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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

“I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from sources are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the biographical references either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and / or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.”

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PREFACE

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**You cannot teach values.
You can only exemplify them through your own life.**

(Viktor E. Frankl)

1. Introduction

Edna O'Brien is the author's name on a green small book in my shelf. I had bought this book because I had visited Ireland in the summer of 2009 due to a long desire to visit this country. I had already been to Ireland once before, when my mother was pregnant with me. Since then we have been joking that I am partly Irish because my mother breathed Irish air that surely influenced my unborn me. Furthermore, all the Irish people patted her engrossing stomach and wished her good luck with me. They were shocked that I only had one brother so far, which is according to Irish standards definitely not enough for a real family. Then, later, my fascination for Ireland increased when I saw pictures of it, the green fields, the stonewalls, the sheep, the fog, the remains of Celtic culture. It did not take me long to be interested in Irish literature as well. I bought O'Flaherty's *Famine* and also wanted to get a description of Ireland, which is why I bought O'Brien's *Mother Ireland*. This is how I got to know this Irish writer and why I decided to deal with her short fiction in my diploma thesis.

As already pointed out in this little anecdote, Irish people pay much attention to children and to family. Although this seems charming at first, when reading O'Brien's short fiction it becomes obvious how hard life must have been for children and young adolescents fifty years ago. They did not only have to develop themselves, but also became part of a generation that changed the notion of Irish society, from patriarchal structures to modern ones. They had to create two identities: their own and the Irish.

So the historical background of mid 20th century in Ireland has to be discussed in the first section of this paper. It shows the political situation of the older generation, namely the generation of these young people's parents to be precise. It was the time of de Valera's Ireland and the new constitution of 1937. It was a society in which patriarchal ideas were idealized, the woman had to be a mother and women's rights were just beginning to be an issue. Even though it is hard to understand nowadays why females did not rebel against their suppression, their acceptance of this role may have been due to the newly

gained independence of the Irish Free State. Ireland wanted to appear strong and wanted to move away from the notion of being female, being a “Mother Ireland”. So, patriarchal ideas were established in politics and society.

As time went by, women could not bear this situation any longer and Women’s Rights Movements were established. Their wishes and demands led to an uproar in Irish society, but also found many followers. The change of the current situation was immediately taken up by literature, especially by female writers, which was new to the men-dominated Irish literary scene. Both men and women who wrote about the changing political situation had to face criticism sooner or later. For some, for instance Edna O’Brien, it was impossible to stay in Ireland, which is why they left the country and preferred exile to their “fatherland”.

Edna O’Brien being part of this new generation of women herself reflected on her own childhood days in County Clare in her fiction and also in her short narrations. The quest of finding a self not created by society or a mother, that lived up to the given rules is dominant in her fiction. So, in her English exile she created different figures who face this very same problem and who try to dissolve it by finding a person to be related to, a role model, a person to take care of – in an intergenerational relationship.

As in all the works of fiction selected, at least one female character is part of the intergenerational relationship, the position of females in 20th century Ireland has to be dealt with in more detail. It explains why there are large differences in attitudes, morals and behaviour within two generations of women. The mothers or the older females in O’Brien’s stories, have completely different points of view concerning priorities in life.

For the older generation being a mother was a woman’s inescapable destiny: for the daughter generation their youth was a time when striving for independence. These two world views did not get along with each other which ended up in rejecting the mothers – not only for developmental reasons, but also because they could not accept their mothers’ generation’s lifestyle any

more. This daughter-generation grew up with Women's Rights Movements and rebelled against the patriarchal society they had experienced in their childhood and at home.

But not only the political background shall be explored but also the four developmental stages of children with a special focus on their kinship, meaning the persons they relate to. They explain why the protagonists turn away from their mothers and that intergenerational relationships are an important part in a child's education and development. In this connection, also the first sexual experience is a topic as within fiction a transition from sexuality as a taboo to sexuality as a matter of everyday life can be observed. Last but not least, the point of view from the adults should not be left aside – not all short stories are told by a young narrator, but also from the grown-up perspective of a narrator.

The identity quest is always in the foreground. It seems more logical with the younger narrators, but is even of greater importance in the short stories with an adult narrator than appears at first sight.

The nine short stories that are discussed are divided into these four aspects of intergenerational relationships referred to above. Besides the rejection of the mother that can be found in *A Rose in The Heart of New York*, there are role models introduced that do not belong to the family, but are people who seem to have something special or fascinating about them so that the young girls strive for their attention. They are eager to get to know them and they treat them as their mentors. Such a person can be found in many places; it can be a couple of sisters as *The Connor Girls*; an exotic person coming who has experienced adventures on another continent as in *Savages*, or an atypical nun in *Sister Imelda*. These intergenerational relationships remain rather pure and innocent, which does not prevent the protagonist from disappointment and disillusionment.

However, there are also short stories in which the protagonists either have already lost or are about to lose their naivety, their innocence concerning some issues. First of all, growing up goes along with making experience with the other

sex, which can be more or less negative. In *Love-Child*, the protagonist will never find out whether she has to see her intergenerational relationship as with a friend, a father or a lover, whereas in *The Bachelor* the match-making of a mother goes too far by selling her daughter to a man that she herself loves, at the same time profiting from his financial generosity. In *Courtship* the narrator falls in love with an extremely good looking young man, for whom she would do anything.

Although they are in contrast with all the other short stories I have selected two in which the protagonist is not a child. They provide a different view on intergenerational relationships, because they show the role model's perspective. It becomes obvious in both *Christmas Roses* and *Clara* that being the older part does not automatically mean that the identity quest has been terminated yet.

Therefore, in this paper the different facets in Edna O'Brien's short fiction dealing with intergenerational relationships will be thoroughly analysed, ending up in an interesting conclusion.

2. Historical Background

In 1922, Ireland was split up into Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom, and the Irish Free State, which remained part of the Commonwealth. In 1937 the country got its own constitution and was turned into the Republic of Ireland showing a more authentic, elite's notion of a separate Irish politics (Hanafin 150). Later, in 1949 it left the Commonwealth. The constitution was Ireland's attempt to announce a new nation, although the Declaration of 1916, the Dail Constitution of 1919, and the Irish Free State Constitution of 1922 had preceded this foundational document, as it is often called (Graf 3-8). In the past decades, Ireland has tried to develop its own culture and has herself separated from British society as well as British politics.

The first attempts of being economically independent of the UK were unsuccessful, because there was no government that could manage to establish proper living standards for the population. Failing in private entrepreneurship and industrialisation, as well as the poor income from exports due to the inter-war period, she found herself unable to build up economic independence (Graf 7).

Besides that, Ireland still suffered from the emigration following the times of the Great Famine of the 19th century. Western seafront areas remained poor and were rather undeveloped compared to the eastern part of the country. There, people had to face low living standards, poverty was predominant and developments in technical fields appeared rather slowly. Cinemas were introduced in the 1930s and 40s and visitors often functioned as heralds and information sources from "the outer world". Cars were a rarity as well as public transport remained scarce, bicycles, instead, were the means of transport most frequently used (Beale 24).

In the 1950s, the Republic of Ireland implemented economic recovery programmes. Before that, the Irish society was characterized by agriculture and rural life were dominant in Irish society, which also meant a conservative,

Catholic lifestyle that led to Irish nationalism and attitudes which were best represented mirrored by politicians such as Eamon de Valera (Beale 9).

De Valera's politics kept up to certain conservative standards: the family and community-centred life, Catholic sexual morality, patriarchy, the hierarchical organization of communities and conservatism. Furthermore, the interest in national and international politics was low.

This conservatism was mirrored by the constitution of 1937 and offered a description of and for the new Irish society. It contains paragraphs on Catholicism, which was the "[f]aith professed by the great majority of the citizens" (Schmitt 48), and on divorce as well as abortion in the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935) and the Conditions of Employment Act (1935) which made it impossible for women to work in certain industries (Beale 8). Parents had to provide for a child's education, meaning religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social training (Dooney, O'Toole 95). Hence, it showed stereo-typed roles, a women's life had to be largely home-centred, while a man's has to focus on work-life and the role of the breadwinner (Robinson 58). These concepts were laid down in Article 41.2. of the 1937 Constitution:

2.1. In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, a woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2.2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (quoted in Robinson 60)

Women's rights were limited and at the same time family life was highlighted by the 1937 Constitution. The nuclear family was depicted as the fundamental unit in society, patriarchy was supported.

Article 41 recognizes the family as the natural, primary and fundamental unit group of society and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights. *Inalienable* means that it cannot be transferred or given away, while *imprescriptible* means that which cannot be lost by the passage of time or abandoned by non-exercise. (Dooney, O'Toole 95)

In his St Patrick's Day speech of 1943 de Valera, he addressed women as "comley maidens" (Doherty, Keogh 104), which did not raise his popularity among them. There also were protests about Article 41.2, but de Valera refused to delete it (Scannell 72). De Valera himself had admitted that he had a "bad reputation with women" (Scannell 71), as there were at least six articles in the constitution that vindicated women's rights. The only rights for women stated in the constitution are that they are entitled to vote, become TDs and citizens on the same basis as men. So, they enjoyed full political rights (Scannell 71).

The marriage bar was a cynical attempt to make jobs available for young single men and women, but only if the women working in the public service did not get married. Also, the idea of denying jobs in new industries was that men who functioned as breadwinners could earn more for their families, however the side effect was that women were limited to their homes. Women were supposed to be dependent on their husbands and society had to support them if this dependence ceases (Scannell 72). In the years of depression years this lead to single men and women who urged married mothers to give up their jobs (Doherty, Keogh 107). Work outside home for married women was regarded as a selfish distraction from any home duties (Scannell 74).

A woman should fulfil her duties at home and be "a good mother". This did not mean to be a good caretaker in emotional or educational terms, but it is a construction of the Irish state, prescribing what a woman or mother should be, "...[the] Catholic ideal of womanhood [...] understands that failure to be submissive, chaste, and selfless often leads to women being labeled [sic] as impure, tainted, or simply evil." (Byron 24). Hence, the term motherhood does not only refer to the physiological reproduction, but also a social reproduction, meaning the institution of motherhood. This was stressed by de Valera who described the women's role as mother as essential, because they were responsible for the next Irish generation. It concerned all women, not just mothers, as the idea was indoctrinated to all women due to the society they were born into (Fasching 5). This is why it was also essential to the stability of the family, the State and the Catholic society that women were returning to the home (Valiulis 152).

However, Article 41.2 was not introduced to ban women from work, it was used as justification for the continuation of the marriage bar. In 1953, the bar was beginning to become obsolete. So the article could not be used against women in many ways, which meant a certain success for the women's rights movements (Doherty, Keogh 108).

It is inaccurate – to say the least – to depict de Valera's Ireland as a graveyard of women's rights. It was an intensive care unit, maybe, but dedicated attention ensured that the patient survived. The very fact that women's rights were constantly being debated, defined and defended indicates that they were very much alive (Doherty, Keogh 108).

From the mid-1930s onwards, young women started to reject the domestic service as an occupation, in 1936, a Frater McCarthy from rural Cork complained that girls rejected the "good situations" and went to England. This led to nervousness in the patriarchal society, the press heavily criticized this new development. In an extract from the *Irish Independent* in 1950, it says, "Young girl wanted to train as Mother's Help: good wages and outings; card stamped, uniform supplied, treated as one of family, help given, present girl four years" (quoted in Doherty, Keogh 109¹).

This shows that the younger generation of women from the 1950s onwards opposed their vocation as housewives and mothers. The role model existing for decades before was not taken seriously any more, however, generational conflicts aroused as daughters striving for independence had to stand up against mothers caught in the net of a patriarchal society.

2.1. Women's Rights Movements

As the role of the woman was an issue during these decades, the women's organisations flourished during this time. The Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social workers had 28,000 members in 1940. It called itself feminist, just as the Catholic Federation of Secondary School Unions, which had a few thousand members. There also were older organisations dealing with the protection of young girls and the rights of women workers like

¹ "Help wanted" advertisements, *Irish Independent*, 27 September 1950.

the National Council of Women in Ireland. They strived for better working conditions for women (Doherty, Keogh 106).

Although the health care for women was improving, contraception was still not an issue in the mid 1930ies, even not for the women's organisations in these years. It is hardly investigated what women thought about having many children, as in the 1930s and 40s they often did not have any other choice (Doherty, Keogh 113).

This means that during the de Valera – years the situation for women changed for the better, even though the political surroundings seemed hostile as the women's participation in paid work and public life were still limited (Doherty, Keogh 114). The improvement was not due to his politics, but because females were increasingly critical of patriarchal society.

The 1970ies brought even more changes: Firstly, courts created an awareness of the citizen's constitutional rights according to their own interpretation of the constitution. Secondly, the feminist movements started, creating a manifesto called "Chains or Change" which was presented in the "Late Late Show" of 6 March 1971, making an end to the misogynistic surroundings. This manifesto included demands such as equal pay, equal education, equality before the law, contraception and justice for abandoned wives, unmarried mothers and widows. Thirdly, Ireland entered the European Economic Community in 1973 (Scannell 74-5).

Focussing on the feminist movements, in the magazine "Woman's Life", for example, working women were depicted, highlighting the importance of this matter, even though in the 1955 Factories Act the working hours of women were regulated in the protective clauses (Robinson 62). Before the Second World War, only less than one in ten women worked in industry, after that an increase of this number could be observed, but the total number of women at work shrunk. There were 50,000 women less in employment in 1971 than in 1926 (Daly 71-2). However, in 1970 the High Court declared that women had a

right to earn a livelihood under Article 40.3 and that any discrimination because of sex is unconstitutional, this meaning at least a small success (Scannell 75).

Even many Catholics thought that it was good for women to participate in public life as long as Catholic principles were followed. This did not mean a full support for women's rights, but also formed a contrast to some of De Valera's ideas. This meant a change from the late 1930s onwards, as before that the Catholic Church denied women a public identity and casting them solely in terms of domesticity (Valiulis 153). The Lenten pastorals, in special Dr Dignan of Clonfert, pronounced himself for a good education of daughters. Even equal pay for equal work was a topic in Catholic magazines in the 1950s. However, the effects of these publications were not large, as they were no wide-spread popular media (Doherty, Keogh 106).

Despite the criticism on the constitution, it also has to be borne in mind that although it was a constitutional article, not everybody abided to it,

How many women were aware of article 41.2. in the 1937 constitution? It is simply not true to claim as one historian does, that by 1937 women's political, economic and reproductive rights had been so seriously curtailed that women were explicitly barred from claiming for themselves a public identity. (Doherty, Keogh 106)

This applied especially to rural areas. When these progressive movements started in the city, life was still under a glass cover in the Western parts of the country. Women and men were involved in completely different areas in their daily life and hardly shared anything in life but keeping up the strict gender and age separation and patriarchy (Beale 29). This shows that in early twentieth-century Ireland, the situation of women was dependent on class, education and on geographical location. Women could act politically in urban areas, but not on the countryside (Fasching 4). O'Brien remembers, "In very isolated country parts, very backward parts, like where I'm from, there is still a very strong sense of guilt, shame, and sin. Between country and cities there is a vast divide" (Moloney, Thompson 204). Women left the farms for better education for England, many girls were sent to secondary school and ended up in civil service or white-collar work (Doherty, Keogh 109-110). This was also

manifested in the Constitution, because the right to educate their children rested primarily with the parents (Scannell 72).

In the 1980s the actions based on the notion that women were properties of their husbands were eventually overcome. Also, discriminations against children of unmarried mothers were removed (Scannell 76).

The 1990s brought some further improvement for the Irish women's situation by the foundation of the Second Commission on the Status of Women. Moreover, women became political leaders, Mary Robinson, and later Mary McAleese, both being feminist and human rights lawyers. The image of the Catholic Church changed: Scandals in Catholic teaching institutions were revealed, which disillusioned Irish people and their attitudes towards it (Fasching 11).

It lasted until 1995, until there was an amendment in the Irish constitution that allowed the possibility of divorce in Ireland. (Dooney, O'Toole 96). However, the number of marital breakdowns started to increase even before, which is due to two aspects,

[...] firstly, men, women and the family are confronted with stresses of an extent unknown before and secondly, women are not longer prepared to accept unhappy conditions, unsatisfactory relationships. They no longer accept the philosophy that for the sake of the family they will put up with anything. They are demanding more. (Redlich 83)

2.2. Literature

Much of the change was mirrored in literature. During the 1970ies, along with the Irish Women's Liberation, a group of female authors focused on the new generation of women. The protagonists in their fiction grew up in the decades (between the 1930ies and 1960ies) and were more independent and sexually free. Edna O'Brien was among these female fiction writers (Saint Peter 7).

In my explorations of contemporary writing by women I find that some of the most radical, both in terms of experimental forms and in political

perspectives, are by women born in the 1920s and 1930s: [...] Edna O'Brien. (Saint Peter 8)

The changes in literature are also due to the changes in politics, not just because of the upcoming of Women's rights movements. Eamon de Valera was replaced by Sean Lemass as Taoiseach. The women's main role as child bearer was challenged, there were more and more women working outside the domestic sphere, although this cannot be generalized for all women, especially, as already mentioned, for those who lived in rural areas. The "new" generation of women who strived for higher education and went to university knew that the image of females being wives and mothers were still more accepted by society (Fasching 9).

Many women writers of O'Brien's generation used to have strong, powerful mothers who stood up against politics during the Easter Rising in 1916, but then became a housewife, denying themselves – hence they failed to provide an empowering role model. This led to a new generation of women who rejected this image of females in their development. In 1960 for example, Ireland had the lowest marriage rate in the world with 5.5 per cent out of 1.000, at the same time the average age was 27.2 years. This shows that the idea of becoming a wife, not to mention mother, became more and more obsolete to young Irish women (Gartner 23). So, women started writing about these changes (Ingman 202).

2.2.1. Women Writing

Due to the patriarchal society, not much attention was paid to women's writing. They were struggling with the authority of the authorship (Saint Peter 3). However, they tried to gain the liberty of speech. Edna O'Brien herself was censored in Ireland in the 1960ies because her literature was regarded as subversive, sexual and heretical. Even though literature written by women was sometimes regarded as a scandal – although this cannot be generally applied –, many regarded their work as a "hobby", a "time-filler during unemployment of before the childbearing (Haberstroh 13)." Censorship was an issue in Ireland up to the 1940s, the 1960s were marked by increasing liberalizations of many

aspects due to Lemass's administrations (1959-66). So, women like O'Brien could write their bold new novels, however as the conservatives still were powerful, she was banned amongst others in the 1960s, which made her go to the British exile (Cahalan 110).

Women used literature as a way to fight against patriarchy and the English rule (Saint Peter 6). They featured a new type of woman as protagonists, a new generation, who put tradition into question. This was a scandal: Women have always been defined – in Catholic patriarchal Ireland – in terms of the roles they played. They were regarded as part of the family, in terms of motherhood, which turned them into “objects” of Irish society. But what if these objects started to speak (Saint Peter 13)?

The speaking “objects” managed to create an alternative image to women being either nuns or mothers, alternatives to stereotypical and idealized images of Irish patriarchal society. They write about female experience, describing how varied and complex life is for Irish women (Haberstroh 16).

Although it is tempting to use fiction by women and feminist fiction synonymously, they describe different kinds of literature. Feminist fiction describes things that are central to women's lives and is socially progressive, treats gender as a social construction that specifically disadvantages women and uses the narrative as a tool to show this. Furthermore, it is embedded in a larger social context (Saint Peter 151). In contrast to that, fiction by women is any book by a woman having mainly a female readership holding up the standard of men's fiction by leaving the female figure in the role of the “other”, or the “object”. However, it focuses on sexual experience of any kind, be it marriage or sexual encounters (Saint Peter 150).

The censorship of women's literature is a strong reaction to that new kind of literature, but also to that new group of female authors. It is very hard to separate the authors from their protagonists, because these developments were initiated both at the same time. There was not only an uproar in Irish society because of the protagonists depicted in works of fiction, but also due to the fact that there actually were female authors who lived according to this new lifestyle.

Many young Irish female writers left Ireland because of its hostile conservative surroundings, unstable politics and an environment in which women had to obey certain rules. (Saint Peter 152). They were women leaving “patria”.

[...W]e move from a description of economically driven emigration to that of expatriation: not exile from a beloved Ireland, but the female experience of being exiled within Ireland by virtue of its patriarchal heritage, a situation with economic consequences. In the last decade particularly, many Irish women writers, northern and southern, have been exploring the meanings of exile. Women, their texts suggest, can never be absolutely at home in a patria – an idea of fatherhood that devalues ‘the mother’ while paradoxically mythologizing the homeland as mother. (Saint Peter 42)

2.2.2. Away from Mother Ireland

There was a large number of female writers who chose to leave the patria Ireland and started writing from a certain distance, physically as well as psychologically, about their home country, “It is less a wonder that women were queuing up to leave the country, that any of them stayed” (Doherty, Keogh 104).

The main reason for emigration was an undeveloped home economy, structural changes in the labour force, but also better access to economies with more favourable conditions and the fact that emigration had tradition in Ireland due to its history. Many of them bore in mind that females of their family have left before, providing a realistic option for them to escape in later life (Gartner 14). This emigrational tradition stems from even pre-famine times, but in contrast to then, in the 1920s and onwards it was single young people who left instead of whole families (Gartner 16). When the economic situation improved in the 1970s, there was only a short standstill of emigration, however, there were always more women than men leaving the country, between 1961 and 1971 61.200 males and 70.600 females left Ireland (Gartner 22). Especially rural areas, just like County Clare, were the ones of large-scale emigration and there was a smaller number of young people remaining than was perhaps usual (Arensberg 70). Hence, also for the people who continued living in these areas, these changes influenced their lifestyles.

Yet, also if they had left Ireland, women writers created heroines leaving that country, but who remain psychologically trapped by myths and stereotypes on Irish women (Ingman 212). They cannot gain experience at home, “After all [...] no one can learn much of anything at home. Going somewhere is the thing” (Howe 1).

Ireland, being a financially weak state, was often referred to as a female that has to be rescued from her own people, also from the strong father Great Britain:

Ireland[‘s ...] salvation lies in her rescue and ‘marriage’ to her English father/husband, whose benevolent and patriarchal governance will allow her to fulfil her essential self and remain feminine and Celtic (Innes 15)

So the British colonial force was regarded as male and strong, whereas Ireland was always referred to as something female, demonstrating the British Empire’s dominance (Greenwood 17). However, also within Ireland itself, a difference between the eastern and western part has to be made:

The west of Ireland was redefined as Gaelic, masculine, wholesome, pragmatic, and Catholic in contrast to the femininity and natural spirituality associated with the Celtic. This denial of the female was also linked to the control of sexuality by Catholicism (Nash 236).

The landscape is described in literature by using metaphors from the field of the female body, ending up in Ireland being a devouring mother who demands the endless sacrifice of her sons and lovers (Greenwood 55). “Feminine Celts”, Celtic stereotypes were established by Matthew Arnold and others, social spaces should be re-engendered, culminating the 1937 Constitution with its division of masculine and feminine spaces (Lloyd 87). Edna O’Brien herself described Ireland as mother in *Mother Ireland* (1976).

Countries are either mothers or fathers, and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire. Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course, a gaunt Hag of Beare (O’Brien, *Mother Ireland* 11).

With the founding of the Irish Free State, the urge to be powerful and strong has led to building up a strong patriarchal society to demonstrate strength, which was an uncomfortable situation for women enforcing many of

them to leave, especially women who stood up against it, like writers who then wrote from exile. Ironically, many of the women were sent to Great Britain, which they were taught to hate. However, they could distance themselves there from control by family and patriarchal society, but many also had to leave because they meant a financial burden to their relatives in a sense of prolonged childhood; they had to ask for money if they needed something (Lambert 182).

According to oral evidence from the life histories of forty Irish women living in Lancashire between 1922 and 1960, only two women wanted to escape parental control. As this is a theme in some of Edna O'Brien's short stories and also occurs in *A Rose in the Heart of New York*, this should be put under consideration:

I wanted to come to England, I didn't want to try for a job in Ireland. Well frankly I wanted to get away from home because my mother was one of those, you never had very much freedom. I never had very much freedom growing up, being the only girl she was strict with me. (Lambert 182)

Obviously, also parents were a reason to leave Ireland, because they were still endorsing the patriarchal ideals. Women who did not want to live up to these conservative expectations had to leave, or rebel against their parents. So, intergenerational relationships did play an important role in an Irish woman's development, preparing the path for their own future. Another aspect of generational duties help to women's exile, as living abroad improved the family's financial situation and made it possible for siblings to receive secondary education (Lambert 182).

This exile literature can be categorized into several types: Firstly in novels of the genre "Bildungsroman", describing young girls growing up and striving for maturity. In the female Bildungsroman the relationships between men and women are often damaged, but even more often the mother-daughter bond is broken. They cannot come up to their daughters' expectations because of their isolation and for emotional, economic and social reasons. (Saint Peter 157). Secondly, adults living in another country pick voluntary exile out as central theme, which always has some kind of autobiographical undertone; thirdly, narratives about women leaving and returning to Ireland. Next to those three

main types, metafictional and political narratives or the struggles with culture, past and inheritance can be found within Irish feminist exile literature. (Saint Peter 45).

Focusing on feminist literature, we have women leaving patria and talking about their “Mother Ireland”, as Edna O’Brien did. But like her, also “third” spaces were created, feminist organizations, feminist spaces, practices and sisterhoods were formed as a new, natural way of living. Their description showed a craving for light and space (Doherty, Keogh 105). This is, for instance, revealed in *Sister Imelda*, where the convent offers a place for development for the young narrator, although it is a prison for others.

2.2.3. Women and Short Fiction

When Séan Lemass was elected new Taoiseach in 1959, he improved the economic development of the country, gave it an air of renewal and self-confidence and turned the tide of emigration. With this new atmosphere in Ireland, new social tendencies were picked up by a new generation of writers focussing on short fiction. They were published not only in the *New Yorker*, but also in the *Irish Press*, which dedicated a weekly page to new Irish writing from 1968 onwards. Soon, a tendency could be detected; themes of time, memory and imagination were prominent in the Irish short stories of these years. Those memories often were the reasons for emigration, rather than economic reasons (Ingman 190-1).

Even in spite of Lemass’s office, the trend among the younger short story writers was to produce backward-looking and critical literature. The stories reflected the changes, especially those concerning the Catholic Church. McGahern, a contemporary fiction writer explained:

I don’t think it’s possible for a writer of my generation born in Ireland to avoid religion, even if it has to be by the path of opposition. It was the dominant force in that society, and, in any sense of the spirit, it was mostly all that was there, even if some of it was unattractive. (Maher 155)

Sexuality and internationalism were the main topics of the upcoming short story in Ireland by the end of the 20th century published by both male and female writers. Especially the female writers appeared on the publishing scene with themes like sexuality, mother-daughter relationships and the quest for women's liberation. The short story writing of this time was concerned with emphasizing the Irish women's predicament, written in a manner of realism through the eyes of daughters keeping the focus on the past, the previous generation of women, rather than the future (Ingman 200-1). Women's concerns in short stories were the mother-daughter relationships drawing them back into the past, whereas male writers talked about memories and time (Ingman 205-6). Even women who could look towards a new bright future stuck to the past in their stories because of their mother-daughter focus (Ingman 217).

Within the short story tradition of women, it is not only Edna O'Brien, but also Claire Boylan, Val Mulkern, Julia O'Faolain, Claire Keegan, Éilís Ní Dhuibne and Maeve Brennan who are popular writers of this kind of narration in the late 20th century. Brennan herself can be defined as the "founding mother" of the Irish female short story (Fasching 44).

In short stories, the source of the narration is usually not found in books or any other documents in contrast to other fiction, but is often based on life experience, so it often contains elements of reality (Lubbers 45).

3. Edna O'Brien – a Feminist Writer?

O' Brien's fiction has been associated with "sin" from the beginning of her career. In Ireland, her books were banned in 1969, because she portrayed female sexuality in her works, which were considered as pornographic and obscene, so were censored. She depicted women's concerns like sex, romance, marriage and childbirth as unsatisfying, claustrophobic "female" preoccupations (Colletta, O'Connor 4).

[..]n 1969 Benedict Kiely twitted the hidebound Irish censors, characterizing their violent disapproval as being activated by 'the feeling that while it's bad and very bad for a man to speak out and tell the truth, it

is utterly unthinkable that a woman [...] should claim any such liberty.’
(Kiely 158)

However, not only conservatives spoke out against her literature; Julia O’Faolain, a fellow novelist, stated in 1974 that “Miss O’Brien’s range is narrow and obsessional [...] What she does not seem to be able to do is to get experience into perspective. She cannot judge or structure it and so she seems forced [...] The story is forever the same” (Colletta, O’Connor 5²).

She has seldom been regarded as a feminist writer at first, although her literature has encouraged her generation of Irish women novelists to write about their experiences and sell books (Cahalan 4). Edna O’Brien did not necessarily want to have a feminist voice in her fiction, she wanted to “[...] write and hope to write with vigor, with muscle. I don’t care whether I ‘m a man or a woman, I want to write as an androgynous person for whom language is sacred” (O’Connor 39³). However, she does notice the importance of gender. She even took a detached view of feminism to a certain degree:

A lot of things have been said by feminists about equality, about liberation, but not all of these things are gospel truth [...] I am not the darling of the feminists. They think I am too preoccupied with old-fashioned themes like love and longing (O’Brien 1984 33).

Edna O’Brien has constructed gender roles criticizing the capitalist patriarchy that is particularly Irish and Catholic. The differences pointed out in the gender question are not necessarily simple or natural, it is a category constructed through social and cultural systems. It is not biologically determined, but sociology has discussed sex roles for a long time, calling attention rather to the assigned than determined nature of gender (Cahalan 8).

Furthermore, she does not only focus on the status of the woman in society, but also on the status of the woman in literature: ‘..[Her] texts offer a commentary on the prescribed roles for women in literature, challenging the adequacy of the female romance plot for representing women’s experience in fiction.’ (Byron 15). O’Brien’s fiction works against male literary culture, as it

² Julia O’Faolain, “A Scandalous Woman,” review of *A Fanatic Heart: Selected Stories by Edna O’Brien*, New York Times, 22 September 1974.

³ O’Brien, Edna. Speaking on The Book Show, New York State Writers Institute – Writers Online, vol.2, no.3; (1998). <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/olv2n3.html>

depicts female life. It is not necessarily about life and solutions offered for women living in a patriarchal society. If you are born in Ireland, it is conveyed as if it was the “worst of luck” (Haule 223) Women are objects of literature, neither subjects nor producers of it (Thompson 32). Mary Salmon praises O’Brien as she does exactly this in her fiction, “the impossibility of a woman living as her authentic self in worlds ruled by men is the theme of O’Brien’s fiction” (Mooney 202).

This is why her fiction came into the critics’ focus because of the themes as contraception, lesbianism, illegitimate pregnancies and illicit love affairs, which made her work “obscene” (Pelan, *Connemara Dietrich* 34). It was criticized by both men and women, “Women do not always show the same consideration or admiration for the women artist. Women writers have a harder time with critics both male and female, unfortunately” (Moloney, Thompson 199).

In Edna O’Brien’s fiction, irony and fantasy are often mixed with cultural discourse. She challenges powerful cultural mythologies, especially those that women construct about their own lives. This leads to her heroines clinging to illusions, these cultural mythologies, in order to create a fiction to live by. As a consequence, questions of cause and effect arise, but there are no real answers to them, at least not in O’Brien’s fiction (Colletta, O’Connor 6)

Lynette Carpenter has noted that Edna O’Brien “has been criticized for writing the same story over and over, and for not writing the story she writes best...In short, O’Brien’s literary reputation is anything but settled” (Carpenter 263).

Edna O’Brien was and still is regarded by some critics as a writer of mainly romantic fiction, although she made ongoing experiments with form, genre and content. When she wrote a biography of James Joyce in 1999, someone remarked that she should stick to the lightweight novels she used to write (Greenwood 1). Also scholars had problems with categorizing her fiction, especially in relation to other women writers or contemporaries (Laing, Monney, O’Connor 5). This was also due to the fact that her fiction was marketed as

chick lit, which did not go along with O'Brien's opinion (Laing, Monney, O'Connor 4).

Although her fiction was criticised heavily at the beginning, it became part of the Irish canon of contemporary Irish fiction, and the number of critical voices remaining is remarkably small (Laing, Monney, O'Connor 2). The root of the problem that she was not taken seriously by all was the fact that she took care of her appearance and appreciated good looks. Hence, it has to be noted that it is not necessarily the literature that is being criticised, but her persona. As Pelan (2006) pointed out in her essay, the emerging iconography of Edna O'Brien overshadowed her work as a writer, questions of authenticity and literariness were asked (Laing, Mooney, O'Connor 4).

She also advertised shampoo and appeared on television chat shows (Greenwood 2). Even her agent, David Godwin, once pinned her public reception down to that "[...] Edna is a more glamorous woman sometimes people don't take her so seriously" (Greenwood 3⁴). This came to an end when *The Love Object* was published, "there is no need any longer to have reservations about Edna O'Brien: this book reveals her unmistakably as a mature craftsman, an unblinking observer, and an unflinching moralist" (Ingman 201⁵).

Edna O'Brien inverts the myth of the West and woman as Other and

[...] a number of O'Brien's stories [...] deal with the almost inevitable oppression of women within a society whose moral and political values demand the denial of certain individual and social liberties, a society which O'Brien portrays as less a return to a proud and glorious past, than a retreat into medieval repression. (Pelan, *Connemara Dietrich* 31)

Bearing this in mind, it is obvious that O'Brien can be found at least within the range of feminist authors and not "just" female writing, or "chick lit".

⁴ Nicolas Wroe, 'Country Matters', *Guardian*, 2 October 1999, 6-7.

⁵ *The Irish Times*, 29 June 1968, 10.

3.1. Her Relationship Towards Men

Ernest Gébler was Edna O'Brien's husband, who can be found as a figure in her fiction several times, but not in a positive way. The male figures that are leaned on his person are often becoming the female protagonist's husband, but only because as the only option in a patriarchal society.

O'Brien and Ernest Gébler first met in the early 1950s. He was an internationally acknowledged author, successful also in financial terms, and much older than her. When she met him she was just 19. Later, he claimed that it was him who has written her first novels. In the 1960s, when O'Brien became successful herself with *The Country Girls* and they got a son, Ernest became more and more bitter as his work was largely out of print and forgotten. Yet, they had several things in common, as Ernest was also banned from Ireland because of the sexual content of his fiction (Woods 55).

Edna O'Brien was respected for her writing, critics point out that her literature was partly disapproved because she left Ireland at the age of 19 with a much older man and was described as "runaway". This came up with every new publication (Woods 56). Her success, however, was "[...] often linked to her personal charm and the sexual content of the novels rather than to genuine talent [...]" (Woods 56), although it has to be pointed out that feminist writing was observed critically. Even her husband could not bear the fact that his wife was more successful in the literary scene than he was (Woods 57).

Carlo Gébler, their son, wrote in his memoirs *Father and I* (2000) that his father had problems facing his wife's success and that he had difficulties in writing. He is described as a misogynistic person, trying to forward his own career and controlling Edna O'Brien's success. This, as well as the age difference and him being brought up in a different social situation paints a picture of an ill-fated marriage very similar to the ones described in her fiction, which represents the smallest unit of a patriarchal society (Woods 60). There were voices that her independence grew proportionally to her success and that she betrayed him during that time (Woods 63).

He himself never really supported any women's rights movements, but supported the equality of classes (Woods 64), which probably has its background in Gebler's own vita, as he grew up in rather poor circumstances.

Summarizing, the relationship between G bler and O'Brien was based on him serving as a role model for a very young female writer. Furthermore, he was successful, much older and embodying patriarchy which she thought she had to follow because of her upbringing and the rules of society. It was her own success that put this decision into question:

O'Brien's location of her novelistic voice may have something to do with G bler, if only in terms of inspiring certain aspects of her patriarchal characters. G bler's voice, it seems, loses its mooring through gnawing envy of O'Brien, and her growing fame that was predicated on a re-imagining of their life together (Woods 66).

The image of marriage and relationships between males and females that she depicted in her fiction is based on her own reception of it. It is based on dissatisfaction and inequity, and although there were social and political changes for women, she claimed that the sexual relations did not improve. In 1984, she told in an interview:

In the mating area things have not changed. Attraction and sexual love are spurred not by consciousness but by instinct and passion, and in this men and women are radically different. The man still has the greater authority and the greater autonomy. It's biological. The woman's fate is to receive the sperm and to retain it, but the man's is to give it and in the giving he spends himself more and then subsequently withdraws. Closeness is therefore always only relative. A man may help with the dishes and so forth but his commitment is more ambiguous and he has a roving eye. (Meyers 41)

Furthermore, it is not only a matter of dominance, but also a matter of violence that makes the male part of a relationship stronger. Edna O'Brien has claimed that she would have never have an affair, because she was afraid that her husband might kill her. This fear of violence is also mirrored by some female protagonists in her stories (Meyers 42). That might also be a reason why some mother figures in her fiction did not, or could not, end marriage, besides the legal problem that divorce was not possible before 1996, then. Consequently, men are in control of heterosexual relationships.

3.2. Writing from the Exile

Although Edna O'Brien moved to London in 1959, she still is closely connected to the land of her birth. In her fiction she combines her own memories with matters of politics and history and plays with Ireland's institutions of church, family and state. Coming from the western part of the country herself, she sets her stories mostly in that part, especially in her earliest and her latest works, where conservative gender roles were held up as long as possible and patriarchy was existent until the end of the 20th century and possibly still is (Colletta, O'Connor 7).

The liberation of the state implies male role-shift from that of Slave to Master, Margin to Centre, Other to Self. Women, powerless under patriarchy, are maintained as Other of the ex-Other, colonized of the post-colonized" (Smyth 11-12).

Nevertheless, featuring politics in her fiction was never her main goal, she said that one's upbringing, the culture in which one grows up and even the religion is political. Especially religion has become a matter of politics, even though it is supposed to be something spiritual (Moloney, Thompson 200).

O'Brien published most of her books from exile, which makes her view on Ireland somehow diasporic (Greenwood 11). Although this was a reason why her literature was not taken too seriously by some critics, she also used her exile status as an advantage in this matter. She has always been described as a "wild, Celtic" type, which was useful tactics to sell her fiction as Irish, even though not written there (Greenwood 16).

The urge to leave, even the necessity to leave becomes obvious in *Mother Ireland*, she claims, "To be on an island makes you realize that it is going to be harder to escape and that it will involve another birth, a further breach of waters. Nevertheless an agitation to go" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 32). She left the country because she claimed that she can only be truly Irish when living elsewhere.

But I had got away. That was my victory. The real quarrel with Ireland began to burgeon in me then; I had thought of how it had warped me, and those around me, and their parents before them, all stooped by a variety of fears – fear of church, fear of gombeenism, fear of phantoms,

fear of ridicule, fear of hunger [...] That is why we leave. Because we beg to differ. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 87)

Even though Ireland did undergo some changes, she still leaves for writing her fiction. However, every time she is writing about her country, she feels closer to it. Returning to Ireland for good is definitely not an option for her.

It is not a question of ever returning to Ireland, since I go there all the time. I could not have written my last trilogy without endless journeying, researching, and talking with people there. County Clare inhabits my thoughts and my writing wherever I happen to be. Ireland is always speaking a story and I have to search for it. [...] With every book I hope to dig deeper. That is all I ask. (Moloney, Thompson 205)

3.3. Edna O'Brien's Intergenerational Relationships

Edna O'Brien's fiction is said to be too heavily autobiographical, especially concerning national and sexual identities (O'Connor 44), but there is hardly enough evidence for that in her fiction. "The reductive tendency to identify the author with her female protagonists has been largely instrumental in her relegation to 'popular fiction' (Greenwood 4). In 1974, Grace Eckley sums up that

Miss O'Briens's novels – written for the most part in the first person – give the impression that they are a personal odyssey beginning with the background in County Clare, the convent school education, removal to London, birth of children, and dissolution of marriage (Eckley 14).

Edna O'Brien's fiction is known for the construction of female sexuality, especially in her short fiction (Laing, Monney, O'Connor 1). Her mother has left for the United States, which became a theme for her own writing, " 'the primal relationship twixt mother and daughter, their shared and their separate existences' " (Laing, Monney, O'Connor 2). Peggy O'Brien, another critic, states that she has a special skill to portray adolescence, but the authorial identity is still in a developmental stage and has difficulty to imagine life as a grown up (Greenwood 6).

If one reads O'Brien for the extreme effect those first intimates, mother and father, have on her authorial psyche, then various aspects of her fictional practice become comprehensible [...] The collusion between author and character is essentially a blurring of the boundaries between

individual and parental identities; and the unresolved nature of these primary relationships accounts for O'Brien's overall obsessiveness. (O'Brien, Peggy 483)

This "obsessiveness" refers to her focus on 'primary relationships', which Peggy O'Brien suggests to be an attempt to finish development, to end the quest for an identity of her own. Concerning the intergenerational relationships the quest for a purely positive role model remains unsuccessful, although they are very important in her fiction, just as in *A Rose in the Heart of New York*, and many critics have failed to recognize their importance (Pelan, *Connemara Dietrich* 31). There are many parallels between her fiction and her own childhood, the heroines always have a special relationship to their procreators. O'Brien herself commented on this observation by denying that her literature is based on truth, but not necessarily on autobiographical facts. However, by choosing this perspective she introduced a new aspect in Irish literature, which has not been there before, namely writing from a country girl's perspective (Greenwood 7).

This also includes autobiographical references to her parents. She commented that her father "was what you might call the 'archetypal' Irishman – a gambler, drinker, a man totally unequipped to be a husband or a father" (O'Brien 1984). Concerning the difficulties with her mother, James Haule speaks of her desire that she wants to be her own mother (Haule 217). This is connected to i.e. an Electra-complex, where – like in the Oedipus-complex – it is not the son who desires his mother, but the infant daughter who has those feelings, even though they are unthinkable, in myth, fantasy or in fact (Cahalan 118). Mothers, in general, played an important role in Irish society. This thought was shared by her,

Mothers were best. Mothers worked and worried and sacrificed and had the smallest amount on their plates when the family sat down to eat, mothers wore aprons and slaved and mothers went to the confraternity on a Sunday evening and whispered things to each other in the chapel grounds about their wombs and their woes. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 50).

She chose images of women as role models in County Clare, where she grew up: The Blessed Virgin and Caithleen Ní Houlihan, so one being religious, the other one being pagan, poetic and romantic (Moloney, Thompson 201). For

her, there were not any other women or men she felt close to, or ever could feel related to,

I am wary of women, especially calculating and controlling women. Probably I want women and I want men to be artists. I value the friendship of a few women that I trust. But, I don't have that many friends, either men or women (Moloney, Thompson 203).

As the reference to the Virgin Mary indicates, O'Brien grew up in a conservative, religiously devoted Catholic Ireland. She describes life there as "fervid, enclosed and catastrophic" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 28). This part of Ireland was rural, poor, uneducated. It was difficult to journey, transport was a great obstacle. The main means of transport were two bicycles, from which one of them was always broke (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 32). Technical developments came much later to the Western part of Ireland than to the urban areas; she describes a scene with a young girl making a phone call for the very first time (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 37).

Later, she went to a convent school. Religion paid an important role to people's lives and also was important in education.

At ten or eleven years, when on a visit, you sat in a chapel with your legs crossed and were asked by an incensed lady to please uncross them at once. 'Did you not know,' she said, 'that Our Lady blushes whenever a woman does such an indecent thing.' (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 38).

Her first sexual experience was not thoroughly positive, as it happened with a married man. She was interested in him, but did not want to sleep with him, so he almost raped her, "I could go through you like butter" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 81). Luckily enough, someone interrupted the scene. Even though she would not have slept with him she noticed a change in her character, in her development. In a newspaper she read a description of a woman and felt that she was becoming like her, someone disrespected by society:

'the hot number with hair elaborately coiled and snowily peroxided, a slut with eyebrows gone and pencil lines replaced, a brazen strap with a mouth like the squeezed cross section of a bloody sausage' (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 82).

Bearing in mind that this was what a young woman thought of herself just because she was *interested* in sex, in looks, it shows how deeply rooted patriarchy was in individuals. Nevertheless, she also notices that she had to go through these thoughts and that they were part of her natural development, so she could “[...] [undergo the] metamorphosis from child to bride” (O’Brien, *Mother Ireland* 86).

Her female subjectivity is most elaborated in the short story collection *The Love Object* (1968), not matter if class, culture or geographical boundaries are shifted. This focus makes it obvious that the theme of her stories is not the longing for sexuality and sexual freedom but the quest for an identity, as they lack of it or have lost it (Greenwood 22).

3.4. Narrative Voices in O’Brien’s Fiction

Exile literature as well as parts of feminist literature often use a first person narrator in order to create a female speaker. It cannot be denied that this “I” is not only used as a poetic tool, but it also often includes autobiographical elements (Haberstroh 16). This is due to the fact that when it comes to Irish women and life, there is nothing else they can talk about than their lives and their friends, because they all somehow grew up under a glass cover of patriarchy (Reynolds, 24). In Edna O’Brien’s short fiction, this “I” often narrates the story, and in the background, on a post level, serving as flashback level, there is an older “I”, putting the naïve worldview of its narrator, the patriarchal and societal brainwash into perspective. The narrator, now much older, is looking back on her youth.

This narrating “I” does not really understand the machinery of society yet and simply goes along with it and does not question or analyze it; the figures do not criticize the world they are living in. The same can be said for women, because “they are constructed by the construct and, therefore, live and write within its parameters (Haberstroh 19).” Women had to create an identity for themselves, then; they had to find out who their “I” is. As Lorna Reynolds, professor of English at the University in Galway, explains in her essay *Irish*

Women in Legend, Literature and Life, she has spent most of her childhood at her grandmother's place and inherited the morality of her society before even knowing what it was about (Reynolds 23).

This means that they imitate the male voices of the society they grew up in, which bears difficulties in attempting to find a voice of their own. Women writers mirror their development through their stories. Writing through the eyes of a child meant reflecting on the author's own childhood and on things that were regarded as the only truth in a milieu governed by patriarchy.

However, choosing a first person narrator is not the same as an autobiographical approach. It

ignores the multiple ambiguities, ironies, contradictions, and diverse meanings of the nonsubjective language systems [...]. The critical theory that maintains that the reader creates the text warns us to ignore anything so absolute as the intention of the author or the subjective meaning [...] (Haberstroh 17)

A feminist voice can have numerous identities, as woman and gender inevitably have. There is not one true or real reflection on their lives, but the question on the relationship between art and autobiography has to be addressed. It empowers the female author:

We can argue that voice, subjectivity, and a female persona may be very important as women move out of silence and that gendering the lyric "I" validates the importance of a woman's voice and experience and empowers the female speaker [...] (Haberstroh 19).

The "I" in the fictional text turns the object into a speaking subject, which takes a new position in society. The first person narrator is both "subject" and "object", "hero" and "historian" (Neuhaus 124). The first person narrator manages to subvert gender roles by turning the male part into an object described, which turns the female into the subject (Greenwood 24).

In Edna O'Brien's fiction, this "I" is double-layered. The voice of the younger "I", the naïve girl, telling her story, an object of society, an object in an intergenerational relationship versus the voice of the adult woman as narrator older "I", an established woman, a subject. Through the narrator a childhood gestalt is addressed, which "grants the "I" its identity", providing "an image of

coherence” and “permit[ting] the “I” to come together from fragmentary points, to gain some stability” (Bristow 85-6). Furthermore, if the narrator tells from memories and thinks back to for example her childhood, the distance from the childhood-“I” and the adolescence-“I” can be used to observe the former existent societal circumstances critically (Lubbers 84).

This stability, however, substitutes a motherly voice, someone who supports the younger, naïve narrator, judging on the decisions made or explaining them. This second narrating voice gives security and explains decisions, but also demonstrates the immaturity of the narrator. In the Irish women’s “bildungsroman” a “double-voiced” narrative can be detected, meaning that there are two protagonists depending on each other in their development (Cahalan 107). This “bildungsroman” that was devoted to the protagonist’s development and coming of age has traditionally been a subgenre dependent on the realistic mode (Cahalan 111).

Not all short stories selected are written in the mode of a first person narrator. The first person narrator/protagonist is even regarded as a disadvantage in fiction, because in most cases, the narrator turns into an observer, the only advantage seems to be that the reader can directly be addressed (Lubbers 83). So, most authors choose the third person narration, because when employing it, the writer has more freedom of action, because the point of view can change between what is observed and what is felt and can comment on the action (Lubbers 91).

4. Discussion of Selected Short Stories

The intergenerational relationships in Edna O’Brien’s short fiction can be approached in various ways. In the following chapter the different types are further explored on the basis of eight selected short stories, each dealing with a special topic.

4.1. Plot Summaries

4.1.1. “Christmas Roses”

Miss Hawkins, a 55 year old former dancer, who is now a gardener and describes herself as a globetrotter, finds a young man, a theatre student, in his 20ies camping in her garden. First, she is shocked and sends him away, but then she realises how lonely she actually is. When he returns she is very glad, so they spend some time together. One night she prepares dinner for him, but he does not show up. This makes her think about relationships and her own life and decides that she is better off without him. Nevertheless, these considerations make her give up her solitude and she starts visiting friends.

4.1.2. “Love-Child”

Hickey is a farm worker living with a family he is friends with in rural Ireland. He is widely known within the town, also because he steals from all people, but mostly because he gives it to the local families. He also always likes a good drink. When there is an opportunity for him to have fun, he takes it. One day, he leaves the family, because the family could never pay him properly. He moves to England to work in a car factory. The narrator is very sad because she appreciated, not to say loved him very much. She will never see him again, although he visits in the town one day. Unfortunately, he does not come to the family's house because he is too drunk. So he departs without meeting them. Years later, they receive the message that he had died at the age of only 57.

One daughter visits his sister after his death and is feeling guilty because she had never visited Hickey in England. There she talks to his sister, with whom he had lived together. She tells her about his last weeks and that he always raved about the people in town, but never mentioned her. When the narrator cannot believe this, she gets very angry with the now young woman because it was her who was his love-child. He loved her like his own child, which was the reason why he did not leave any sooner, despite his poor work-conditions. Instead, he went to England and took a child from the London

orphanage to whom he could give his fatherly love. Still, the loss of her broke his heart.

4.1.3. “Clara”

Mister Herema, living with Mrs. Roger’s family, visits the local lunatic asylum one day, where he meets Clara. Clara is a beautiful underage lunatic with whom he becomes friends. He visits her regularly and is fascinated by her, although she usually does not speak, but she reads out poems. One day, he goes for a walk with her to the woods, when Clara disappears, which means great danger because she has tried to commit suicide twice before. Luckily, he finds her in the woods unharmed. They kiss and both seem to enjoy it. Then he learns that Clara is not really mad and that it was her brother who put her into the asylum because he killed his wife and blamed Clara for having committed the murder.

People know about Mister Herema and Clara by now and react in a weird way and there are lots of rumours. Mister Herema meets Clara’s brother who is a doctor and who calls him a swine and accuses him of being a pervert, reminding him that Clara is insane. Mister Herema is not impressed by his speech and tells him that he wants to educate her and treat her well. The doctor softens, when, suddenly his wife, who has been supposed to be dead, turns up. It turns out that it is the doctor’s wife who is the madwoman, not Clara.

4.1.4. “The Bachelor”

Jack Holland, the Bachelor, is a shopkeeper and a friend of the narrator’s family. The family’s father has a gambling and a drinking problem, this is why the family lives in poverty. Jack is very fond of the mother, she also likes him but does not admit that. She visits him regularly, which leads to the assumption that they have an affair.

One day the mother sends a letter to Jack, after which he does not come for visits that often any more. The parents often talk about the daughter

marrying Jack in the future. He sends her letters to her boarding school as well as money.

Jack, who is about 60 by now, builds a house and is supposed to get married to a girl named Cissy. After finishing school, Jack wants to see the protagonist and show her his house. It is dirty, shabby, he is not engaged, but admits that he has feelings for the protagonist and tries to kiss her. She runs away, after which Jack avoids the family and does not want to marry anyone any more and publicly talks about the rejection. He becomes a loner, the house is falling apart and tinkers move in. Years later, the narrator feels sorry for him and tries to talk to him, without success.

When Jack dies, he leaves nothing to the family. However, it becomes obvious that the narrator's mother has loved him and wanted her child to get married to him so she can be close to Jack.

4.1.5. "Courtship"

A young girl, the protagonist, works at Mrs. Flynn's family place as a maid. Mrs. Flynn's husband has already died, one of her sons has died, the other sons are very handsome. The narrator fancies Michael, who goes out with a girl called Moira. She never confesses her feelings for him, but observes him. One day he meets a beautiful girl from the city, Eileen. The narrator is very jealous.

The next day is her last working day at Mrs. Flynn's and they arrange a date for her with Tom, who invites her to the movies. However, she does not like Tom and rejects him when he tries to seduce her, which makes him mad. She tells him that she loves Michael. Tom tells her that Michael is just interested in sex, which she does not believe. At home, she runs into Michael who has been waiting for her and he confesses his love to her. She knows that his feelings are not real, but she enjoys living that dream for the night and leaves the next day.

4.1.6. “A Rose in the Heart of New York”

Delia gives birth to her fourth child, two of her other kids are already dead and it has not been her choice to have another child. Her husband is a drunkard and not interested in her, even when she is in labour. Delia loves her fourth child very much, although it is ugly and a little bit retarded at first. One day, Delia leaves the family because of her cruel husband, but returns some time later. Her youngest child is happy to have her mother back and her whole life evolves around her returned mother. Nevertheless, she is also jealous because she pays most of her attention to her older sister who visits from school.

When the girl is sent to school herself she is seeking for comfort and motherly love and projects her filial feelings on a nun. Having found a loving motherly person, she ignores and hurts her mother emotionally when being home.

Later, she marries a man with whom she is rather unhappy, and that marriage results in a divorce. Her mother did not like her husband from the beginning, but she tries to spend time with her daughter, so they go on a holiday. There they get to know each other better, but the young woman hurts her mother by criticizing her mother's lack of education. She is much disappointed by her that she even has thoughts about what it would be like if the mother was dead or if she embarrassed her mother in public. Delia, however, loves her child very much, and is therefore deeply hurt by the daughter's criticism.

When the mother dies, the daughter feels guilty and deprived, it is as if a part of her heart has been torn away. When she tidies up her mother's clothes she finds an envelope with money for her. She also remembers her mother telling her about a man called Vincent, who lives in New York, for whom she had deep feelings. She realises that her mother was indeed in love with another man, whom she could never forget.

4.1.7. “The Connor Girls”

The Connor family is very rich, but nobody in town really knows them, yet they are fascinating. The daughters of the family, the Connor girls are not very pretty but quite conceited. The narrator’s mother wants to invite them, but they refuse, which disappoints the mother. Mr. Connor, Lucy and Amy’s father, is in a wheelchair, their mother died some years ago. The family keeps very much to itself.

There are rumours in town about them having affairs. Amy is in love with the bank clerk, which leads to a scandal in town because he is not a Catholic. When they get engaged, they even get death threats. For the wedding nobody in town is invited; the bank clerk leaves, Amy is leaving as well. In winter, their father dies and Amy returns, in the meantime she has gained weight and has become an alcoholic.

Years later, the protagonist has become a young woman meanwhile, the fascination for the Connor girls is gone. However, she marries a man with a different religion, and is attacked by her family and receives terrifying letters. After years, she is invited by her family again. She meets the Connor girls, who are not arrogant any more; and she realises that she has married the wrong man, her marriage is like exile to her.

4.1.8. “Savages”

Mable McCann has been to Australia, she was sent there by her mother when she was still a child. The whole town is excited when Mable is supposed to come back after ten years. Her mother prepares special food for the day of her return, although they live in poverty and the father is a drunkard.

When Mable arrives, the town is disappointed because she is very different from what they expected. The narrator, a younger girl, is fascinated by Mable and is very happy when she spends time with her. Mable misses Australia and regrets to have come back to Ireland. They go to dances together

and make visits; one day, Mable gets to know Matt, with whom she falls in love. They secretly meet in and send love letters to one another. The narrator functions as a herald until one day, one of their love letters get into wrong hands. Mable and the narrator have a fight; then rumours turn up that Mable is pregnant.

At first, this is regarded as a scandal in town, however, with months passing by, they accept her single motherhood and are less vicious. In the summer, the baby is supposed to be born, but then it turns out that Mable was not really pregnant. Not being able to bear the shame, Mable does not want to see anyone and leaves town and is never seen again.

4.1.9. “Sister Imelda”

Sister Imelda, a young nun in a school, is a fascinating personality – especially to the narrator, a young girl. She will play an important role in her life. The narrator is not a very good student, but nevertheless, Sister Imelda is very fond of her; they become friends. When she punishes her for her bad results in class, she feels sorry afterwards and makes her little presents. The narrator becomes her pet and works hard to become better in class. Sister Imelda turns into a mother figure, a role model for her and the other students are jealous because of their good relationship.

She prefers her to other students and they meet each other in private. Even the Mother Superior gets to know about their friendship and the narrator is afraid that she might be sent away from the convent. They are kept away from each other and they both suffer. They talk about the future and Sister Imelda suggests the narrator to become a nun after school. She admits that it is hard at first, however, the young girl agrees.

After school, however, the narrator decides that she does not want to become a nun. She is still in touch with Sister Imelda, they write letters to each other, but they contact each other less and less, especially when she starts attending university. Years later, she sees Sister Imelda in a bus by

coincidence. The narrator hides from her and feels bad because she has broken her promise, but she realises how much she has loved the nun.

5. Intergenerational Relationships

In the selected short stories the main theme is intergenerational relationships. There are some in which the protagonist is still young, sometimes even a child and seeks for a person to relate to. There are psychological reasons for this, which shall be discussed in the first section, which are due to the normal development of a child, because it seeks and needs them naturally. In the second section, one specific aspect of this development is looked at, namely the quest for identity, which also occurs in the narrations. Thirdly, when the child already is in the developmental stage of puberty, it starts feeling sexually attracted to people they feel related to. Although sexuality is still a taboo in Ireland of the 1960s and 70s in which most stories are set, it should not be neglected as the protagonists often do feel sexually attracted to someone. Last, but not least, there are two short stories, *Christmas Roses* and *Clara* that are written out of an adult's point of view. Here, the reasons for adults to interact in an intergenerational relationship shall be worked out.

5.1. Psychological Reasons for Intergenerational Relationships

In Ireland, family and kinship is of highest importance, deriving especially from the times of the 1937 Constitution. It is reflected in a vibrant interest in local and family history, and further, in literature (Whelan 73).

The most natural kind of intergenerational relationship is the one within a family. The nuclear family that was held up in Ireland as an ideal was and still is a small, highly institutionalized group. It is based on a stable, legalized partnership with their offspring, sharing a common residence (Widmer, Jallinoja 1). Its emerging was not an accident but stemmed from the change from a largely industrialised society into a predominantly industrial one (Redlich 85).

The nuclear family was regarded as a strong unit, stronger than the individuals in it. Patriarchal structure reinforced the gender divisions within the family, explaining role expectations and traditional attitudes that should especially taken over by the girls to become mothers and housewives themselves:

[...] as young children's contact was primarily with the mother. Upon reaching work age, the boys worked with the father while the girls remained with the mother learning the techniques of home management. The woman ate alone or in the scullery with the young girls; guests were seated with the father. (Redlich 85)

Thus, girls experienced a completely different childhood to boys, they are associated with work in the household, whereas young boys in rural Ireland worked together with their father. Therefore, the role model is already defined by tradition (Arensberg, 64).

There are two kinds of family, namely the nuclear family, as already mentioned, which consists of parents with minor children at home. The second type besides this exclusively family-centred pattern are kinships with relatives and friends. Because of this, the family gets community-like ensembles (Jallinoja, 115). As time passed by, the nuclear family merged into a cluster of family and friendship relationship (Wall, Aboim, Marinho 215). This extended family-unit could most easily be observed in urban areas with young married couples (Redlich 86). Furthermore, in Ireland "friends" also meant people whom you were obligated to; hence the connection was even stronger (Arensberg, 76).

If it is not the parents taking care of the child, it often is a member of a family who takes over this task, be it grandparents, siblings, uncles or aunts. This is because of a social obligation they are involved in. It can be due to several reasons, in last decades mostly because the mother cannot take care of the child because of work (Kempeneers, Thibault 38). The offspring then builds up a relationship to these relatives. They form permanent relationships that go along with commitment; it is a moral tie of the self to the Other. However, the most important factor is that this strong commitment has to be borne in mind

and it is obvious that not every relationship will and can last forever (Jallinoja 98):

Relationships need not necessarily be in practice as permanent and as all-embracing as they pretend to be; instead, what counts is that the assumption of their being such must be made. Relationships are not entered into out of preference, as more useful, more pleasurable, more prudent or generally more satisfying. [...It is called] relatedness 'being-for' togetherness, which means a leap from isolation to unity. (Jallinoja 98)

This means that two, namely the adult and the child, make the commitment to a close relationship no matter if they are related or not. For children, it is the parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles and cousins who are in the inner circle when it comes to tell of who represents the closest kin. But also friends or godparents, even animals, appear in these inner circles, the minority are non-related people or teachers. Consequently, bloodlines do not always mean that a person is important to a child, emotional closeness cannot straightforwardly be equated with genealogical closeness (Mason, Tipper 140).

Especially children who do not know the "classical, nuclear" family life seek for kinship-like relationships:

We know from previous research that children who have experienced parental separation and stepfamily life may become very engaged in working out how they are related to others and what family means under complex or changing circumstances [...]. It is important to note that the children were seeing these as kinship-like relationships, as distinct from friendships. (Mason, Tipper 141)

So genealogy does not necessarily form the basis of a good kinship. However, frequency of contact and the longevity matter for a successful relationship between child and the "other". Face to face contacts, even if infrequent, show a certain commitment to each other, especially important if the child and the kin live nearby. They do a variety of things together, including playing, eating and drinking, talking, watching TV, having outings as well as spending time with each other in each other's presence or homes (Mason, Tipper 142-3).

When the kinship is initiated by adults, some children are proud of their ability to speak confidently to adults, although some also are intimidated by their knowledge, are scared that they probably cannot answer every question and some found adult conversations boring (Mason, Tipper 144). However, from the child's point of view when describing the contact with their kin,

[...] their accounts were usually very visceral, tangible, and embodied in that they focused on sensory and tactile dimensions and were often retold and enacted with exaggerated facial or bodily expressions or supporting noises. The children also used the photographs they had taken of 'who matters', as well as other visual and material aids such as personal possessions, household objects and so on, to animate their accounts. (Mason, Tipper 144-5)

The most important themes emerging were the appearances of their kin, including smell or voices, spaces and places they associated with them, things and material objects as already pointed out, food, hobbies and the behaviour towards children. So the tangible and the sensory dimensions are highlighted by children, which is important because it shows the meaning of a relationship to another person from a child's perspective (Mason, Tipper 145). The same is true of people that children do not like, there are hints of compulsion, subversion and resistance (Mason, Tipper 147).

So, kinship offers multiple sets of relationships between the people involved in it, meaning adults and children. Time plays an important role because it strengthens the kinship stories and includes imagination, narratives and memories. For children, the tactile and tangible knowledge plays the most important role.

When children grow up, it can be observed that the separation from one's mother is a major developmental issue, especially for girls because of the bond between her and her mother. Boys have more permeable ego boundaries than the female offspring. Girls define themselves more in relation to others (Cahalan 10). As Chodorow sums up,

[W]omen's mothering, then, produces asymmetries in the relational experiences of girls and boys as they grow up, which account for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality, and the relational

capacities and modes which these entail. Women and men grow up with personalities affected by different boundary experiences and differently constructed and experienced inner object-worlds, and are preoccupied with different relational issues. Feminine personality comes to be based [...] more on retention and continuity of external relationships [...]. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. (Chodorow 169)

This urge of being related to others can also turn into a complex, the Cinderella complex Dowling describes. Girls as well as grown up women tend to have a personal and psychological dependence on others, i.e. the wish to be taken care of by others. They are waiting for something external to transform their lives (Dowling 21). This leads to a loss of identity, often described in some of O'Brien's fiction, for example the mother in *The Bachelor*.

Although being a mother is always described as natural and the woman also actively wants to be the primary kinship contact of her children, it is also possible that women do not develop maternal love, which is why they decide against children. One writer, Mary Manley, even stated that it is “meritorious Tenderness [sic], common to all the Female-kind [sic], and only less to be found in the Human [sic]! [...]” (Nelson 134). Thus, the maternal feeling is not directly denied, but it is recognized that the conditions of human existence can weaken or break the bond between a mother and her child (Nelson 134). Even though women are supposed to be mothers, there are some who decide against this role or have difficulties with it, such as in the short stories *A Rose in the Heart of New York* or *Christmas Roses*.

5.2. Intergenerational Relationships – the Quest for Identity

The quest for role models and for kinship relationships are common themes in a child's development to figure out one's own identity. Children try to find people they can orientate on to find out what they want in life and what to reject. Grown ups are often aware of this, which is why they – mostly – try to offer a good example.

However, children are also born into specific circumstances, their family, their town, their country, their continent. Often, they first focus on their

surroundings' behaviour and manners before they get the opportunity to question them (Erikson 71). So, we do not only take over our family's traditions and morals, but society's. The self is not only formed by this inner circle, but also by the milieu we are living in, home is already defined through our citizenship (Erikson 106).

At the beginning, the child is completely dependent on other people; in most cases it is the mother or the parents who are the primary care-takers, which turns the mother into the first role model, the first object of identification, even more the first intergenerational relationship a human being can be in (Reiter 34). After that the young being is always looking out for people who pay attention, also to demonstrate that it is important to the person in this dominant position (Erikson 98). So, we need someone to look up to, it seems to be natural and we are eager to get that feeling.

Later, the child starts making its own experience and wants to share it. Again, the child refers to the parents in the beginning, but later, enlarges his/her inner circle to find people with similar experiences to share them, to talk about them (Erikson 102). They leave their inner circle of kinship (Reiter 50). Instead, they turn to peer groups they can identify with (Williams, Nussbaum 33). However, these peer groups are only one part of the social development. Children strive for adult identities because they want to explore the possibilities of adult identities, considering lifestyle choice and so forth. Within interactions with the older generation, this becomes the projection and rehearsal of possible selves (Williams, Nussbaum 129).

Then, the adult role models play an important role again; these adults taught morals, traditions, what is right and what is wrong. So, attitudes and beliefs are influenced by perceptions and not necessarily by objective reality (Williams, Nussbaum 26). These people have turned into inner voices through development, symbolizing something bigger, older, more intelligent and more powerful (Erikson 103). They have shaped and moulded the young human's self.

Hence, there is a relational communication bearing social information, which can be adapted for intergenerational contacts. According to Williams and Nussbaum (2001), there are four points on how they work and what is conveyed through them:

First, we both gain information from and follow norms in our society and culture. Second, we learn by observing others both passively and actively [...]. Third, we gain information actively as well as incidentally from third parties such as friends and family [...]. Fourth, we gain information directly through our first-hand-intergenerational interaction. Finally, as a result of our own intraindividual communication – that is, our ongoing conversation with ourselves – through our cognitive work and reflexive activity, our knowledge can feed back into our future interactions. (Williams, Nussbaum 28)

There are many ways how identity is formed, which explains later actions and behaviour. The child also creates its identity through how it is perceived by others, i.e. by strangers, which leads to a distinction between self and other. To be able to do this, the child compares itself to groups and units that are relevant to it, namely people of the same age as well as to idols. The self is always embedded within relationships, which gives another view on the individual self (Williams, Nussbaum 131). Within those they detect positive role models, but also so called “negative identities”, which represent everything the child does not want to become (Reiter 25-7).

The identity of a human being when grown up is to some extent defined by his or her occupation. “We are what we do” is a proverbial saying that may best describe this fact. People often ask at the beginning of a conversation what we do professionally, because we need this information to find out about a personality. The personality is shaped at school, when we learn to play according to the rules and thus gained the ability to find ideals and role models through game and work. By that we manage to form our identity, even though we still feel guilty because we have neglected our parents as the ones we have seen as examples (Erikson 119-20). Elements of the identity that were formed in the first stages of development are usually rejected and put into perspective, which are in contrast to the expected roles and demands of society (Reiter 51).

This is what has also been labelled as “initiation”, the transition from childhood to adolescence, the introduction to reality and the adult world (Bergmann 35).

The developmental stages of initiation and adolescence go hand in hand with disillusionment, because young persons are now able to distinguish between their own notion of what they think life is like, and reality. Hence, role models and intergenerational relationships that are glorified during childhood lose their original credibility. This is why extreme love can turn into rejection or even into hatred (Bergmann 169). As already pointed out, it is mostly the parents who are rejected because they are the people children are most closely connected to, although this is more forced by girls more than by boys:

Turning to the kind of conflict which is found in the adolescent girl in our society, we find that it centers about the problems of sex, the discipline and authority of the home, the assumptions or rejection of social responsibility, religious and ethical conflicts. (Mead 181)

However, the quest for identity also provides difficulties in the set ideas of gender within a social environment, especially in patriarchal hierarchies. As Erikson has pointed out, black people, as well as young people and women play a subordinate role in perspective to the white male. For women, the roles of mother and wife were predetermined (Erikson 130). This is why it was hard for women, especially before the Women’s Rights Movements, to gain an identity of their own, independent of social constraints.

5.3. First Sexual Experience – the Other Perspective on Intergenerational Relationships

Growing up does not only involve finding role models who function as ideals the child is longing for and is trying to meet. It also goes along with the first sexual experience, with finding a partner and getting married.

In O’Brien’s short fiction there are older men who fall in love with younger girls as in *The Bachelor* or *Clara*, or an older woman feeling attracted to a younger man, like in *Christmas Roses*. The stories describe the growing love of

the adults for the young. In *The Bachelor*, the attraction to the girl develops because Jack Holland loves the mother of the girl, who cannot disclose her feelings, because she is already married. Instead, she suggests a deal by organizing a match-making between him and her daughter. In *Clara*, Mister Herema falls in love with an underage (!) girl, living in an asylum because she was declared mad. Beside the fact that she is beautiful, she is an icon of innocent purity because she hardly speaks. *Christmas Roses* is a strong contrast to all the other short stories because here a 55-year old former dancer feels attracted to a younger man, who finally becomes aware of her loneliness, but also reveals the life of an elderly single woman who cannot accommodate in a society based on family relationships.

Consequently, match-making is a recurrent motif in O'Brien's short fiction. It always goes along with courting, which was common in the times of O'Brien childhood:

Men who were courting used to wait on the roadside and let out their low signalling whistles. Courtships were desperate affairs conducted in bogs and mires, eked out in the secrecy of wet hedges. And were they inarticulate affairs apart from the body's noises, apart from the grunts? (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 33)

It was normal that men tried to get a woman's attention, it was socially accepted that a man had several acquaintances, however, the same could not be said for women. A woman doing so immediately got a bad reputation, as Moira does in *Courtship* or Mable in *Savages*. Even married men did abstain from flirting:

There was the couple who had had a made match, who still kept the top tier of the wedding cake for the offspring that was not forthcoming. The wife was a distance away under an umbrella with a group of ladies, murmuring. He winked at me and said I was growing into a fine woman, then winked with the other eye, then nothing more. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 67)

But match-making was primarily devised by the parents, they invited men to their house to choose a daughter for becoming his wife (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 60). Similarly, the parents in *The Bachelor* talk about who their daughter

will marry one day – the mother, reminding her promise to Jack Holland, suggests the wine shop owner, her father, however, bearing wealth and security in mind, suggests a doctor (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 64).

5.4. Intergenerational Relationships – the Adult Perspective

The focus of the previous chapters was on the development of children and the reasons why they were actively looking for kinship that was not part of the nuclear family and which roles the intergenerational relationship play for them. In secondary literature, the adults are hardly ever focused on, nor are their roles in an intergenerational relationship further discussed.

Not every adult is automatically in a relationship, nor does he or she need to have any children. In Irish society, one important social group is ignored: the singles. The word woman was often used as a synonym for mother, but there was a large number of single women, by choice or by lack of opportunity, who constituted over 50% of the population in the 1970ies (Robinson 59).

Still, young or middle-aged adults in an intergenerational relationship put themselves in a position of power and identify themselves with the role of the care-taker. This was the result of a study with college students and middle-aged adults who took care of older people or younger children. It gave them a feeling of superiority, because people were getting dependent on them (Williams, Nussbaum 143).. Helping, caring for others puts the active person into a position of power, which can be detected in *Savages* and *Christmas Roses*.

If the age difference in intergenerational relationship is even larger, it is often regarded as strange (Williams, Nussbaum 217), “awkward” and “receives negative reaction from others” (Williams, Nussbaum 219). It is of particular interest that, according to a survey by Bettini and Norton (1991), intergenerational relationships seem to be of more importance for elderly adults than for young adults. Elderly age groups reported that they formed these relationships through contact with their children, grandchildren or the church; with middle-aged generations the places of contact were schools and work

places. Still, even though these friendships are important to them, elderly adults noticed a difference in equality, which is one fundamental difference to an age-peer friendship. Younger generations mostly get in touch with older age groups through their parents, but they do not acknowledge the authority of the older generation (Williams, Nussbaum 218).

Despite the difference in age and social status, the subjects talked about are very similar to those within a peer-age group: Family, friends and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships are discussed, besides work-related activities and hobbies such as sports, recreational activities and travel (Williams, Nussbaum 219). This can also be observed in the relationships of Jack and Clara, as well as in *Christmas Roses* with Miss Hawkins and the theatre student.

In the latter short story, another aspect of the intergenerational relationship is described, namely the mentoring relationship. Results of the empirical enquiry have shown that several people claimed that the intergenerational friendship was similar to a mother-daughter relationship, or a mentoring relationship (Williams, Nussbaum 219). This mentoring relationship is emphasized in all of O'Brien's short stories, leaving the question aside of whether this is perceived by all the participants in the same way, and whether it is always positive. The role models function as mentors and are more or less responsible and reliable in this role. If they are not, the young are disillusioned and turn away. Another reason for neglect of responsibility may occur if the intergenerational relationship has turned into sexual attraction. The partly negative reception of intergenerational relationships might also have to do with this point, because observers or people who do not have a similar kin, associate it probably with sexual attraction of only one part, which makes the relationship perverted.

6. Intergenerational Relationships in Selected Short Fiction of Edna O'Brien

In the previous section, four different aspects of intergenerational relationships were discussed. Firstly, the primary role models, the mothers and fathers, who are the persons a child is most closely related to. Secondly, the secondary role models who help finding an identity are fascinating and are considered as idol-like figures. Thirdly, the first sexual experience of a growing-up girl was featured, together with the potential problems related to it, such as insecurities and pleasures. Last, but not least, the adult's point of view on an intergenerational relationship was discussed, showing the reasons for a grown up person to become the friend of a much younger person.

In the following sections the intergenerational relationships in selected short fiction by Edna O'Brien will be discussed. To begin with, the primary love object of the child, the mother, is presented, who is then illustrated by the example of the short story *A Rose in The Heart of New York*. The section on the mother will be more thoroughly elaborated because the mother figure plays an important role in most of O'Brien's short stories, even though they often are rather flat characters.

Next, the short stories will be discussed, divided into the three remaining categories of intergenerational relationships: Protagonists who aspire for a role model, namely in *The Connor Girls*, *Savages* and *Sister Imelda*; protagonists who deal with the opposite sex in their intergenerational relationships, like in *Love-Child*, *The Bachelor* and *Courtship*, finally, the two narrations from the adult perspective will be considered: *Christmas Roses* and *Clara*.

6.1. “I Do Not Want to Become My Mother” - The Rejection of the Primary Love Object

The protagonist's quest for identity in Edna O'Brien's fiction goes along with the question of what identity means in Irish society. One of the issues is – as the Irish Constitution already emphasizes – motherhood. “This plotting of motherhood again recalls one of the most common outcomes of the female romance plot: the heroine can only realize her potential as woman through marriage and childbearing.” (Byron 23). Mothers are described as unique, important figures and were regarded as the “best” in Irish society (Pelan, *Love Objects* 61).

Nevertheless, although the strong maternal bond should be efficient, the juvenile narrators of the stories do not always have the best relationship with their mothers. This goes along with the fact that sexual liberty stood in contrast to religion in post-Catholic Ireland (Changing Ireland 5). The younger generation could not identify with their parents' situation any more, meaning that daughters did not automatically choose their mothers as role models. O'Brien's fictional mothers do not really attract admiration, because they are responsible for raising narrow-minded daughters, who live in a world of imprisonment and subjugation (Pelan, *Love Objects* 63).

Many daughters live in rage at their mothers for having accepted, too readily and passively, ‘whatever comes’. A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches for her clues as to what it means to be a woman. Like the traditional foot-bound Chinese woman, she passes on her own affliction. The mother's self-hatred and low expectations are the binding-rags for the psyche of the daughter. (Rich 243)

In many works of fiction women are described as the “angel in the house”, the women's world is the kitchen and men keep to the barn and the fields. Furthermore, they flee to the pub because men feel more comfortable when socializing with each other outside their home (Cahalan 13). Women's activities at home are confined to connections to and concerns about their children and their husbands. Hence, women's connectedness to the domestic world and the

men's detachment from it is also mirrored in literature. This also has to be taken into account for women who are not mothers, or were not raised by their own mother (Cahalan 11).

The pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular, rather than spiral: female heroines remain at home: Instead of testing their self-image through adventures in the outside world, they are initiated through learning the rituals of human relationships at home, so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers. (Ferguson 59)

Motherhood defined Irish women, as the terms woman and mother are used interchangeably in the Constitution (Haberstroh 14). However, sometimes there is no strong bond between the child and the mother in Edna O'Brien's short fiction. It is common knowledge that in child development children seek for a role model when growing up. Usually, the mother is the primary love object, and the father the secondary one (Thompson 32). The relationship between mother and child influences later love relationships and through idealizing people, things, causes or institutions by which the motherly love is substituted (Pelan, *Love Objects* 63).

If the child does not respond to the mother – and the father is always the background in O'Brien's stories – it has to seek for a new role model, a new person to identify with. The reason why the girls do not respond to the mother in a strong, natural way could be described in terms of matrophobia, “a term that means not hatred of the mother, but fear of becoming one's mother” (Sukenick 519). This may provoke anger in a child, if it really misses a positive role model.

6.1.1. “A Rose in the Heart of New York”

This story was pre-printed in the *New Yorker* in excerpts, in a section on new Irish writers, just like the *Irish Press* did, before it was published in the short story collection *Mrs Reinhard and Other Stories*. The story shows the psychological and material oppressions of an Irish woman, described by her daughter, whose feeling towards her turn from love into hatred, because there is no strong role model. Rejection is a normal behaviour in child development; through the disillusionment, the childhood and its attitudes towards people, a

child's love can be turned into negative feelings (Bergmann 169). The narrator learns that her mother is not the perfect god-like creature, but a human being who makes mistakes and has her weaknesses.

The story is set in rural Ireland and focuses completely on the mother-daughter relationship. As in many other narrations of O'Brien, the names of the figures are not disclosed, which gives the story a stereotypical touch, indicating that the situation is representative and typical of many at that time in rural Ireland (Ingman 222).

The child that is born is not wanted at the beginning of the story. The mother is in agony when in labour, by which the midwife is reminded of many other women who did not want to become pregnant again. She has seen children who were stuffed away in a drawer after birth, or killed, because the mother was not married (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 376). Also in this case, the mother cannot bond with the unwanted baby:

The mother was not proud, far from it. She fed the child its first bottle, looked down at its wizened face, and thought, Where have you come from an why? She had no choice of a name. [..T]his child had the ugliest face that had ever seen the light of day. (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 379)

But then she begins to idolize the girl because she is very quiet and never asks for anything. It also loses its very ugliness and as time passes by, it turns into her favourite child. They do everything together and the love for one another is overwhelming so they develop a symbiotic closeness.

This story is an instance of a so-called "self-other" attachment, which is a theme in several stories of O'Brien. In Freudian terms, this involves an identification rather than an object-love. „Indeed, the attachment represented in several of the texts seems almost literally identification, a fusing with or felt return to the one (mother's) body" (Coughlan 187):

They were together, always together. If its mother went to the post office, the child stood in the middle of the drive praying until its mother returned safely. [...] Her mother's knuckles were her knuckles, her mother's veins were her veins, her mother's lap was a second heaven, her mother's forehead a copybook onto which she traced A B C D, her mother's body

was a recess that she would wander inside forever and ever, a sepulchre growing deeper and deeper (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 380).

The identification between mother and child is so strong that the child starts feeling like the mother. They share everything, even food. The father is violent and is responsible for financial problems in the family. Her mother does not try to comply with his orders, but stands up against him. One day, he tries to shoot her and her mother leaves the family for a while, which means many difficulties for the child. It is scared that she will never return again. Fortunately, she does – her absence did not change their relationship, it seems as if she had never been away. Her father promises to never cross the line any more and her mother tries to avoid another pregnancy.

Sometimes the protagonist's elder sister comes for a visit and her mother then pays all her attention to the other child. Then, the younger offspring is jealous and feels unimportant, "[...] She had to stack dishes onto the tray" (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 386, my emphasis). She is competing with her sister and waits until she is back in boarding school, because then "[...] happiness was restored again" (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 386).

The girl still notices the difficulties in her mother's marriage and wants to protect her and from her father's violence. She decides to get a good job when she grows up to move away with her mother, probably to America. At the same time, she starts to distance herself from her mother. "The growing girl began to say the word 'backside' to herself and knew that her mother would be appalled" (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 387). However, she also punishes herself for doing this, wishing to be only separated from her mother when one of them dies, just like "till death do us part". Her parents notice that she has reached the right age for boarding school and intend to send her there, too, especially her father wants that because he notices that the protagonist is emotionally too much dependent on her mother.

She is so satisfied with her relationship to her mother that she does not even consider to become friends with any other children of her age. Her mother is all she needs, to her she is a divine creature. She realises that life is harder

away from her, and she also stays so close because she does not want to grow up. She has heard hideous things about the world “outside”:

Her cup was full. Her mother was the cup, [...] the lake with the legends, [...] a habitation in which she longed to sink and disappear forever and ever. Yet she was afraid to sink, caught in that hideous trap between fear of sinking and fear of swimming, she moved like a flounder through this and that; through school, through inoculation, through a man who put his white handkerchief between naked her and naked him [...] (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 388)

Then they send her to school, which she refuses and feels let down by her mother. She is very disappointed by her, which leads to the first stage of a long process of estrangement. As in *Sister Imelda*, she replaces the mother with a nun and notices that she does not need the mother as her role model any more. She experiences the sensation of loving another person, namely a nun, which, as in *Sister Imelda*, has obviously lesbian undertones. Thus, she has engaged in a new intergenerational relationship. In the holidays she tries to act like her sister, her mother trying to get her attention but she ignores and rejects her, then. Her mother is hurt and starts to get rude, because she feels that she has lost her daughter's love. Nevertheless, in a desperate that she cannot separate wholly from her mother, she turns love into hate (Ingman 222).

Even when she grows older, the nun remains to be the person she is most related to. She thinks about her all the time, just as she did when the mother was her primary contact. She has enlarged the inner circle of her family with persons she feels close to. The next step in her development as a young woman follows when she gets to know a bakery man, with whom she has her first erotic experience. In these moments she recalls her mother from very long ago, “But she was recalling someone whom she wanted to banish” (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 391).

She wants to withdraw from her former life, her childhood as much as she can. She starts working as a librarian and gets married in a haste. She wants to have her own family, so that she is no longer dependent on her parents. She still gets food parcels including letters from her mother, which she hates, in which the mother apologizes for her husband's and her own

behaviour. The strong woman she was in the eyes of the child, has been changed into a very weak, subordinate and repressed person. It is an image of a woman, a mother the girl does not want to accept, consequently, she rejects the mother even more. But she does not manage to live a different life than she did, because her husband is very dominant:

They lived to themselves. She learned to do chores, to bottle and preserve, to comply, to be a wife, to undress neatly at night, to fold her clothes, to put them on a cane chair [...]. It was like being at school again. The mother did not visit, being at odds with the censuring husband. (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 391)

This was a constellation typical of Irish marriages. In this patriarchal structure, the wife is brought to the husband's family and takes his patronym. She becomes the mistress of the husband's house and has to adapt to her husband's surroundings, his family and friends. She then has kinship obligations not only to her own family, but also to him and his family (Arensberg 87). This explains the treatment of his wife – nevertheless, the protagonist does not want to cope with this and the marriage fails.

Still, the mother and the daughter sometimes meet, but they do not talk about anything delicate. When the daughter's marriage fails, the mother is not surprised. Her mother regards her as a rather soft, weak person who serves her husband and is dominated by him, forgetting her own situation. "Perhaps she thought that her daughter's marriage might have amended for her own" (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 392).

The mother does not believe in partnerships and love between man and woman any more, the only true bond existing is the one between mother and child (Ingman 188). She requests her never to drink alcohol and advises her not to go out with men any more. The protagonist does not bear her situation any more, nor can she stand as her mother, and flees to England. There she wants to start again and begin a new life. Still, she thinks about her mother and starts to make her responsible for everything that went wrong in her life:

[...] and always, like an overseeing spirit, the figure of the mother, who was responsible for each and every one of these facets [...]. They were

more than thoughts, they were the presence of this woman whom she resolved to kill. Yes, she would have to kill. (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 393)

After years, the feelings towards her mother change and she decides to meet her again, to go on a holiday with her, but she still disrespects her because of the marriage to her father, which is why she wants to talk about the life before, when her mother was a young girl in order to find parallels to her own life. Here, she gets to know another facet of her mother, when the mother tells her daughter about her first lover. She gets a short glimpse into her mother's life before marriage, a speck of independence. This leads to a revival of their bondage, the "rose in the heart" is blossoming when telling about her youth in New York. But the mother denies that her daughter's life in London is comparable to her life in New York in former times, the two adult women do not get along, meaning the mother-daughter relationship has failed (Ingman 223).

This short story is characteristic of the Irish short story of that time because it shows the transition from past to present, and the tensions within a mother-daughter relationship. It shows memories, imaginations and a daughter hoping to improve her relationship to her mother by trying to find things and feelings in common, yet the attempt is not successful (Ingman 224).

This mother-daughter relationship was rather regressive, because she never supported her daughter in finding her freedom, independence and liberation (Ingman 223). By suggesting that they should be buried together, she criticises her own relationship, but also demonstrates that she equates her and her daughter's situation, even more. Although her husband has tried to kill her and her daughter managed to get separated from her dominant husband, she still thinks better of her life. They both feel frustrated with each other:

She wished then that her mother's life had been happier and had not exacted so much from her, and she felt she was being milked emotionally. [...] But also she blamed her. [...] The mother [...] wished that her daughter had never grown into the cruel feelingless hussy that she was. (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 399)

They do not get the possibility to reconcile again, because her mother dies. The last impression she gets of the mother is one of a silenced person.

The daughter had tried to make her mother talk when she was asking her about her New York-lover, but she resisted. Only now that she is dead and she sees the corpse she sees that her mother's mouth is open as if to speak (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 403). As Rich has explained, the mother figure has to be strong for her daughter to develop. In this case the mother cannot provide this strength for the protagonist any more, so she will never find her mother's voice.

She then goes through her property and tries to reconstruct her mother's personality. She has a feeling as if she had never known her. Then, she discovers a love letter to Vincent, her first love, the man in New York that she had left for Ireland. It says, "I think of you, you would not believe how often" (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 403), and even if this letter was written decades earlier and was never sent off, the protagonist realises that her mother has thought about this missed chance all her life. Furthermore, she finds an envelope with money for her, but there is no message. She realises that she has been the second big love of her mother's life and feels an inner void:

A new wall had arisen, stronger and sturdier than before. Their life together and all those exchanges were like so many spilt feelings, and she looked to see some sign or hear some murmur. Instead, a silence filled the room, and there was a vaster silence beyond, as if the hose itself had died or had been carefully put down to sleep. (O'Brien, *Rose in the Heart* 404).

6.2. "I Would Do Anything For You" – Identity Seekers and Their Role Models

Edna O'Brien does not idealize the childhood of the narrators of her stories, she simply lets them observe the surroundings they grow up in. They do not understand the mechanisms and become a part of them before they realize what is happening. They choose role models, relationships to people who seem interesting, not being able to differentiate between what is a good role model and what not.

What they do have in common is that they seem to be special. They have lived abroad, have a good education, are especially good-looking. This is one

aspect of the intergenerational relationships the narrators live in, meaning to actively elect someone to become a role model, an idol, other than the mother. In many cases it is not the mother because O'Brien usually portrayed mothers as joyless, self-denying victims of society and male violence. They did not have a stable identity, meaning their daughters could not inherit a sense of confidence. Rich pointed out that 'the nurture of daughters in the patriarchy calls for a strong sense of self-nurture in the mother' (Rich 245). So if the daughter wants to grow up without subjugating the mother's life she has to reject her. This is why the image of the mother was often described on negative terms (Ingman 206).

The intergenerational relationships in which the quest for identity is featured have in common that they play an important role in the development of the juvenile narrator-protagonist, mostly positive ones, even though the experience might be negative, because they always see things in relative terms. They make them think about their own lives, their development; at least they use a part of their naivety, because their role models are deprived of their mystique and they have to start reflecting on their lives for themselves. In doing so, Edna O'Brien manages to subvert patriarchal assumptions and societal codes (Haberstroh 17).

6.2.1. "The Connor Girls"

To know them would be to enter an exalted world. To open the stiff green iron gate, to go up their shaded avenue, and to knock on their white hall door was a journey I yearned to make. (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 3)

This is how the short story *The Connor Girls* begins and it immediately reveals the appeal of these girls have for the female narrator. The Connor Girls, growing up at their father's place – their mother has already died – are not especially beautiful, but are well-groomed, noble and chic. The narrator spends much time on describing their looks and their clothes.

Clothes are used as metaphors for characters and identity, as Mary Salmon pointed out in an essay on Edna O'Brien in 1990 (Mooney 197). This

goes along with the reception of O'Brien's persona, as critics minimized her talent because she was too attractive, too well dressed for a writer. Clothing is regarded as a way to express one's psyche (Mooney 198), and the mentioning of what a figure wears conveys a certain meaning. When Miss Amy, the younger sister is supposed to get married and describes what clothes she could wear, what her wedding dress will look like, ending up in the narrator's confession, "I loved her then, and wanted to know her and wished with all my heart that I could have gone across the fields with her and become her confidante, but I was ten and she was thirty or thirty-five" (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 10).

Clothing establishes individuality as it frames and contains the body and, therefore, it constructs identity, a self versus the other, but also includes the self into a community. This turns clothes into an aspect of culture, being both a communal and personal phenomenon (Mooney 200). The meaning of their clothes, their behaviour, their status becomes obvious in a completely different context, a description of a situation functioning almost as metaphor, "[...] our own sheepdogs barked fiercely but kept inside our own paling, being, as I think, terrified of the thoroughbreds, who were beagles" (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 4). The *Connor Girls* are rich and besides the fascination, people hoped to be friends with them, either because they hoped to improve their social status in the local community, or because they might benefit in some other way.

People try to get pally with them, but they usually only allow men to get in contact with them, not women. They talk to the narrator's father in a flirtatious way, but ignore the mother. The mother wants to invite them over to show what a good housewife she is hoping to be admired by them. But these attempts end up in embarrassing or frustrating situations:

She swept her hair back, pinned it with her brown tortoiseshell comb, and went out and leaned on the top rung of the gate as if she were posing for a photograph, or looking at a view. I heard her say, 'Excuse me, Miss Connor, or rather, Miss Connors,' in that exaggerated accent which she had picked up in America, and which she used when strangers came, or when she went to the city. It was like putting on new clothes or new shoes which did not fit her. (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 4-5)

There are many rumours about the Connor Girls, because they keep very much to themselves. They supposedly meet with a retired captain, nicknamed the “Stallion”, with whom they are said to have an affair. They obviously do not meet any women, they do not have other friendships, although “local people longed to be friends with them” (O’Brien, *Connor Girls* 6). There are many other rumours about them, because they seem to be exotic, yet no one really knows them. However, they are not as decent and distinguished as one would judge by the favourable impression they leave in public, “[...they] used language that was not ladylike” (O’Brien, *Connor Girls* 7). It is a children’s game to spy on them and guess what they do, also because their love relationships were too scandalous to be true. Rumours climaxed when Amy meets the bank clerk, whom she will marry eventually. They are said to swim naked in the river, although, again, nobody can really confirm this (O’Brien, *Connor Girls* 8).

This is when another sujet of the story is introduced: religion. The Connor Girls are Protestants, the bank clerk, however is a Catholic. People predict that they will not stay together due to that fact and the narrator’s mother clearly states that such cross-denominational romances will and cannot last. This attitude becomes important to the protagonist later: “She could not abide it, she said that Catholics and Protestants just could not mix. [...] Her mind was firmly made up about the incompatibility of Catholics and Protestants” (O’Brien, *Connor Girls* 9).

When the wedding does not take place for whatever reason whatsoever – there are again only guesses why it did not take place – Amy’s character changes dramatically. There are rumours that she was confined to an asylum because she turned into a madwoman (O’Brien, *Connor Girls* 11). When people see her again, she is obese and has turned into an alcoholic, because she is broken-hearted. This also affects her behaviour towards the local people: she does not ignore them any more, but tries to integrate and socialize.

The narrator even gets to know Amy better, they take long walks, where they even talk about Amy’s future. The narrator takes over the role of an elder sister, asks her about boys, whether there was anyone she liked, but at the

same time she dismisses love as a mere illusion, a dream (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 13). Nevertheless, after the end of the love affair she has almost lost the local people's admiration and is no longer as interesting to them as she used to be.

This also goes along with the narrator's own development when she attends boarding school:

In September I went to boarding school and got involved with nuns and various girl friends, and in time the people in our parish, even the Connor girls, almost disappeared from my memory. I never dreamed of them any more [...] (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 13).

The relationship she has to the Connor Girls becomes more detached and she turns her attention towards nuns and girl-friends. Especially the nuns are appealing and admired role models. However, the narrator's possession with the Connor Girls is obvious, as they do not only govern her thoughts when being awake, but even dominate her dreams. They played an important role because they were important for the inner circle of the people she was related to notably her mother. She imitated her mother's urge to please them, to win their attention.

By leaving her home town for a longer time, the narrator's former life is put into perspective. She neither takes the Connor Girls nor the mother as a role model any longer and becomes independent. Town life, as depicted here, shows parallels to O'Brien's hometown. It lacks progress, is an Ireland dominated by a sense of guilt, shame and sin, showing the traps of femininity rather than liberation through the mother figure (Moloney, Thompson x). She tries to find her identity, a process fraught with emotional problems; problems of self-recognition, doubts and other struggles for identity (Redlich 83).

She even marries a man who is not a Catholic and thus splits the family: "[...] my mother had penned an oath that we would never meet again this side of the grave. I did not see my family for a few years" (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 14). This is not surprising because her mother's opinion has already been revealed during Amy's relationship. It is nevertheless an indication of a society dominated

by strict Catholicism, destroying family bonds. Her own development results in estrangement to her family, caused by her independence and her rejection of inherited social ideals and moral values.

When returning home to finally meet her family again with her husband and her son, she finds a mother who seemingly did not develop at all. She has arranged a meeting with the Connor Girls, who have become elderly women themselves by now. They still are charming for her. The mother tries to bond with the daughter hoping their feelings towards the sisters are still the same, to show they still have at least something in common. But the narrator agrees rather out of politeness than out of real interest, realising once more the differences between herself and her mother.

Meeting the Connor Girls then makes everything look different. She now realises that she is not her own master after all but dominated by her husband:

[...] Miss Amy looked at my husband and said, 'Hasn't the mummy got any say over her own child?' [...at] that moment I realized that by choosing his world I had said goodbye to my own and to those in it. By such choices we gradually become exiles, until at least we are quite alone. (O'Brien, *Connor Girls* 16)

The narrator has just changed role models and people she can refer to instead of becoming really independent. She rejected her mother, left her home town and gave up the intergenerational relationship to the Connor Girls as ideals to gain freedom, to fully develop. Nevertheless, she did not fully manage because she got caught up in society's net and became a wife and mother. She changed the role from daughter to mother without having the possibility to be *just* a woman. The ones who were indeed able to gain independence are the Connor sisters; they wanted to get married, but lived their lives as independent women and sisters and not as someone's wife.

6.2.2. "Savages"

In this narrative a different role model than that of the mother is introduced: A local girl that has lived in Australia for ten years brings some excitement into the

sleepy Irish town, which the narrator herself calls a “godforsaken townland” (O’Brien, *Savages* 74). Mabel has returned home after having lived in the Outback in her youth. The narrator of the story is a young teenage girl. She asks herself many question about Mabel, the mysterious stranger:

She would be tired. She would be excited. She would be full of strange stories and strange impressions. How long would she stay? What would she look like? Would her hair be permed? What presents, or what knickknacks would she bring? Would she have an accent? Oh, what novelty. [..H]er name and her arrival were on everyone’s lips. (O’Brien, *Savages* 73)

The young Irish girl is completely fascinated and can hardly wait for Mabel’s arrival. She even helps Mabel’s mother to prepare everything for her welcome, which she regards as a special privilege. She wants to be close to Mabel’s surroundings because this gives her a special insight into the emigrant’s exotic’s life. She idealizes Mabel and chooses her as a role model. She wonders how Mabel’s life will develop, including marriage: “[...] I began to wonder who Mabel would marry, because of course she was not yet married and she must not be left on the shelf, as that was a most mortifying role” (O’Brien, *Savages* 75). This way of thinking demonstrates that the narrator already has accepted *the* typical notion of the role of the woman in Ireland: Becoming a married woman, and, thus, a housewife and mother.

She wishes badly to be there at Mabel’s arrival, but she is not allowed to as her mother orders her to do housework instead. While the parents are there to welcome Mabel, she does nonsense with her sister because she cannot think of anything but the girl from Down Under. When her parents return home, her mother seems to be disappointed because she did not like the present she got by Mabel – pyjamas: “I could see my mother’s reaction – immense disappointment that was bordering on disgust. [...P]ajamas [sic] were shameful, sinful” (O’Brien, *Savages* 77). Her father, however, seems to be impressed by Mabel because she backed horses and had been to race meetings in Sydney.

Finally, the narrator gets the chance to meet Mable, because Mabel has been invited to visit them. Mabel is torn between emotions, because she blames

herself for coming home, she complains about her parents, but she also misses Australia. She has a different behaviour and different manners and is rather crude, if not obscene by Irish standards. She also has a funny accent that she drops as soon as she is talking about her own people. She has missed Ireland, but now she has returned and thinks she has made a mistake. The narrator's mother understands Mabel: " 'Faraway hills look green,' my mother said, and the two of them sighed as if a wealth of meaning had been exchanged" (O'Brien, *Savages* 79). This remark reflects the situation of Irish female emigrants and the wish of many Irish females to leave the country for a better life. Obviously, also the narrator's mother shares this dream, who has left the country on one occasion, giving a hint that she as well thought about freedom and a different life to the one she has now. However, the narrator is still too young to discern the mother's meaning.

It takes months before Mabel turns her attention to the narrator. Before that, Mabel spends time with the girl's sisters, because they are older and share the same interests, doing typical girl's talk on clothes, looks and make up. Mabel enjoys people's interest in her, "she was mad for gallivanting and had worn out her welcome in every house up the town, and in many houses up the country" (O'Brien, *Savages* 80). She enjoys people's attention, which will finally lead to an anti-climax in the narration.

Finally, the narrator becomes her "best friend". The narrator feels chosen: "One Sunday she chose me" (O'Brien, *Savages* 80), and Mabel still has the fascination of a mysterious stranger to her. They visit people, Mabel still enjoying her status as an exotic person in town, which she takes advantage of. The narrator is aware of that and realises that it is also helpful to increase her own popularity. She turns into a role model for even younger children, the "dummies", who want to play with her and choose her for their games (O'Brien, *Savages* 81). Hence, her companionship with Mabel also advances her own social status.

The naivety of the narrator, caused by the indoctrinations of religion and her moral standards show when she eavesdrops Mabel and the dummies'

mother talking. They are exchanging on her husband's haemorrhage, which makes her almost faint: "Only women did that. I began to go dizzy with dread" (O'Brien, *Savages* 81). She gets completely hysterical and shows her prudishness. Bearing the mother's reaction towards the blue silk pyjamas in mind, the question where she got these world views from remain unanswered. Also at a later point in the story when Mabel asks the narrator whether she is already interested in boys, she feels as if she was fainting (O'Brien, *Savages* 83). The narrator is definitely thoroughly "pure", she had to repress any sexual impulse and be chaste in thought and expression (Arensberg 208).

Purity was primarily cast as a woman's responsibility, a woman's crowning glory. Women were thus critical to Irish self-definition and any rejection of traditional standards of purity endangered Ireland's definition of self. (Valiulis 154)

Mabel has now turned into the person the narrator is most related to, emancipating herself from her mother, which goes along with feelings of guilt. "It meant that she and I were now friends, allies. Of course, I knew that I had betrayed my mother and would pay for it either by being punished or by having bouts of remorse" (O'Brien, *Savages* 83). Being friends with Mabel seems to be wrong to a certain degree, something sinful because she has to turn her back on her family. The narrator does not consider that she is simply developing and that breaking away from her parental home is something inevitable.

Even though she has these ambivalent feelings she very much enjoys meeting Mabel. It is like a gift to her:

As we walked along she took my hand and said that henceforth I was to be her waling companion. It was a thrill to feel her gloved hand awkwardly pressing on mine. Untold adventures lay ahead. (O'Brien, *Savages* 84)

They also meet other girls and Mabel is always aware of her superior status and makes use of it. When she tries to impress others she talks with her Australian accent (O'Brien, *Savages* 85). They also go to rambles and enjoy themselves. In mid 20th century Ireland, unmarried younger women and adolescents kept to themselves and formed cliques and smaller groups of

neighbours and kinswomen among themselves and went to dances and any other kinds of available amusements in town (Arensberg 196). The narrator states that she goes to such dances with Mabel, which was common also in Edna O'Brien's hometown:

At night the amusements started up and the place was a mecca with multi-coloured strings of light, fairy bulbs going twinkle-twinkle, and every conceivable distraction such as bumper cars in which people could sit and bump blazes out of their friends and enemies (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 34).

There, Mabel meets Matt, whom she fancies. Matt was once engaged, but the marriage did not take place, there have only been rumours about it. Thus three O'Brienic themes are introduced here:

Some said that the marriage was broken off because the two families couldn't agree about land, others said she thought his manners too gruff; at any rate, she fled to England. (O'Brien, *Savages* 86)

Firstly, the financial situation is discussed and the role of money and property, the usual match-making procedure of these times is addressed. Secondly, the dominance of a man in a relationship is indicated, his immoral behaviour, which some women do not want to tolerate. Thirdly, the issue of the emigration of women is addressed, who try to leave for England to achieve independence.

Although such rumours about Matt are a warning, Mabel feels attracted to Matt. Matt invites Mabel, the narrator and some girl friends to his place. Again, the situation seems odd and somehow compromising and potentially dangerous for morals. This is mirrored in the surroundings as well: "[...] the cock started to crow as if disapproving" (O'Brien, *Savages* 87). It conveys that is not decent for young girls to be alone in a young man's company. Mabel is offensively flirting with him, but he is not attracted by her at first but more to Moira. Both these older girls turn into good-girls-gone-bad in his presence:

Her reply both shocked and dazzled me, I thought, What a wonderful way to talk to a man, to be at once polite and distant, to be scornful without being down-right rude, to parry. (O'Brien, *Savages* 88)

She admires the other girls because they are grown up, they are both role models taking over the function of elder sisters, as her own sisters have gone away to boarding school. However, at the same time, she finds some ways of their behaviour appalling. Furthermore, her observations lead her to think of what life will be like when she will be grown up. She tries to explain Mabel's behaviour toward Matt to herself, "God knows what fancies were stirred in her then. Perhaps she thought – a bachelor, a two-story house, a man she could cook for, prosperity, a wedding" (O'Brien, *Savages* 88). The influence of patriarchal society and the women's role as defined by the 1937 Constitution is pinned down in this thought once more.

Then the beloved idol, the narrator's role model suddenly shows her dominance in this friendship, demonstrating the power she has over the young girl. "Then came the command" (O'Brien, *Savages* 89). She uses her for the love relationship with Matt, giving their friendship a bad taste. When the narrator does not fulfil this command properly, Mabel is mad with her, calling her names and starts to ignore her. The narrator, having no self-esteem, feels guilty instead of feeling attacked wrongly.

Suddenly there are rumours that Mabel is having a baby. The pregnancy leads to an uproar within the community. Pregnancy was something good, but only in a stable relationship, meaning marriage, not for a single woman outside wedlock with the unborn child's father being unknown.

O'Brien had a friend herself who became pregnant, and it was a taboo to talk about it:

[...] because three months later she had lost her job [...]. I used to visit her on Sundays without actually discussing what was happening to her. I could see that the one dress he had [...] was heaving out over her belly and she had coins ready for the landing phone and the number of a maternity hospital [...] (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 78)

Mabel is again the gossip of the town: First, there are speculations as to whether she is really pregnant, and when it seems to be confirmed, the town

wonders who the father might be. Mabel gets financial problems as she cannot go working and would not have got a job either. There was no financial aid for unmarried mothers at that time (Scannell 73). Her parents are ashamed of her, the inhabitants of the town are vicious. In the end, however, this issue is no longer sensational news for the people. Protecting the reputation of a family was of ultimate importance and an extra-marital pregnancy was the greatest shame she could have brought upon her family.

Bearing the narrator's reaction to the talking of haemorrhage in mind, it is not surprising that sex was a taboo and sex outside marriage was not even talked about. Many girls were not even prepared for the first occurrence of their periods and ignorant of any sexual matters during their youth (Lambert 183).

Then the narration reaches its anti-climax: When Mabel is supposed to be in labour it turns out that she is not and never was pregnant. The young woman who grew up in Australia loses other people's respect. Her mother sardonically comments on this fact: "[...] Mabel was, from birth, a rotten egg. Mabel's attraction to the opposite sex had been in the nature of a disease" (O'Brien, *Savages* 95). The story ends with Mabel leaving Ireland forever.

Mabel, who is treated by the narrator as "the chosen one" and as someone special, is not a good role model and only takes advantages from intergenerational relationship. She notices people's eagerness to meet her and to know her and uses every opportunity to. When there is nobody left to impress her, Mabel chooses the juvenile narrator to spend time with her and finds a grateful "slave", who will do everything for her. As time goes by, people are less interested in her just like the dummies' mother, who sees through her and denies her a larger meal when she is visiting. Her real feelings towards the narrator are unveiled when the girl does not observe her "command" as she is expected to, using her position of power. Last, but not least, Mabel makes up a story, namely her pregnancy, to evoke people's attention again.

6.2.3. „Sister Imelda“

In Edna O'Brien's short story *Sister Imelda*, two kinds of romance are combined, the religious one and as the erotic one (Shumaker 196).

It is hard to tell, whether Sister Imelda becomes the narrator's love object because she assumes the role of a surrogate mother when living in the convent, far away from home, or whether she has primarily homoerotic feelings for her. In O'Brien's fiction women are often portrayed as being bisexual, because she has experienced this herself: "Girls were in love with nuns and nuns either made pets or victims of one girl after another [...]" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 71). Lesbian sexuality is adopted as an explicit refusal of motherhood and marriage or as a way of maintaining emotional well-being (Moloney, Thompson 198). Mary, the protagonist of the story *Night*, chooses lovers of all ages, social classes and of both genders (Thompson 36).

However, even though the sexual aspect plays an important role in *Sister Imelda*, the nun is the person the narrator chooses as the one she relates to most closely. Living in a convent means having to stay away from the family for a considerable time, having no role models except the teachers – in this case nuns – or, else older school colleagues. O'Brien grew up in a convent herself and remembers

Parents seemed to exist no longer, or rather they had receded into being people who had given birth to one and about whom one had certain fossilized feelings, just as one day these nuns – the next instalment of parents – would recede and be replaced by another authority and yet another. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 69)

This means that the function the mother is taken over by Sister Imelda, slipping into the role of the mother figure:

I was happy in my prison then, happy to be near her, happy to walk behind her as she twirled her beads and bowed to the servile nun. I no longer cried for my mother, no longer counted the days on a pocket calendar until the Christmas holidays. (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 129)

Like other mothers in Edna O'Brien's fiction, Sister Imelda is aware of her function as motherly figure and induces the narrator to emulate. Although Sister Imelda confesses that it is awfully hard to be a nun at first (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 137) she encourages her to become a nun, just as a mother would encourage her to get married and have children, so live her life. In *Sister Imelda* it seems as if the nun wants to convince the narrator to confirm that she has chosen the right lifestyle herself. Sister Imelda is selfish, she never encourages the narrator to do anything else. It can somehow be compared to the situation in *The Bachelor*, in which the mother wants her child to experience what she has missed, namely marrying the man she loves in order to be close to him, no matter what her daughter desires; Sister Imelda does not support the narrator to go her own way but tries to push her into becoming a nun. Young girls in Edna O'Brien's fiction do not get the chance to make their own decisions; their role models take over before. They are intruding into their lives, although it has to be considered that in conservative Catholic Ireland only two options were provided for women: either becoming a mother or a nun (Pelan, *Love Objects* 68).

This underpins the national image of Ireland itself. In the aftermath of the Easter Rising of 1916, there was a period when young people searched for a heroic life, because they were disillusioned after the war (MacCurtain 147). There are stark similarities between "Mother Church" and "Mother Ireland", as they are two female images and provide female models of behaviour and identity (Greenwood 18). Women were regarded as docile and submissive, who rarely raised their voice or eyes (MacCurtain 149-50). Nevertheless, the image represented by Sister Imelda is very different from the image usually conveyed in Irish short stories of the 20th century (Graf 106).

As already pointed out, the terms mother and woman were often used synonymously (Haberstroh 14). As the Catholic Church had a strong influence on people's lives, positive associations and connotations were put into the profession of a nun. A woman in this position was compared to Virgin Mary, an perfectly asexual archetype of womanhood, comforting and protective, submissive and domesticated and serving as a mother. Also Pope John Paul II supported this point of view in a speech in 1979, in which he stressed that a

religious vocation has to be given preference to motherhood (Haberstroh 14-15).

Sister Imelda is different from the other nuns because she has spent four years at the university in Dublin. Living abroad, or in Dublin, or any other big city is very daring and fascinating from the perspective of the convent. Many of the nuns never left their town and only know larger cities from narrations. City meant excitement, modernity; it had numerous delights, “[...] clothes, cafés where ice cream was served in long-stemmed glasses and three distinct kinds of coffee” (O’Brien, *Mother Ireland* 79). This is why Sister Imelda is so popular among the pupils. There is something exotic and fascinating about her because of her life in the city, which is also something strikingly modern and a stark contrast to the other nuns of Imelda’s convent:

The girls milled around her, linking her, trying to hold her hand, counting the various keys on her bunch of keys, and asking impudent questions. ‘Sister, did you ever ride a motorbicycle?’ ‘Sister, did you ever wear seamless stockings?’ (O’Brien, *Sister Imelda* 137)

Living outside the convent has made her different, turns her into a role model for many:

Her spell in the outside world made her different from the other nuns; there was more bounce in her walk, more excitement in the way she tackled teaching, reminding us that it was the most important thing in the world [...]. (O’Brien, *Sister Imelda* 125)

The convent offers a new feminist space; even though the convent can also be regarded as a prison for the girls, which is noted by the narrator on one occasion (cf O’Brien, *Sister Imelda* 129). It is a place of development for the young narrator (Saint Peter 161). Therefore, it is natural that a role model, a person she can regard as a person she can relate to and orientate on is searched for in this environment of emotional suppression. She is looking for someone she can trust but also someone who shows her options in life, something she can do later on. It is not surprising that she does not really care about men or family, as this is not something that is demonstrated to her there. She does think about boys but never asks her about them (O’Brien, *Sister Imelda* 130). This is the reason why she thinks about becoming a nun herself

and, finally, promises Sister Imelda to become one. Furthermore, the idea of a life without sexuality, an asexual lifestyle seems appealing to her (Graf 106).

However, she accepts the idea of a life in a convent only as long as she can stay with Sister Imelda. She likes the idea to live with her:

[...] instantly I made up my mind that I would be a nun and that though we might never be free to express our feelings, we would be under the same roof, in the same cloister, in mental and spiritual conjunction all our lives (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 136-7).

This indicates that the protagonist does not only regard the nun as her role model, an ideal she wants to emulate after, but that she also has erotic feelings for her.

The story is told by a rather unassertive first person narrator-protagonist and shows some parallels to the portrayal of a nun in O'Brien's *Mother Ireland*, as it is also set in the west of Ireland where Edna O'Brien grew up herself (Graf 106). The author reports a similar episode from her life in *Mother Ireland*:

'Have you thought of what you are going to be?' she [a nun at her convent school] asked with a certain coyness. Almost flirtatious was she. Oh to please her and win one's way into her hard heart and be invited to do little favours for her, like carrying her book, or opening or closing a window or cleaning the blackboards, oh oh to be her slave!

'A nun,' I said, quicker and more soulful than I had ever said aught. The thought of a vocation danced before me; like a banner, the word waved and with it the vision of a young postulant with a see-through veil, one foot in the world and the other sinking deeper and deeper into the mists of spirituality, towards the "never to be forgotten day" when one would take the final vows and be cut off from the worlds outside, from family, from pleasure, from men, from earthly love, from buses and shops and cafeterias, from life. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 68)

Edna O'Brien and the female protagonist in *Sister Imelda* seem to have the same thoughts and feelings about religious "vocation", about becoming a nun. Becoming a nun means protection from the outside world, but also goes along with certain restraints. Just as the protagonist, O'Brien seemingly wanted to become a nun once, not because she felt a particular vocation but to please her "favourite nun". She even had a cousin being a nun herself who advised her

not to become one: "Once she said no, she would not have lived her life all over again [...]" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 71). When the narrator grows up and actually lives in *that* outside world, being a university student, she knows that it would have been the wrong decision, just as it would have been for Edna O'Brien as she sarcastically points out in this passage. Moreover, the idea of being a traditional housewife is considered to be an alternative option. The awareness of becoming a slave for the nun is very similar to being a slave for a husband, meaning that becoming a nun would have nothing to do with making decisions of one's own, with fighting patriarchy, but more with slavery and devotion from a male shifting to a female partner. Nuns were *the* prototypical image of desexualized women (Lee 42).

The notion of becoming a nun is idealized as the juvenile narrator knows what the future beholds if she decides for living in a convent. Life's meaning is connected to be somebody's odd-job woman, within her development it is not possible to imagine to be an independent individual one day.

Being a "good" pure woman also went hand in hand with self-sacrifice, which could mean self-sacrifice for a husband and the family, but could also be read in religious terms. The girls at the convent were taught this virtue very strictly, because they were even required to impose self-punishment on themselves. Diseases should be regarded as possibilities of gaining spiritual experience, suffering should be regarded as a religious exercise, as a path towards spiritual growth (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 127).

The only female figure in this narration rebelling against the life in the convent is the narrator's friend Baba, who represents a modern feminist point of view. She regards her situation as imprisonment and cannot understand Sister Imelda's decision: " She was a right lunatic, then, Baba said, having gone to university for four years and willingly come back to incarceration, to poverty, chastity, and obedience (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 126)." Baba is developing in several ways by putting the idea of vocation and devotion into question, by dismissing the idea of being someone's slave and by rebelling against the Irish patriarchal ideal. By studying she acquires a good education and is able to

continue her process of self-realization, and to become an independent Irish woman.

However, the milestone on the way to better education for women was already set by the Intermediate Act of 1878, allowing girls to enter civil service and for matriculation into the universities (MacCurtain 147). It is ironic that when better educational opportunities became available to Irish women, just like for Baba decades later, this educational system began to indoctrinate women even more with the prevailing male image of women, also because there were not enough jobs for these highly qualified women (MacCurtain, 148). So many dedicated their lives to the Holy Church, resulting in larger number of nuns by then, teaching girls obedience, docility and resignation according to this (Lee 42).

Baba represents an unconventional female figure, she is an subversive emancipated woman, that turns up several times in Edna O'Brien's fiction, which also has an autobiographical background. The writer once confessed that such a figure forms her "alter-ego", as she had school friends that were like Baba, hence the opposite of herself, that were extrovert and mischievous and she felt drawn towards these opposites (Cahalan 119).

However, it becomes obvious that the change of the traditional social system could not be achieved by either of them. They simply chose the alternative to becoming a nun, namely looking for a husband, "Life was geared to work and to meeting men, and yet one knew that mating could only lead to one's being a mother and hawking obstreperous children out to the seaside on Sunday. 'They know not what they do' could surely be said of us (O'Brien, *Sister Imelda* 142)." A narrative voice from the present, a later self, judges the situation the girls are in. This shows that even though it does not seem to question the system she is living in first, one day, she will. Hence, the intergenerational relationship to Sister Imelda had some influence on her at first, but it was only one step in the development. She undergoes a maturing process resulting in rebellion, which becomes manifest in the feeling of shame when she meets the nun again in the bus many years later, because she is reminded of

her promise to become a nun and had not kept that promise. She might also feel ashamed for the homoerotic feelings she had experienced for Sister Imelda when she was an adolescent girl, which is another parallel to the author's personal experience:

I used to look at my favourite nun and speculate on how much or how little a crop of hair was concealed beneath her guimpe [...]. If her hair grew again it would be like a little thatch of fur. My mind would make such speculation while she asked me how my vocation was coming along, or draw from her pocket a jam tart that she had saved for me. Often I felt we might kiss or that we might cry, but we didn't (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 71).

The short story *Sister Imelda* is full of autobiographical analogies: the wish to become a nun, the substitute of her parents for an older nun, the choice of a role model and the development of an intergenerational relationship, the bisexual feelings, the urge of wanting to know the nun's hair colour. Even the theatre-scene happened in real life as well as the scene of saying good-bye for Christmas holidays, "Then she tickled my toes and we laughed and then it was time to be solemn because we were parting for the Christmas holiday" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 72).

6.3. What Is Love? Romance and Repulsion in Intergenerational Relationships

The first romantic feelings trigger a feeling of insecurity within the protagonists of the following short stories. They either have naïve ideas of love and romance, or they are afraid of even thinking about love. Courtship and match-making were common in rural Ireland, but it was also a taboo, especially when it came to sexuality. For all the protagonists it is no matter of discussion that they will marry one day, but it obviously is not always their own decision who their future husband will be, partly because of a promise between friends, a match made by the parents or because it was merely a dream of a teenage girl in love.

Young girls are inclined to dream of getting married one day, however in mid 20th century Ireland marriage implied a number of things. To a woman, it could mean marrying someone for financial reasons and it definitely meant

becoming a mother one day. It is obvious that the protagonists do not think about this. Nevertheless, not all the relationships with the opposite sex are negative, but they always go along with some kind of disappointment.

6.3.1. "Love-Child"

In this story, Hickey, a farmer is described. His figure is based on a real person that she describes in *Mother Ireland*,

A County Clare farmer – ,I saw Hickey coming over the field and I waved to him. He was driving the cows. They straggled across the field, stopping for a minute, as cows will, to stare idly at nothing. Hickey was whistling and the evening being calm and gentle his song went out across the field. A stranger going the road might have thought it was a happy place. (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland*⁶)

Hickey is a figure recurring in many stories of O'Brien, including *The Connor Girls*. He is always a farmhand and a reliable, amiable person. This is also the case in the short narration *Love-Child*. The narrator shares her memories of Hickey, who was a farmworker whom she truly had loved. The story begins with, "I walked by the river and straightaway fell to thinking of Hickey" (O'Brien, *Love-Child* 154). She likes to think about him because to her he is a very special person, although he is known in the Irish town for his big appetite and his thieving. He steals from other people, but sometimes shares his stolen goods with the narrator's family. In return, he also takes things from them.

Hickey is portrayed as a person full of flaws and weaknesses, but still a very amiable one. He is known all over town not least because of some rumours related to him. One day people had played a trick on him and "invited" him to a wedding, which did not really take place in the end. They knew of his lack of moderation concerning food and alcohol and made fun of this, which hurt his feelings. Furthermore, they said that he had impregnated a local maid, which he denied furiously. Later, the narrator reflects on this and concludes, "Also, in my

⁶ O'Brien Edna. *Mother Ireland*. Norwich: Penguin Books 1976. Cf.p.38 „A County Clare Farmer“.

most secret thoughts it occurred to me that his fury [...] must have meant he was responsible” (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 158). But this is never confirmed, but it is revealed that the pregnant maid had slept with many men in town:

[...] the local men from the cottages whose wives were dead or having babies or in the asylum; the circus people who came a couple of times a year; the black doctor; in fact, anyone, and hence she was called the Bicycle. (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 158-9)

It is remarkable that both the behaviour and sometimes the bad manners of Hickey as well as of the maid are never morally judged. This is due to the fact that the narrator in this story is not a child any more but a grown-up person. It is probably not the thefts, but the fact that there was an extramarital pregnancy in town with the father more or less unknown, would have been described as a scandal by a child-narrator in O’Brien’s short stories. The adult female narrator, however, has a different perspective due to a more mature changed view of life.

However, all the other people in town seem to respect Hickey and appreciate his personality. Finally he leaves for England to take up work in a car factory, because the local farmers could not afford to pay for his services any more. When he leaves, it is a huge loss for the narrator:

I cried for several weeks and used to stay in his room, standing by the little window in order to smell him, feel him, hear him, in order to commune with him. Often I saw his tongue travelling over his verdigris teeth, and so many times saw his big frame come in at the gate below [...]. (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 157-8)

For her, Hickey is a person she is emotionally deeply related to, although it is never really revealed what he did that this relationship got so close, there are only some memories of what they did together. When he comes for a visit in town, she is looking forward to seeing him, but he does not come because he is too drunk. Her mother is sure that his alcoholism got stronger because of his living in England – again, this country is associated with something negative. The girl, however, concludes that “[...] perhaps our house and the driveway and his own little room, now converted into a bathroom, would sadden him and revive too many memories [...]” (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 158), indicating that he

feels about her in the same way as she does for him. They know that they love each other.

Then she hears about his death and decides to go to England, now being a grown up woman. She wanted to go there for years, but never did— possibly out of fear, because a meeting would have evoked the same feelings in both of them as his visit would have many years before. In England, she meets his sister and sees how he had lived the last few years. She describes Hickey as a very caring person, mirrored in one of his hobbies, “[...] there were birds in cages [...]. His sister told me that Hickey had bought them and trained them to sing, and even left their cage doors open to let them taste their freedom” (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 159). This is what he possibly meant to her as well; he took care of her, but at the same time allowed her freedom, which is why their bond could become so strong.

The sister also tells the narrator that on his deathbed he still raved about the people in town, how much he had liked each and every one of them. The protagonist is disappointed that he obviously had never mentioned her:

I said that was impossible, since I was his favourite, since he was in the house at my birth, since he taught me the time and boiled pullet’s eggs for me, and brought me to hurling matches and often gave me Turkish delight. I lost my head, rather, and related some of our daft prattle and our promises to wed one day. (O’Brien, *Love-Child* 160)

They seem to have spent lots of time together. She regards him both as a mentor and teacher, someone who had shown her interesting things and someone with whom she experienced some adventures. Interesting is the fact that they also had promised to marry each other one day. This is not specified any further in the text. It remains open, whether it was just an older man’s promise to a naïve little girl, a very pure and innocent promise, or whether they really had an erotic love relationship. Therefore, her feelings for Hickey never become fully transparent for the reader.

Hickey’s sister is very mad at the narrator, because she knows how important she was to him. He had never forgiven the narrator, and neither did

she, because he stayed in the Irish town for much too long. It had ruined his life and his financial situation was very bad, but he stayed there because he had loved her so much. He had regarded her as his daughter, which he could never have, both because he never married, but also because he could never have afforded children as he stayed with the narrator's family. Still, he never told anyone about these feelings and thoughts.

Instead, Hickey went to England and adopted his own daughter, whom he took out of an orphanage. Obviously, the mother, a maid did not want to be a mother and sent her child into an English orphanage. She became his love-child, but he could never love her in the same way as he had loved the narrator. The narrator claims that she had never known about this and that "[...] love puts ridiculous bonds on people [...]" (O'Brien, *Love-Child* 161). She is upset because she had felt the same way for Hickey, for her he was both a father-figure and her first love. She feels responsible for his unhappy life and is helpless at the same time, because he had never had a word with her about it.

She is sad and thinks about taking a look at the child, because she wants to see whether there are any similarities, but she also reflects at the same time that she would probably only do this because she would like to see him again, for the last time. "I wanted to go downstairs and look into her eyes and see if they were a shiny periwinkle grey like his [...]" (O'Brien, *Love-Child* 161).

She leaves the house with strange feelings. She is sad and furious because she does not have the possibility any more to talk to Hickey about this. She is desperate, because he had hidden his love from her, "[...] all he love that he had borne me seemed no more than a ridiculous pretence" (O'Brien, *Love-Child* 161). She knows that he had loved her that much, but is sad that he could never talk about it. If he had done so, she could have told him that she loved him in the same way, and it makes her most unhappy that she does not have that chance any more.

In *Love-Child*, it is a man who functions as an obvious role model, just as in *Clara*. The difference, however is that this story is told from the female point

of view, revealing the protagonist's feelings towards Hickey. It shows what the male figure had meant to her, and although they were talking about marriage, to her the feelings were innocent and pure. So, any indecent sexual implications can be put aside. Nevertheless, his grief because of not being with her is similar to Jack's reaction in *The Bachelor*, when he finds out that he cannot be together with his love. So the borderlines in this intergenerational relationship between a male role model and a romantic lover are blurred. What is similar to other stories is that one partner feels ashamed, in this case the female narrator, because she thinks she has been responsible for his depression by letting him down.

6.3.2. "The Bachelor"

In *The Bachelor* the relationship between mother and daughter is ambivalent. It is obvious that the narrator's mother is in love with Jack Holland, the owner of a local wine shop, and that she „uses“ her daughter to be close to her lover. The daughter notices that her mother dresses up for Jack when he visits the family, but the grown-up narrator mentions that this is an indication that something went wrong in her mother's life, notably her married life, and her relationship to her husband (Pelan, *Love Objects* 61).

The girl realises that the domestic situation becomes tenser and tenser with each of Jack's visits until he does not come by any more. However, the narrator's mother sends Jack a letter, the content of which the reader can only guess –she apparently promises the girl to the bachelor in return for financial support.

This assumption is confirmed when the girl receives letters from Jack. When she is at boarding school, he sends her money and confesses his love to her when she comes home.

In this case, the mother-daughter relationship is strained, as the mother deceives the daughter and tries to contract her to a man in return for money. The mother wants to be close to Jack, she wants him to play a role in her life,

as she cannot get divorced, nor get separated from him for legal and social reasons. However, she takes the risk of „selling“ her own daughter for her own benefit and advantage.

The narrator does not realize these motives and the state of affairs at the beginning. She only knows that there is a relationship between Jack and her mother that goes beyond friendship. However, she is just able to reveal this after Jack's death:

When he died he left his premises to a cousin who we had never seen and scarcely knew of. Realizing that he had not remembered us at all in his will, and reciting the motto about 'blood being thicker than water', my mother said that she was genuinely surprised that he hadn't left her a decanter or a biscuit barrel. But I think her disappointment was not so much to do with graft as it was deference to hidden romance [...] (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 72).

She does say at the beginning of the narration that Jack loved her mother and that he wanted to catch sight of her when strolling in their fields (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 56), but it does not seem at first that the mother has the same feelings towards him. In this short story, O'Brien never really abjects the desired object and is aware of the profoundly symbolic character of all our desires, which can be demonstrated by several quotations (Coughlan 190):

Did we, I wondered, ever pay him back the money he had given the bailiff? [...] I did not care. Only one thing was uppermost in me and it was flight, and in my fancies I had no idea that not matter how distant the flight or how high I soared, those people were entrenched in me. (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 69)

As I walked down the road and saw the bright red bells of fuchsia and heard the sounds of motorists hooting happily, I thought how untoward his gloom was and how melancholy had cut him off from others. In him I saw a glimpse of my future self. (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 72).

Even though the narrator never wanted to be in a love relationship with Jack, Jack is accepted by her family as friend with whom she has grown up. She sees him frequently and she likes him. He seems to belong to the inner circle of people to whom she is emotionally connected. He allows her to read his poems, although he thinks she is too young for that (O'Brien, *The Bachelor*

56), but he permits lets her play in his wine shop, “I used to catch fleas for him and keep them in a match box, and my reward was a penny and a glass of raspberry wine” (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 55). When thinking about him and telling the story, associations of food, smells, presents and actions come up, just as described by Mason and Tipper when talking about kinship.

It becomes obvious after some time that Jack only treats the juvenile narrator nicely because he wants to be close to the mother. He is not attractive, and so the mother keeps her distance from him at first. But when makes promises to her and gives her presents, she softens and appears to be attracted to him. Jack does not hide his feelings for her. Even the protagonist notices that “their bodies were getting closer to each other, and I thought that if he moved again they would have to touch” (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 58), and at another point “ I saw his figure going down the field, but I didn’t call after him, because I hated him using our cups and being so personal with my mother” (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 59). This makes her feel uncomfortable because she feels that the behaviour of the two adults is morally wrong, but also because she is rather innocent. A touch is something obviously very personal and improper for an acquaintance like this. This is also due to her education, in which anything sexual is banned or anything which has to do with sex or pregnancy, which is why her mother hates the maternity nurse, “[...] as she insisted on describing women’s labors and the different ways their water broke” (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 58).

Jack buys them presents and supports the family financially, when he gives the bailiff the money they owe. Yet the “family-friend” that he seems to her is just than that because of the love affair with her unhappy mother. Her father is a drunkard and likes gambling, although the family cannot afford it because they are heavily in debt (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 57). The father does not care that he is a bad father for his family (O’Brien, *The Bachelor* 62).

Jack is a bachelor living with his sister Maggie, who is a disabled person for whom he has to care. He also obviously never had a love-relationship before, because the protagonist assumes that although he was a middle-aged

man, he never had known a hand clasp or a kiss (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 56). Sexuality is a taboo, because the "worst" thing the protagonist can imagine between the two adults is a kiss. This is why she feels hurt when Jack and her mother talk so intimately with each other and almost touch. Nevertheless, she asks her mother on one occasion whether she prefers him to Dada, meaning her father (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 59), but the mother does not reply and tries to hide her feelings in front of her husband as well as her daughter.

She cannot show her feelings because her husband is jealous already and tends to become violent (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 59). He does not want Jack in the house at all. Although the wine shop owner is not really handsome, it is the situation at home that makes the mother feel more and more attracted to him, because he pays attention to her and worships her. She appears to have a Cinderella-complex (Dowling 21), because she likes to be taken care of by others and sees in Jack her chance to escape somehow from her unhappy and hopeless situation.

The narrator does love her mother, she describes her in detail, her looks and her dressing up. She wants to be like her but she does not want to have the same problems as she has. However, her mother's education is not as good as hers. The narrator's generation has access to higher education, all her siblings are at boarding school.

I thought then that when I grew up if I could be as fetching as my mother I would be certain to find happiness. For some reason I believed that the troubles of her life were an anomaly, and never did it occur to me that some of her fatality had already grafted itself onto me and determined my disposition (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 57).

Her mother's love becomes manifest when she pities her daughter for her father because of his gambling. He endangers the family's home by running into debts. Nevertheless, the mother is torn between her daughter's and her own happiness, as it turns out later.

Interestingly enough, the juvenile narrator already conceives herself as the future breadwinner, announcing when the bailiff was at their house that she will

install the family in a big house one day when she is rich (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 62).

When the mother realises the growing aggression of her husband against Jack she decides to write him a letter in which she appears to promise her daughter to him, in return for a loan, which proposal is accepted by Jack. When Jack's sister dies, the narrator's mother, always referred to as "Mrs. O.", thinks that she can deliver on her promise now "[...] it was a pity that Jack had never married and that perhaps he would now [...]" and "[...] what was a house without a woman [...]" (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 64). The mother claims also half-jokingly that one day her daughter will marry Jack, which obviously offends the narrator/protagonist she is "vexed" that her mother even thought of that (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 65).

From this point onwards Jack gives the girl presents, sends money to the convent where she attends boarding school, as well as letters, which are censored by the nuns. When returning from school Jack, by now about 60, is looking forward to seeing her. She has developed a more sophisticated philosophy of life by now, is more mature and grown up, even criticising life at the convent as cold and unnatural (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 66). In the meantime, Jack has built a house which he likes to show her and then his motivation is revealed, namely that he wants marry her:

'Hallelujah...ours, ours, ours.' He said for long he had envisaged such a scene and only wished he had brought a ring. His mouth and nose were lowered toward my face, and I saw him as a great vampire about to demand a kiss. I struggled out of his arms and ran toward the barbed wire, accusing him of being a horrible man. Either he was too shocked or too ashamed to follow [...] as I looked back, I saw that he was standing as stationary and as forlorn as a poplar tree. (O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 70)

From this moment onwards he avoids the whole family and hides from the people in town, being depressed. When the priest asks Jack why he does not settle down and get married he replies that this is now out of question: "I was betrothed for a long number of years to a certain little lady in this parish, who jilted me. It has embittered my ideals about the opposite sex, it has cauterized me from ever entering on another alliance, indeed, it has ruined my life"

(O'Brien, *The Bachelor* 71). The narrator is embarrassed, but does not regret her decision at all. The mother shows no reaction to Jack's behaviour, only after his death.

In this case, the intergenerational relationship has two different stages: at the beginning, the child narrator sees a family friend in Jack, a person to refer to; later, as a young adult, she views him as man being in love with a much too young woman. He likes the girl very much, but it is out of question that he rather wants to be close to the mother. He accepts an immoral deal made by the mother who is unhappy in her marriage and considers it to be the only chance to be close to him, if her daughter gets married to him. The protagonist is abused as a victim in their love, as a sort of merchandise.

6.3.3. "Courtship"

The love objects in Edna O'Brien's fiction are sometimes mothers and women living in the girl's surroundings. However, there are also young girls depicted in the short stories that make their first experience with the opposite sex. This is the case in *Courtship*, where the narrator, a young girl, yearns for Michael's attention, who is seen by her as god-like creature.

The narrator has naive notions about love relationships, whereas Michael already has experience with other girls. He has a steady relationship with Moira:

That night in a dance hall, girls would vie to dance with him. He had a steady girl called Moira, but when he travelled to hurling matches he met other girls at dances, and for weeks some new girl, some Ellen, or some Dolly, or some Kate, would plague him with love letters. (O'Brien, *Courtship* 98)

He is a „womanizer“, aware of his appeal to the local girls. However, the narrator never considers this character trait. She understands why the girls are yearning for him but never asks herself whether Michael has done his bit for attaining this reputation. This is because sexual matters were not openly spoken of in rural areas and there was a high moral standard. For girls,

premarital virginity was regarded as a treasured value, whereas men were not expected to be as chaste as women before marriage (Arensberg 206).

This is the reason why the young narrator/protagonist is upset when a friend of Michael's tells her describes what Michael does with Moira when they are alone:

,Hasn't he got Moira?' – [...] 'That's a lie' [...] 'Is it!' he said, and boasted how Michael described Moira's arrival, her shyness, her chatter, then her capitulation as he removed her coat, her dress, her underclothes, and she lay there with not a stitch. (O'Brien, *Courtship* 108)

She cannot believe this because neither does it go along with her image of Michael, nor with her notion of love in general. On one occasion the narrator observes Michael's erotic advances when he meets a local girl, Eileen, who is working in Dublin:

He was standing a little behind her; her pleated skirt was raised so that it came unevenly above her knees, and I could see the tops of her legs, the lace of her slip, and her mounting excitement as she stood on tiptoe to accommodate herself to what he was doing. (O'Brien, *Courtship* 104)

The narrator observes what Michael does, so the question comes up why she denies what the friend tells her. It is possible that she does not interpret Michael's behaviour in sexual terms, but it is also possible that she censors what she saw and simply denies it. In her opinion, it is not possible that love or relationships have anything to do with sexual gratification, with men seducing women for sex outside marriage.

The reasons why sexuality has turned into a taboo in Irish society are religious and historical. Apart from Catholic morality, parents were responsible for match making of their children. Their daughters were to be married off to wealthy suitors. Hence, the lovers should not deal with the issue of marriage or love themselves. Such thinking derives from post-famine times, nevertheless they were still in the Irish people's minds in the 20th century.

Sex, therefore, must be denounced as a satanic snare, in even what had been its most innocent pre-Famine manifestations. Sex posed a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family. Boys and girls must be kept apart at all costs. (Lee 39)

Hence, girls got taught to take over a different role, like the narrator. She wants to be perfect for Michael, meaning that she wants to serve him, be the ideal housewife. However, her love for also assumes the attitude of religious devotion. She wants to be adopted by his mother so that she might be his sister and thus be close to him. She does not only have a crush on him, but she wants to serve him. Edna O'Brien herself experienced such feelings, yet for a priest, "How we fussed over him [...] If there is such a thing as the birth of maternal instinct I discovered it that day wanting to do everything for him, even dreaming of washing his feet" (O'Brien, *Mother Ireland* 53).

Although the young narrator, featuring as a maid in Michaels's home, fancies Michael the most, it is also his brothers who flirt with her, William, the oldest brother, asks her to go for a walk with him telling her gossip in town, including a strange mother-daughter constellation. Two women that are supposed to stay in bed all day wearing nightgowns. " 'Do you ever score?' I heard his cousin Tom ask him one morning, and William put his finger to his lips and smiled as if there were sagas he could tell' " (O'Brien, *Courtship* 100). All the boys, not just Michael, try to meet as many women as possible and make a game out of this to demonstrate their manhood, something the protagonist cannot yet understand because of her age and her naivety. She is perceived as still very child-like by others: " 'Who's the little kid?' ", one of Michael's girls asks (O'Brien, *Courtship* 103).

In the end of the story she gets what she wants, a confession of Michael's love, who is apparently shocked how Tom has treated her:

Suddenly he kissed me, and this kiss being a comfort, he followed it with a shower of kisses, embraces, and fond fugitive words. 'I love you,' I said bluntly. 'Ditto,' he said. [...] What had been disgusting and repellent an hour before was now a transport [...]. (O'Brien, *Courtship* 109)

He even promises her to wait for her but she knows that this is not true. Nevertheless, she got what she wanted and is very much in love with Michael.

It is not only the love relationship with Michael that is featured in *Courtship*, but also the narrator's relationship to Michael's mother. Right at the beginning of the narration, the protagonist refers to a poem by Patrick Pearce *The Mother*, which is one of the favourite poems of Michael's mother, Mrs Flynn. It deals with a mother who loses two strong sons in war. Mrs Flynn seems to be such a strong female figure and has likewise lost her youngest son Frank.

She is a businesswoman and owns a shop where she even sells underwear, which "[...] were the subject of much innuendo and mirth" (O'Brien, *Courtship* 99), as well as a mill. She has three more sons, all being handsome and strong.

She is proud of her sons, which also gives her a certain strength. One day the narrator gets the opportunity to work at their place as a maid, "I had yearned to go for many years and at last the chance came, because my sister, who used to go, had set her sights on the city [...]" (O'Brien, *Courtship* 98). At the beginning it is hard for her to stay away from home but then she starts feeling comfortable there.

The mother is respected by the local people because of the loss of one son in the war, her business and her sons. She is widowed, but prefers to remain single, even though men try to attract her attention:

The brothers used to tease her about being a favourite with the sergeant, and though pretending to resent this, she blushed and got very agitated and looked in all directions so as to avoid their insinuations. (O'Brien, *Courtship* 99-100)

Michael's mother is a faithful Catholic, she often prays the rosary for her dead husband and son. The girl goes along with this but is not as concentrated because she thinks of her surroundings and Michael. Nevertheless, she stays with Mrs Flynn praying, which is rewarded by special treats by Mrs Flynn:

Afterward she gave me little biscuits with colored icing and said that I could come for every holiday and stay for the entire length. Saying it, I

think she believed that I would never grew up. I slept with her [...]. That night, perhaps exalted from so much praying, she did not insist that we go to sleep at once but allowed us to chat (O'Brien, *Courtship* 105).

The young maid has become a companion to the elderly woman who is like a daughter to her, one she never has had herself, and the girl enjoys it. When it is her last day at Mrs Flynn's family, the narrator/protagonist even gets a little reward and a crucifix and organizes the date with Tom for her.

Once more, also in this short story, observation plays an important role in the narrator's development. Just like the girl in *The Connor Girls*, there are long descriptions of the "love objects" in *Courtship*, giving information on their looks, their behaviour and their characters. However, they simply are objects of observation, not reflection.

In *Sister Imelda*, the protagonist is friends with Baba, in this narration the protagonist works together with Peggy, the second maid who is hardly mentioned but who chooses a different lifestyle. The narrator is not yet fully grown-up and still longs for becoming someone's wife. She still is naïve and her development towards maturity is still in progress. Peggy is older than the protagonist and has plans of her own about her future. She wants to leave for England, " 'I can't wait to get to England,' Peggy would say, and her version of life there seemed to envisage a world that did not include geese or the necessity to make beds" (O'Brien, *Courtship* 101). Moreover, she does not seem to be impressed by the boys at all.

Hence, in this narration there are several intergenerational relationships, namely a love object, Michael, a sisterly figure, Peggy, and a motherly figure, Mrs Flynn. They represent three different lifestyles to the young maid and protagonist, namely being a wife and mother, when she considers a life with someone like Michael; independence outside Mother Ireland, outside patriarchy and self-fulfilment is represented by Peggy and Mrs Flynn represents the religiously devoted existence of a widow and a single woman.

6.4. “I Do Not Need Anyone” – Intergenerational Relationships from the Adult’s Point of View

The last two short stories are different compared to the others discussed as they are narrated from an adult’s point of view. It shows grown up people who should know who they are, who have made their experiences and already made decisions in and about their lives. They both are already in their forties and fifties, so they are much older than any of the other idols or role-models in the short stories referred to here.

It seems at first sight that they had both lived the life they decided for; Miss Hawkins has travelled the world and has made a lot of experiences and seems tough, she even got separated from her husband. Her adventures make her appear an independent and self-confident woman; thus she is like Jack, who despises the family fathers and men with alcohol problems and is happy that he has never married, watching the couples and families around.

In all of the other cases it is the younger protagonist who learns something from the others. In these narrations, however, it is the other way round. It shows that a person’s identity is never fully developed; there are wishes within both of them that are denied. Miss Hawkins finds out that she is lonely, Jack falls in love despite the negative examples witnessed in his surroundings. It seems as if they can never escape the patriarchal society and its given norms. Miss Hawkins has to pay the bill for the wish of being independent and being a working woman. She is excluded from society, there is no social network she can rely on, she has no husband, nor a family. Although Jack is already in his forties he realises that he wants to get married. This option is to save two lost souls: his and Clara’s.

Ironically, both are much older than the counter-figure they feel so attracted to. Nevertheless, they learn something from this intergenerational relationship and they are also disillusioned – either by themselves or by society.

6.4.1. "Christmas Roses"

The protagonist in *Christmas Roses* is an elderly woman, Miss Hawkins who is aged fifty-five. She is a single woman living alone close to London. She has taught private dancing and worked in a municipal garden to supplement her income and loves taking care of the flowers and the plants, the gardening in general. Miss Hawkins can live a calm life now, because, "according to her she had had lovers of all nationalities, endless proposals of marriage, champagne in every known vessel, not forgetting the slipper" (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 354). Hence, she stands in a stark contrast to all the other female characters of O'Brien presented so far, not only because of her age.

The middle-aged woman is still very concerned about her looks. She works out regularly, but she hardly goes out, only about three times a year. Even though she lives alone, she does not seem lonely, at first. She is a single who lives autonomously and, as many singles do, reflects on her status in a positive way (Baas, Schmitt, Wahl 50). One day, a young man puts up his tent in her garden. She is scared at first, but when she sees him, she is attracted by the young man's appearance although she is furious. "There was a grown boy of twenty or perhaps twenty-one on a mattress, asleep. [...] She noticed at once that he had soft brown hair, white angelic skin, and thick sensual lips" (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 356). She sends him away, which she regrets instantly. She hardly sees anyone and has not got any visitors. Having now met someone triggers in her the desire to see someone regularly and provokes questions in her: "What harm had he been doing? Why had she sent him away?" (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 357). Moreover, she finds the young man fascinating as he spent some time in Africa and she wants to talk about his journeys with him. The more she thinks about him, the more she likes to see him again. She now clearly recognizes the advantages and disadvantages of her single life.

Bearing this in mind, she also wants to go out again, together with a young escort like him, but not to a public house, because that would be vulgar, and drinking is even worse, because "[...] it was the road that led to ruin" (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 357). Alcoholism is obviously something she has made bad

experience with. In this case, however, it is not a drunken father or mother that is introduced, but she rejects alcohol as a matter of principle. The refusal to go out has been engrained in her from religion and religious teaching. The pursuit of pleasure, the evils of modern dress, modern dance, the cinema and indecent literature are all condemned by staunch Catholics. These pleasures were said to destroy traditional Irish Catholic life (Valiulis 154). The protagonist might not be aware of this, but grew up with these rules and constraints.

Being alone does not seem to be difficult for Miss Hawkins, but she has also “vowed never to submit to self-pity” and has written this philosophy down in rules: “ I will know who I am. I will keep my mouth shut. I will learn from everything. I will train every day” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 357). This demonstrates her credo, portraying a woman torn by a conflict of identity. Interestingly enough, all these statements begin with “I will”, showing an intention, but it is not sure whether she really always acts upon those rules. It says, “I will know who I am”, but not “I know who I am”. It seems even though she is portrayed as a strong woman, she is not as firm as she first appears. Also the claim, “I will keep my mouth shut” seems to reflect the impact of patriarchal society, in which women were not allowed to talk freely, or only when asked.

However, she breaks a taboo because her feelings for the young man intensify, especially when he suddenly returns to her house. He turns into a love object for her, because she can both teach him what she knows, but at the same time gets attention in return, also noticing that the young man has a crush on her. She tells him about gardening, which he listens to patiently and he takes her out to the theatre, although she wants to reject the invitation at first, “She frowned and said could he not ask someone younger, someone in his own age group, to which he said no” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 358). She knows that it is breaking a taboo when she goes out with him, but her suggestion that she should find someone else to be taken out appears not convincing.

She enjoys going to the theatre with him and they both share an interest in plays, especially as he wants to become an actor, which is the reason why he

came to London in the first place. Going out together as friends ends up in a rendez-vous, showing his affection for her:

As an escort he was utter perfection. [...] He admired how she looked, he helped remove her shawl, he had already bought a box of chocolate truffles and was discreetly steering her to the bar to have a drink. [...] He radiated happiness. (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 358-9)

Miss Hawkins enjoys his companionship as much as he obviously does hers. After the play they talk about jealousy, which she claims she is no longer suffering from. The young man finds that interesting and wants to be taught how not to become jealous any more. For him, Miss Hawkins is both an attractive woman with experience, and a teacher. She is the perfect combination of mother, lover and older sister, as she can offer him a mother's comfort, an older sister's advice and a lover's love. Although she is pictured as an independent woman with experience of any kind – she even danced naked in front of others (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 362), she also is prudish. When he tries to touch her hand in public, she draws it back and is apparently offended by the indiscretion (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 359). She develops more and more into a two-layered personality, one being independent and modern, the other one being prudish, shy and conservative.

As time passes by, the mother figure becomes more prominent than the role of the older sister and the lover. She takes care of his clothes, does the mending for him and tries to persuade him to choose a macrobiotic diet (O'Brien, *Christmas Roses* 360). Their intergenerational relationship has changed, however, and she cannot decide whether she wants to be more of a mother or more of a lover to him. When he tells her that he has to leave his flat she asks him to move in with her, which he immediately agrees on and offers him to stay as long as he wants. Bearing this in mind, she prepares for this, she asks herself what she can cook for him, but at the same time wants to improve her appearance. This situation overstrains her, as she gets more and more torn between the role of the mother and that of the lover, but she wants to be both. Nevertheless, the thought of him moving in with her makes her feel happy and as alive as a twenty-year old girl. "But then, thoughts of insecurity cross her

mind, “[...] Supposing he changes his mind, or supposing he brings his horrid friends. [...] Supposing he did not arrive” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 363).

This brings up memories of the time she had been disappointed, the many love relationships in the past that did not work out, with engagements broken off. And there are memories of a former marriage. Once more, the independence of a modern woman’s life suggested at the beginning of the story is seen in relative terms. Miss Hawkins is not any longer the all-admired woman who has travelled the world and was proposed to many times, but more the female who was left and disappointed too often. All these thoughts scare her because she does not want to be left again: “She could not bear to see him leave, even leave amicably” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 363). She does not want to be alone any more, left alone and lonely. Having met someone like this young man actually made her realise what she has really been longing for in life.

So, she decides against him moving in, even before he arrives and leaves a note telling him never to return to her place again. She realises her solitude and visits a friend whom she had promised to see for ages, being confident with her decision: “The most stupid thing would have been to welcome him in” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 364).

It remains unclear which of the feelings in her were stronger, those of her lover or of the mother, but the same can be said for the young man. He obviously feels attracted to her, but it is obvious that he seeks a mother figure as well. Being a young drama student in an obviously foreign city might make him miss his home, his parents. An older woman to rely on, someone to lean on, finding a role model or an older person to refer to is a natural reaction. It cannot be told whether he only wants to make use of her, but it is obvious in the end that he was relieved when she offered him to stay. But it is left open how he responds to her final decision.

The intergenerational relationship they have is a symbiosis, because she can try out her mother role and forget her solitude for a while and he has both a

mentor and a person he can look up to and lean on. Only in *Clara* a similar relationship is portrayed, concerning the motives of the relationship and the age difference, although the young man is not underage any more, which would make a love relationship legally possible. But as Miss Hawkins is much older than him, it would break more taboos. She is aware of that and knows that she acts wrongly; there are no other (town) people who interfere and judge their special relationship. In addition, their relationship remains innocent out of their own motivation. Having someone emotionally that close, however, makes Miss Hawkins change her former lifestyle and she turns to other people, and realises that she needs a social network and friends in the future.

The setting of the story is not explicitly stated. But Mrs Hawkins lives close to London, but it is not disclosed if she has lived there all her life. Bearing her lifestyle in mind it seems impossible that she could have behaved like this in Ireland. She seems to be one of the female emigrants to England, had to move to Great Britain to live a life according to their dreams and liberal ideals.

The only other living things she has paid so much attention to before were her plants, burning the fallen leaves, the past; and enjoying the blooming flowers, she has put much effort into, “Indeed, there was not a day throughout all of autumn when there was not a bonfire in Miss Hawkin’s municipal garden. And not a month without some blooms. At Christmas was she not proud of her Christmas roses [...]?” (O’Brien, *Christmas Roses* 355). Bearing this in mind, the young man was like a Christmas rose she could raise and look after, she wanted to see him bloom.

6.4.2. „Clara“

Clara is, together with *Tough Men*, the only work of fiction by Edna O’Brien which is not narrated from a female perspective (Pelan, *Connemara Dietrich* 35). It is narrated by a male first person narrator called Jack, although his real name is Jan. He is about forty, unmarried, already grey-haired and has a beard (O’Brien, *Clara* 146). He works in a factory, which he does to earn a living, but does not really like it. The only female person he has regular contact with is his

landlady. But he does not have any sexual feelings for her. He describes her as a warm, comfortable person:

She is a large buxom woman who must have been a beauty once. [...] Her eyes are the softest green. In fact they are like greengages and as big as that. She wears a lot of perfume and the house is redolent with the smell of that and the smell of porter. The perfume is eau de cologne. I saw the bottle on the kitchen shelf beside her knitting and her prayer book. (O'Brien, *Clara* 147)

As many of O'Brien's characters, he is an observer, describing his surroundings, things and people he feels close to. The landlady Mrs Rogers is "his" human contact, and she seems like a replacement for a mother, even though he is already a grown up person. Still, he needs a person he can feel close to, even if it is in only a platonic way. She is also alone and childless and seeks his company to talk to.

Jack, like many other characters in O'Brien's fiction, feels the urge to leave home one day. His wish is to go to Africa, because he cannot stand the life in cold Ireland any more (O'Brien, *Clara* 146). He criticises the situation around him, the misery and bingles living in the neighbourhood. Even more, he even watches them critically, their unhappy marriages, drinking bachelors, the unhappy housewives and the mean children (O'Brien, *Clara* 148). Hence, he stands in a stark contrast to all the other male figures drawn by O'Brien, as he does not drink, he loves nature and long walks – and he has a name. But throughout the narration it turns out that he is interested in living in a partnership. Single men often reflect their status as negative and want to change it, curiously enough more often than single women (Baas, Schmitt, Wahl 51).

On one of his walks he sees a beautiful house, which he takes a closer look at, where he has a frightening experience, seeing the pale face of a woman in one of its windows, scaring him to death. The next day he has an accident and breaks a shoulder. He gets a visit by the local doctor, who treats him in a fatherly way. They have drinks together and the old man tells him about his life, the misery with his children:

His wife barged from morning till night, his beautiful daughter was a kleptomaniac and had stolen cosmetics from the chemist, his eldest son who was in a most expensive boarding school could not put two and two together [...] 'The skeletons in the cupboards, Mick' [...] Religion he insisted was the opiate of the people. But as he said, 'Mum is the word, mum is the word, Mick.' (O'Brien, *Clara* 155)

He portrays in this passage the life in the town, which consists of unhappy marriages, blind devotion to religion and mother figures, who are in a position of social power, even though women as such were not. He then tells him about the creepy house he had seen, "Tintrim", in which a doctor has an asylum and a private practice. However, this house is said to be haunted (O'Brien, *Clara* 156). The mother of the lunatic living there is called Lena. She obviously evokes some feelings in the doctor, which make Jack assume that he might have loved her once (O'Brien, *Clara* 157). In all of the other stories we have women with unfulfilled wishes and missed chances. In *Clara*, there finally is a male person who did not get what he wanted, the life he wanted. Because of his age and position he is a person of respect, also for Jack. It seems as if he wants to give him advice by telling his misery:

When he decided to leave I had to get out of bed and help him up [...]. I forgot about my shoulder and walked with him in my pyjamas up the cobbled street towards his own house. It was one of those lovely hushed winters [...] when two men are just seen to stagger home and joke about heads which on the morrow will be no joking matter. (O'Brien, *Clara* 157)

Then, one day, he has to take Mrs Rogers to St Mary's, a mental hospital. At first, he does not like to go there because of bad childhood memories: "I had to go once as a child and got overwrought there" (O'Brien, *Clara* 159). There, he has the sensation of seeing faces like the one that scared him days ago, which makes him feel uncomfortable. Mrs Rogers is there to see Clara, whom she introduces to Jack, who is immediately fascinated by her:

I saw Clara and I tell you I had to hold on to the back of a dining chair to give myself some semblance of steadiness. She was like a little torch – pale faced, golden, fairy-like. These words are not improper. She was sucking a little gold cross, the very picture of youngness, and wrongedness. I felt when I saw her that it was as if some terrible mistake had happened. She had no business there. (O'Brien, *Clara* 161)

Although Jack does not know why Clara is in the asylum, he obviously feels attracted to her. The young girl also opens up when she meets him. She

starts talking, which she usually does not do. He paints pictures for her and decides to visit again. In the small town people start talking, they say that he would be baby-snatching (O'Brien, *Clara* 163). He feels that she was silenced and not that she did not speak because she did not want to, "the saddest thing was that one knew from the eyes that there were things she wanted to say, badly say" (O'Brien, *Clara* 163). He brings poems for her to read, as well as cake. It seems as if he wanted to court the much younger girl. "She was thrilled to see me. She ran from her basketwork and smiled as if she were hugging me" (O'Brien, *Clara* 164). Together with her responsible nurse they decide to take her out. She reacts like a typical teenager and even dresses up to go to the woods and puts on make up. This shows that she also feels attracted to Jack.

Then, she suddenly runs away and is gone. This evokes a feeling of insecurity to the male protagonist, because this is the first time he actually realises that Clara is a lunatic. He learns that she had tried before to commit suicide. He is worried and feels guilty. Fortunately, he finds her in the woods. She thinks of her escape more as a funny escapade than that she has done anything wrong. She apologises, " 'I'm only young' " (O'Brien, *Clara* 167) and when she sees a mistletoe she kisses him:

It is her - overanimated, tomboyish – trying to ask forgiveness. Yet instantly she was ashamed of what she had done. Her face was an image of shame and her eyes were on the verge of overflowing. She threw the mistletoe to the ground. I picked another piece and put it in her buttonhole. Then I kissed her to give some complexion to the event and it was all quite different. It was not a playful kiss at all. The outer skin of her lips clung to mine a second longer than was appropriate. [...] I held her. [...] Noone had held her for a long time. (O'Brien, *Clara* 167-8)

This is the point in the story, where the intergenerational relationship between Clara and Jack gets a new dimension, namely turning from a feeling of closeness into a love relationship. They feel awkward, but at the same time they both are confident that what they did is not wrong. Jack's feelings for her increase, he can feel her presence, her energy, something he has not felt for years. To the others in the asylum, especially to the staff, he appears like a benevolent uncle, but not like a lover (O'Brien, *Clara* 168).

Clara gets punished for her behaviour in the woods, nevertheless, she seems to be more vital. She writes letters to strangers as future pen-pals and she writes looking for employment, to be a lady's companion or an understudy to a lady on the stage. This thought rends Jack's heart. Clara obviously wants to start working, so showing more vital signs than many other girls of her age in these surroundings or in town probably did. Although she is declared crazy, she shows similarities to other female figures in O'Brien's short stories, namely dreaming of a future of independence and freedom.

Then, Jack finds out that Clara is actually not a madwoman at all. She has been declared to be one by her only brother, a doctor in the town of Tintrim. Nobody knows however, what the reason was for this decision, but it is told that she tried to strangle his wife. This is when Jack receives anonymous messages warning him to stay away from the underage girl. He becomes aware that people and town start noticing his feelings concerning Clara, which some obviously find perverse, some support him and confirm his impressions. But he is sure that he has done nothing wrong, as he does "all for Clara" (O'Brien, *Clara* 171). He learns that she used to get along very well with her mother, who is depicted as the ideal housewife, although has been criticized that she never sent her daughter to school, thinking the girl is not intelligent enough.

Jack then visits her brother, who immediately knows who he is and calls him names, " 'You swine' " (O'Brien, *Clara* 174). Her brother is a very cold man, accusing him of being harmful to his sister. Then suddenly, Jack suggests the following:

'I could marry her,' I said. Not even to myself had I made that kind of statement. I was engaged once but it was cancelled due to a piece of destiny. Since then I enjoyed the monastic life. [...] 'She is below the age of consent,' he snarled. 'Not for long,' I said [...] (O'Brien, *Clara* 175).

His courage and obviously also his feelings for Clara, which the brother is not pleased at, surprise him. Jack is portrayed as an innocent character, almost feminine in his features. He is both lover and fatherly figure, because he has lived a "proper" life since his last engagement, never turned into a drunkard or took advantage of women, but sees his destiny in Clara, as if they were star-

crossed lovers. The weird twist to this situation is that Clara is still an underage girl and he is nearly twice as old, which gives him a position of power and dominance in this intergenerational relationship. Nevertheless, Clara is a good match because she owns a huge house and lands worth over a hundred thousand pounds, which also guarantees social security (O'Brien, *Clara* 175).

Clara's brother is threatening that he will lock her away for good. Once more, Jack turns himself into a saviour-figure as he begs for her freedom, offers him that he can have the house and the grounds, promises that he will look after Clara and send her to university in France and would even stop seeing her (O'Brien, *Clara* 176).

Then the doctor's dark secret is revealed – his wife actually is the madwoman, who he had hidden away from the public. Clara knows this dark secret, which is why he had hidden her away in the first place:

A crazed woman tugged at my collar while a lather of curses issued from her tongue. I thought ridiculously that that was why I had never married. [...] I may be exaggerating but her will to harm me was something other than hate, it was desire gone very wrong, it was desire that was choking and thwarting her. I realised how jealous she was of Clara, and of me, of life, of happiness just as I realised how unhappy she was. (O'Brien, *Clara* 176).

It remains open, whether Jack will manage one day to marry Clara, but having seen the doctor's mad wife, he is even more determined to free her from her brother and her mad sister in law.

Jack, or actually Jan, is a very interesting male figure. He is both a fatherly figure to Clara as well as a lover. His outlook on life seems to be progressive, as he wants to free her from her dominant brother and even sacrifice her wealth to be with her. He also wants to offer her good a education and loves her so much that he would even give up his desire to be with her, just to attain her freedom. He stands in a stark contrast to all the other adult figures in O'Brien's fiction, namely as someone to rely on, someone strong. It is possible, though that his reliability can be regarded in relative terms as he addresses the reader in the story, "[...] and, oh dear reader, [...]" (O'Brien,

Clara 176), which indicates the possibility that he portrays himself better than he actually is. But this cannot be confirmed. The only odd fact is that he is twice as old as his love object, giving this intergenerational relationship an unpleasant taste. Because of the difference in age, he will always be in the position of the saviour figure and the one with much more experience – which would, of course, be a better one than her life in the asylum, but might after all end up in a different kind of imprisonment.

Even though there are not any hints in the story that the narrator is unreliable, from a neutral point of view, it is Clara's only chance to escape the asylum. Jack represents a male ideal and it cannot be denied that Clara loves him, because he pays attention to her and looks after her. So, the relationship offers opportunities to each of them, namely getting married and, for Clara, getting out of the asylum. Hence, their intergenerational love relationship has also a practical side.

7. Conclusion

No matter if the intergenerational relationship is one between mother and daughter, a young girl and an older girl or woman, a girl and a boy, or man, or the other way round, they all have something in common: the partners in the relationship influence each other's way of life. An intergenerational relationship has not only an effect on the younger partner, but is always mutual, affecting the older generation as well.

The younger ones learn from the older generation, they find out which behaviour they like and which one they dislike. They observe their role models and later judge their behaviour, reject and accept life-styles, values and ideas. The younger partner uses the older partner to develop his/her identity and personality as to become an adult.

Although the adults in these relationships are expected to function as role models and care-takers, it becomes obvious that being a grown-up person does not automatically mean that they are perfect. Adults will make mistakes, they misbehave, they are selfish and often make use of their superior status and power. At the same time, they have to face the fact that being confronted with someone who is not fully developed in psychological terms also involves the danger of finding out that their quest for an identity of their own is not yet completed. They do realise that they have an effect on the younger ones and they enjoy their admiration, so they try to live up to their expectations.

This is a challenge for them: they know they have to be sure about their own feelings towards the young adolescents. Any intergenerational relationship has a special impact on the individual identity of the two partners involved. Hence, this relationship obviously has an impact on adults, too.

The younger partners in the intergenerational relationships are often disillusioned when they spend much time together with their older role models. Sooner or later they realise that they got to know just one aspect of a complex concept of identity. Someone who seems to be divine, pure, good, fascinating in

the beginning becomes more “human” in the course of time, as mistakes and imperfections become manifest. In some instances, the whole intergenerational relationship is questioned and ultimately dissolved.

Disillusionment is one of the reasons why all intergenerational relationships in Edna O’Brien’s short stories are fragile. So the intergenerational relationships only serve a purpose temporarily, as long as both partners need each other or benefit from one another. In all the instances, one partner is always in a more powerful position – consciously or unconsciously. This position of power is even more stressed when it comes to sexual attraction between the two intergenerational partners.

The portrayal of intergenerational relationships in O’Brien’s fiction also reflects the changes within one or two generations in Ireland in mid 20th century. There always is someone in the narration who belongs to the older or the parent’s generation, representing conservative moral values. It is not surprising that mother figures and other role models belonging to patriarchal Irish society were rejected. As the quote at the beginning of my thesis says, “You cannot teach values. You can only exemplify them through your own life”, the younger generation was expected to live up to traditional values. The young characters of the 1960s and 1970s wanted to define values for themselves and rejected conventional morality and religious values and wanted to develop a new and independent way of life.

The intergenerational relationships featuring in Edna O’Brien’s short fiction depicted in this thesis do not last because the characters involved in it are not equal in age nor in social status. One of them always is in a position of power, nevertheless, it tells them something about their identity. Furthermore, the younger generation is able to take decisions independently because of the cultural, political and social changes in Ireland. By conveying progressive thoughts of this kind in her fiction, Edna O’Brien advocated moral liberation and redefined the notion of Irish womanhood.

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10. Abstract

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit intergenerationellen Beziehungen in ausgewählten Kurzgeschichten der irischen Autorin Edna O'Brien. Zunächst wird auf den soziologischen und historischen Hintergrund eingegangen, der für das Verständnis literarischer Darstellungen und Interpretationen notwendig ist.

Im Irland des 20. Jahrhunderts hatte die Frau eine einzigartige Stellung, der Wert der Mutterschaft war sogar in der Irischen Konstitution von 1937 festgelegt. Die Rolle der Mutter war von höchstem Wert und sollte keinesfalls durch berufliche Tätigkeiten außerhalb des Haushalts gestört werden. Dies ging so weit, dass die Worte für „Mutter“ und „Frau“ synonym verwendet wurden. Im Laufe des Jahrhunderts wurde diese Einstellung immer häufiger kritisiert, weswegen in den 70er Jahren Frauenrechtsbewegungen entstanden, die sich für die Emanzipation und Gleichberechtigung einsetzten. Frauen verliehen diesem Unmut auch mittels Literatur ihre Stimme, so wie die Autorin Edna O'Brien, die sich aufgrund der frauenfeindlichen Verhältnisse in Irland für ein Leben in England entschied.

Neben den soziopolitischen Aspekten wird kurz auf die psychologische Entwicklung des Kindes im Hinblick auf Bezugspersonen eingegangen. Es wird erläutert, warum die Mutter bzw. die Eltern für das heranwachsende Kind eine wesentliche Rolle spielen und aus welchen Gründen diese dann im fortgeschrittenen Jugendalter gegen neue Bezugspersonen aus verschiedensten Altersgruppen ersetzt werden. Die alte Rollendefinition und die traditionelle Einstellung zur Mutterrolle und Familie spielen dabei eine wichtige Rolle, da auch diese Werte hinterfragt werden. Die intergenerationellen Beziehungen spielen also nicht nur auf der emotionalen Ebene eine Rolle, sondern dienen auch der Emanzipation des Kindes von Traditionen und dem Streben nach Gleichberechtigung. Die vorliegenden Kurzgeschichten zeigen eine starke Resonanz auf diese Änderungen und geben Einsicht in das Leben von Kindern und Jugendlichen, die zu dieser Zeit aufwuchsen.

Die Literaturanalyse und –interpretation stellt einerseits die heranwachsenden Erzählerinnen in den Mittelpunkt, andererseits Erwachsene in einer intergenerationellen Beziehung. Anfangs wird das Verhalten des Elternhauses aus Bequemlichkeit und Gewohnheit kopiert, dann jedoch zunehmend hinterfragt. Alte, traditionelle Werte im Sinne der Irischen Konstitution, die im ländlichen Irland stärker und länger vorherrschten, stehen im Konflikt mit der progressiven Moderne, was dazu führt, dass die Erzähler in einem Interessens- und Identitätskonflikt stehen. Meist erfolgt eine Zurückweisung des alten Gedankenguts, was Gefühle der Abneigung oder gar des Hasses in den Protagonisten hervorruft; oft gegen die Personen, die auf diese alte, streng katholische und konservative Art leben.

Die sozialen Paradigmen und Werte, die die Stellung von Frauen ideel und historisch konstruiert haben, sind in Edna O'Briens Kurzgeschichten von wiederkehrender Bedeutung. Die Gegenüberstellung dieser Werte manifestieren sich in den Partnern der intergenerationellen Beziehungen: Jung und Alt, modernes und konservatives Irland stehen sich gegenüber, während die Protagonisten versuchen – mehr oder weniger erfolgreich – sich von vorgegebenen Rollen zu lösen. Edna O'Brien beschreibt diesen Konflikt in einer Vielzahl ihrer Kurzgeschichten und dokumentiert damit die Entstehung der neuen, jungen und progressiven irischen Gesellschaft.

11. Curriculum Vitae

SCHULISCHE UND UNIVERSITÄRE AUSBILDUNG

- 1993-1997 Volksschule "St. Marien", 1060 Wien
- 1997-2001 Gymnasium "Mater Salvatoris", 1070 Wien
- 2001-2006 HBLA XIII, Zweig: Fremdsprachen und Wirtschaft
- 2006-dato Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien
- 2007-dato Studium der Komparatistik an der Universität Wien

PRAKTIKA

- 2004 Praktikum im Hilton Vienna
- 2006 Praktikum bei Bawag
- 2006 Praktikum bei Raiffeisen

BERUFSERFAHRUNGEN

- 2008-2011 Jugendleiterin der Katholischen Jugend Wien
- 2011-dato Koordinatorin für diözesane Großprojekte der Katholischen Jugend Wien

WEITERE AUSBILDUNGEN UND QUALIFIKATIONEN

- 2006 Peer Mediation
- 2006 Certificat de français professionnel (Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Paris)
- 2008-2010 Fernkurs für Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der STUBE (Studien- und Beratungsstelle für Kinder- und Jugendliteratur)
- 2011-2012 WIFI Lehrgang "Projektmanagement"
- 2012 Grundlagenkurs "1x1 des Journalismus" der KMA

EHRENAMTLICHES ENGAGEMENT

2007-dato Pfarrgemeinderätin der Pfarre Gumpendorf St.Ägyd
(Schwerpunkte Organisation und Kinder/Jugend)

2008-dato Firmbegleitung

2012-dato Pfadfinderleiterin

FREMDSPRACHEN

- Englisch (C1)
- Französisch (B2)