourable cultural and religious reception of the early twentieth century to such a declaration.

O'Brien's single females are not a homogenous group, despite similarities of situation. Neither are the depictions of lesbian characters in her fiction stereotypical. In "Out of Order: Kate O'Brien's Lesbian Fictions", critic and writer Emma Donoghue discusses O'Brien's work in the context of the lesbian writing tradition, and argues that O'Brien's lesbian perspective governs the content and structure of her novels in respect of "the careful mixing and contrasting of loves."²⁵ Agatha Conlon was O'Brien's first lesbian character, and Agatha plays a significant role in the novel, *Mary Lavelle*. From the beginning, Agatha is depicted as being different from her governess colleagues. Like Mary, she is interested in her adopted country, has learned its language and is addicted to the drama of the bullfight. There is something heartrending in the depiction of Agatha in her room overlooking the church of San Geronimo, "stitching an altar cloth"²⁶ as she implores a God, whose servants on earth have no words of comfort for something over which she has no control. Agatha tells Mary that she loathes life. When Mary asks her why, she answers: "My evil nature. I'm at cross purposes with it". (207) Agatha explains her sexuality to Mary: "I knew it was wrong; but lately I've been told explicitly about it in confession. It's a very ancient and terrible vice". (285) Agnes Mulqueen's words about God's responsibility for the needs he "plants" in humans are evoked here. The 1994 edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* shows the unchanged Catholic stance. Section 2357 states:

Tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.²⁷

Currently, the Church commands the faithful to avoid discrimination of homosexual people, which incorporates an impression of condescension, in that homosexual people are deemed to be deserving of sympathy.²⁸

As O'Brien wrote that the sexuality of the author was not important with regard to a consideration of their work, it is her concern with "private decisions" and the consequent individual manifestations of those decisions that are of uppermost interest with regard to her character depictions. Agatha, for example, is not explicit about her feelings for Mary until quite late in the novel. What is striking about Agatha's declaration of love, and Mary's response, is the way in which Mary's love for Juanito, and Agatha's love for Mary, are paralleled. What is emphasised is the similarities between relationships, not the differences. Donoghue writes: "Not having chosen any of the spurned lesbian's traditional options (travel, drug addiction, madness, death, heterosexuality), Agatha stays around, and finds to her surprise that she and Mary grow closer than ever."²⁹ Similarities between relationships are also a feature of the erotic affairs depicted in O'Brien's final novel, *As Music and Splendour*. In this novel, O'Brien presented two female characters with successful careers, who are financially independent, and who have the freedom to control their sexual lives. In this novel, too, O'Brien set forth, without coyness, a definite lesbian affair. Like Mary Lavelle, Rose Lennane and Clare Halvey are removed from an Irish cultural context, as they live and work in Italy. O'Brien groups heterosexual and homosexual affairs as one and the same in terms of "sin" as well as the guilt invoked by committing that sin. Clare explains it as follows to her colleague, Thomas, when she tells him about being in love with their fellow singer, Luisa: "Certainly I am a sinner in the argument of my Church. But so would I be if I were your lover... We all know the Christian rule – and every indulgence of the flesh which does not conform to it is wrong. All right. We are all sinners."³⁰ This echoes Mary's response to Agatha in *Mary Lavelle* when Agatha tells Mary how she feels about her. Mary exclaims: "Oh, everything's a sin!"³¹ Mary's response

reflects the Church view that only sexual relations that are open to the conception of life are without sin. The implication too is that Mary's heterosexual affair is just as "sinful" as Agatha's love for Mary. Erotic love, in O'Brien's novels, is generally illicit, and the gender of the participants mixed, which allowed O'Brien to argue for "moral accountability", "tolerance" and "sexual self-determination."³² Donoghue's view is that "Kate O'Brien's lesbian fictions do not promote lesbianism so much as freedom of action."³³ Donoghue's view can be supported by O'Brien's depiction of homosexuality in *The Land of Spices*. This was the novel whose banning was the cause of much controversy as it highlighted the sheer idiocy of the workings of the Censorship Board, leading to the book actually being discussed in the Seanád, and O'Brien being personally attacked by Seanád member, Professor McGuinness.³⁴ The novel, set in a convent, with the Reverend Mother, Helen Archer, as the central character, was banned on the basis of one line alluding to the homosexuality of the heroine's father. The characterisation of Henry Archer is complex. He is urbane, educated, kind and adored by his daughter. As the novel continues, however, a chink develops in the depiction. He is ruthless in his shaping of Helen's mind, and selfish about claiming her company. So much so, that Helen barely misses her mother when the latter dies at an early age. The idealisation of Henry comes from the child Helen's viewpoint, and loving him exacts sacrificial demands from both his wife, Catherine, and his daughter. The revelation of his sexuality changes the course of Helen's life and leads to an estrangement between them, which Henry cannot fathom. Walshe writes:

Henry Archer's sexuality is destructive to those around him, yet he dies happily unaware of the damage he has caused. Kate O'Brien's representation of Henry Archer's homosexuality merits comment, since she constructs his sexuality as a selfish and destructive element within the narrative. Therefore, one could argue that, in this novel, male homosexuality is presented in a negative light.³⁵

Significantly, therefore, O'Brien does not promote approval of the homosexual encounter in the novel, as the young Helen is so repulsed by her father's behaviour that she flees to a convent. This ties in with O'Brien's reluctance to judge her characters on the basis of gender, sexuality or sexual behaviour.

O'Brien does not promote any fixed role for her female characters. Rather, she promotes the freedom to experience life in whatever way it manifests itself. However, the freedom to choose love does not guarantee happiness, as is demonstrated by Clare and Rose, who are O'Brien's truly free characters, in their experiences of love. What is key in O'Brien's work is that freedom brings responsibility, as demonstrated by Christina, Agnes and Mary. Where the Christian ethos is most apparent in O'Brien's characters is by the fact that desire is never pursued and attained at the expense of another's happiness. Also O'Brien's lack of belief in the endurance of erotic love encompassed all her characters, whatever the gender of the participants involved. Neither were any of O'Brien's depicted love affairs, either heterosexual or homosexual, conventional.

In order to win O'Brien's admiration, it appears that life had to be confronted by her heroines, not shied away from. Clearly, O'Brien's heroines are products of their cultural and religious upbringings in that they do not seize happiness at the expense of others. Yet, they are not afraid to experience life and love, even if it is only for a time, when the situation presents itself. Although their experiences differ, there are points of similarity. They are humble, obedient and utterly loyal to their families, but not afraid to confront the consequences of emotional attachments, despite the confrontation with guilt and sin that intimacy entails. This is because love is central to the emotional development of O'Brien's characters. Difficult experiences do not break O'Brien's female characters; rather they emerge wiser and self-reliant at the end. It is apparent too, that O'Brien believed that distance from family and the cloying cultural context, as she perceived it, was necessary for the psychological freedom needed to establish a role outside of those assigned to women of the middle-classes. Crucially,

O'Brien's work questions the generalisation of women of the early twentieth-century as a homogenous group in society, also challenging the view that women's sexuality can be linked only to their ability to produce, and governed as one and the same outside the context of individual agency, choice and desire.

Notes

¹ O'Brien, K. *Farewell Spain*. London: Virago, 2006: 146.

² Dalsimer, A. M. *Kate O'Brien: A Critical Study*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1990: xv.

³ O'Brien, K. *Presentation Parlour*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Poolbeg [1963], 1994: 33.

⁴ In order to avoid repetition, "the Church" will be the term used to denote the Roman Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, and will be used without prejudice to the ecclesiastical status of other denominations.

⁵ For a history of the education system in Ireland, see Coolahan, J. *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*. Dublin: IPA, 1981. See also O'Connor, A. V. "The Revolution in Girls' Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910" in Cullen, M. ed. *Girls Don't Do Honours: Irish Women in Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Dublin: Argus Press (WEB), 1987: 31-54.

⁶ See *Bunreacht na hEireann*. Second Amendment Edition. Dublin: Government Publication Office, 1942: Articles 41.2.1 and 41.2.2. See also Pope Pius XI's encyclical, "*Quadragesimo Anno*" (15/5/31, Section 71a) in Carlen, C. *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939 Vol. 3*. USA: Pierian Press, 1990: 426. Also pertinent is Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, "*Rerum Novarum*" (Section 60).

⁷ In the 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII (1878-1903) wrote: "No human law can abolish the natural and original right of marriage, nor in any way limit the chief and principal purpose of marriage, ordained by God's authority from the beginning. *Increase and multiply.*" Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubi*, set out the Church's position on contraception. Pius wrote: "Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious... Our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offence against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin." Fremantle, A. ed. *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context*. USA: Mentor, 1956: 171 and 239 (Sections 54 and 56).

⁸ For an account of St Teresa's life, see O'Brien, K. *Teresa of Avila*. 2nd ed. Cork: Mercier, 1993. See also Malone, M. T. *Women and Christianity, Vol. 1: The First Thousand Years*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2000.

⁹ O'Brien, *Teresa of Avila*... 37.

¹⁰ Maher, E. *Crosscurrents and Confluences: Echoes of Religion in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Dublin: Veritas, 2000: 104.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹² One of the means of achieving this was through the medium of confession. See Inglis, T. *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998: 129-130.

¹³ O'Brien, K. *Without My Cloak*. 3rd ed. London: Virago, 2001: 308.

¹⁴ *Short Catechism*, A. Sligo: Champion Publications, Undated.

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- ¹⁵ See O'Brien, K. *The Ante-Room*. 2nd ed. London: Virago, 1988. It is notable, although outside the scope of this article, that Agnes is a middle-class girl, whereas Christina is a peasant girl, and it could be suggested that O'Brien was not yet ready to depict the "fall" of a girl from the bourgeois class, of which she was a member.
- ¹⁶ O'Brien, K. *Mary Lavelle*. 2nd ed. London: Virago, 1984: 257.
- ¹⁷ O'Brien, K. *That Lady*. 2nd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965: 192.
- ¹⁸ O'Brien, K. *As Music and Splendour*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Penguin, 2005: 170.
- ¹⁹ O'Brien, K. *Pray for the Wanderer*. 2nd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951: 107.
- ²⁰ O'Brien, *The Ante-Room*... 260.
- ²¹ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*... 247.
- ²² O'Brien, *As Music*... 173
- ²³ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*... 146.
- ²⁴ Walshe, E. *Kate O'Brien: A Writing Life*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005: 47.
- ²⁵ Donoghue, E. "'Out of Order': Kate O'Brien's Lesbian Fictions" in Walshe, E. ed. *Ordinary People Dancing: Essays on Kate O'Brien*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1993: 42.
- ²⁶ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*... 98.
- ²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Dublin: Veritas, 1994: 505.
- ²⁸ Section 2358 of the *Catechism* states: "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfil God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition (*Catechism*, 2358, 505). The use of the word "condition" is notable and evokes the notion of a medical condition.
- ²⁹ Donoghue p. 46.
- ³⁰ O'Brien, *As Music*... 208.
- ³¹ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*... 285.
- ³² Donoghue p. 39.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ³⁴ See Terence Brown. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922–1985*. London: Fontana [1981], 1985. 196-8.
- ³⁵ Walshe p. 88.

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