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A JAIL OR A REFUGE: CATHOLIC CONVENT EDUCATION IN KATE O'BRIEN'S *THE LAND OF SPICES* AND EDNA O'BRIEN'S *THE COUNTRY GIRLS*

Abstract

This article sets out to explore how the two Irish authors, Kate O'Brien (1897-1974) and Edna O'Brien (b. 1930), convey Catholic convent education in their novels, The Land of Spices (1941) and The Country Girls (1960) respectively. Drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of the „ideological state apparatuses" which subtly but continually control the everyday lives of individuals, this paper argues that in the chosen texts Catholicism and Catholic convent education largely function as an ideological and repressive social force in twentieth-century Ireland. Kate O'Brien's representation of convent life is, however, in many ways much more subtle than Edna O'Brien's unsympathetic and down-to-earth portrayal of the education at the hands of nuns. What is common to both authors and what situates these two novels in the same ideological and cultural context is that they use the representation of this particular educational apparatus to the same end, in order to offer strong critics Irish Catholicism of their time.

Key words: convent education, Catholicism, ideology, repression, Althusser, state apparatuses

In Ireland, a country which for most of the twentieth century was characterized by the tacit but firm alliance between Church and State and a strict Catholic ethos, convent education for girls was seen as self-evident. Irish girls were sent to austere Catholic convent schools where they were taught by nuns who acted as strong enforcers of the religious doctrine. Submission, subservience, assiduousness and passive suffering were only some of the values promoted by them, and made part and parcel of every Irishwoman's child- and girlhood years. Irish journalist Nuala O'Faoilain, convent-educated in the forties and fifties, argues that at the time the nuns were certainly the most powerful women in Ireland but completely out of touch with the secular reality. When O'Faolain was about to leave school, she got advice from the head nun that she never really understood: „She... advised me, earnestly, that in whatever situation I might find myself I should think what the Virgin Mary would have done and do the same" (*Are You Somebody?,* 1996:, 37). She also admits to „have never found an authentic, truthful relationship" to them ("My Memoirs", 2002: 596). O'Faolain's testimony is almost graphically illustrated in an excerpt from Eithne Strong's long poem *FLESH...The Greatest Sin*. Young students were supposed to stand in awe of the nuns and dutifully obey the orders of the stern life in convent schools in mid-twentieth century Ireland:

> ... Rosaries were constant diet,
> Hail Mary, Holy Mary. Purest of the pure, Mary:
> Everyone is to know the awful need for purity.
> …
>
> Never *never* offend the Immaculate Conception.
> What does conceived without sin mean?
> Isn't it plain – it means what is says.
>
> … Remember the sixth commandment
> Thou shalt not commit adultery.
> What is adultery? Hold your tongue
> And learn obedience. Mortify the flesh,

> That is the enemy; not to be pampered,
> Scourge it so that you may not fall into eternal fire.
>
> ...
> Imagine that punishment and realise then how much better
> To punish yourself now; polish harder, go hungrier;
> Be glad you are cold; cold and purity combine;
> Welcome the sweat of heavy labour, it washes you pure;
> Remember purity is supreme; to be virgin
> There is nothing higher for a woman. (1993: 15-16)

Girls were not expected to develop an inquisitive mind and certainly not to ever question Catholic dogma, especially those issues regarding purity and the untouchable Immaculate Conception. Abnegation of flesh was their daily mantra. As Marina Warner lucidly observes, „far from remaining a privileged state undertaken by a few women of vocation" accepting Virgin Mary as the ideal of femininity mostly resulted in virginity and chastity becoming „general condition of sinlessness applicable both to the married and unmarried" (2000: 77). Generations of convent-educated girls in Ireland were to become women, future wives and mothers mostly unable to cope with the unattainable Virgin Mother ideal as the only acceptable model of womanhood.

Drawing on the philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of the „ideological state apparatuses" which subtly but continually control the everyday lives of individuals, this paper argues that Catholic convent education largely functioned as a repressive social force in twentieth-century Ireland. In his famous essay, Althusser points out that in contemporary society the force that has been installed in the dominant position is exactly the educational ideological apparatus (2006: 103). What is peculiar about the Irish context, however, is that for most of the twentieth century Catholicism as a repressive force had enormous impact on virtually every aspect of life. It completely permeated not only the social forces of school and family, but also the political and cultural state

apparatuses. Irish citizens were supposed to live both their public and private lives within a strict Catholic moral framework. Observed in the light of Althusser's thesis, the Irish were deeply „steeped" in, that is, subjected to the ideology of the Irish Catholic Church. The particularly close link between religion and education produced a double effect, as it were. As an area of vital importance in which the state was too hesitant to intrude, the educational ideological state apparatus remained under the huge influence of the religious hierarchies for most of the last century. Althusser argues that this apparatus „takes children from every class at infant-school age", and then „for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable,' squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus," it instils „a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology ... or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state" in them (2006: 104).

How convent education for girls is „wrapped" in the ruling ideology of the Irish theocratic state is demonstrated in the novels of the two prominent twentieth century Irish female writers: the groundbreaking *The Country Girls* (1960) by Edna O'Brien (b. 1930), and *The Land of Spices* (1941) by Kate O'Brien (1897-1974).[1] However, it has to be noted first that the ways these two authors convey girls' convent boarding-school life differ in many respects. Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* is set entirely in the enclosed space of a convent school in the initial decades of the twentieth century, a world whose ins and outs the author is well acquainted with and which she describes lovingly and in detail. As Eibhear Walshe claims, the author's own convent education on which she largely draws on in this novel gave her a lot of confidence, but, to a certain extent, it also limited her. The result was that, in invoking the atmosphere of convent life, Kate O'Brien „never came to question the authority of the nuns or acknowledge the underlying power structures and exactions of religious life" (2006: 19). On the other hand, in the first book of her *Country Girls Trilogy*[2], Edna O'Brien undoubtedly points a finger at the

1 The two writers are not related. For the sake of clarity I will use both name and surname of each writer throughout the article.

2 Edna O'Brien published the trio of novels in the course of four years: *The Country Girls* (1960), *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964). The trilogy was

unsympathetic nuns as some of the most severe enforcers of oppressive religious ideology in mid-century Ireland. It is not until her protagonists, the teenage Kate Brady and Baba Brennan, enter a convent school that they become more fully aware of numerous mindless restrictions Irish society and the Catholic Church impose on girls and women. Whereas Kate O'Brien's Anna Murphy, one of the two main protagonists of the novel and the embodiment of the author herself as a child, spends ten, mostly happy and fulfilled years at *La Compagnie de la Sainte Famille* (*The Community of the Holy Family*), the three year period covered by Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* is conveyed as gloomy and desolate for both girls, especially for the rebellious Baba.

Nevertheless, what is common to both authors and what situates these two novels in the same ideological and cultural context is that they use the representation of this particular educational apparatus to the same end, to undermine the Catholicism of their time. It comes as no surprise then that both novels were immediately proscribed by the Irish Censorship Board, yet another instance of Althusserian (cultural) ideological state apparatus.[3] Kate O'Brien's subversion is far more subtle and moderate than that of her younger colleague, as she combines her positive personal experience of being educated at the hands of nuns at the Laurel Hill convent school in Limerick with the open animosity towards Irish Catholicism. In the character of the other main protagonist, Reverend mother to the convent school, Mere Marie-Helene, she offers somewhat (sometimes perhaps too) idealized alternative to the unyielding religious ideology. It is significant that *The Land of Spices*

accompanied by an epilogue in 1987. I am here using the 1988 omnibus edition with the epilogue (*The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*, London: Penguin Books, 1988).

3 *The Land of Spices* was immediately banned due to a sentence which invokes a homosexual relationship ("She saw Etienne and her father, in the embrace of love" (2006, 165).) Irish journalist Brian Fallon bluntly terms this act of censorship a „piece of official stupidity" (1998, 202). The novel was un-banned five years after its publication, in 1946, whereas *The Country Girls Trilogy* remained blacklisted for a much longer period of time. Edna O'Brien was heavily stigmatized as a „smear on Irish womanhood" who allegedly offended both the Catholic Church and Irish women. Her local community went as far as to burn „heretic" copies of her books in „the chapel ground" (Carlson, 1990: 76, 72). It is not surprising that both authors were driven into exile. Kate O'Brien lived in London for some time, and Edna O'Brien has lived there ever since her early trio of books was banned.

can be read in the context of religious women countering the bigoted Irish Catholicism both at the beginning of the twentieth century (when the narrative takes place) and in the early stages of the young Irish state (when O'Brien actually wrote the book). In this way, Kate O'Brien's invented version of Irish Catholicism, almost completely disengaged from the official religious discourse, paradoxically subverts what she saw as deeply wrong in the dominant state and religious ideology in Ireland of both periods.

Interestingly enough, for the first time in her fiction, Kate O'Brien decided not to have an Irish but English heroine, someone with an outsider's perspective on Irish life. Throughout the novel, the tacit hostility between Mere Marie-Helene Archer and Ireland is mutual. She fails to comprehend the constricted Irish view of Catholic faith, and feels awkward and out-of-place in the country she considers only in terms of „Irish exile" (*The Land,* 2006: 55). What is more, the convent of French provenance placed in the middle of Ireland is branded „too European for present-day Irish requirements" (*The Land,* 2006: 220). With its English Reverend Mother, it is considered to be a thorn in the Irish Catholic Church's side.[4] Her own non-Irish origins, excellent knowledge of European art and literature to which her erudite father, a widely read scholar and an expert in seventeenth-century English religious poets, exposed her in childhood make her continuously stand out in her dull surroundings.[5]

It is therefore quite obvious that her intelligent and justifiable non-Irish Reverend Mother acts as a powerful lens through which Kate O'Brien fosters the international quality and European-oriented

4 In an unfinished autobiographical memoir, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1976), Kate O'Brien returns to the years of schooling at the Laurel Hill convent and remembers a Reverend Mother who was also English. Helen Archer, Mere Marie-Helene, is most probably her fictional version: „Over the long view one has seen how absurd it was that little Englishwoman, that one especially, should have been in charge of the education of Irish girls of the Catholic middle class in the years so quickly leading up to 1916" (qtd. in Bourke et al. IV, 2002: 574).

5 Poems of John Donne, George Herbert, Vincent Vaughn, and others of them are interspersed throughout the book, „giving the novel and almost Protestant sensibility" (Walshe, 2006: 85). The title of the novel comes from the closing of George Herbert's poem „The Prayer."

educational system of the convent school and subtly but firmly denounces Ireland's parochial state policy with which she was hugely disappointed at the time. Represented as a rather different type of a religious woman, one with much more tolerant views of Catholicism than her Irish colleagues, Mere Marie-Helene largely encapsulates Kate O'Brien's ideal version of Catholicism. Eibhear Walshe suggests that the author employs this invented version of Catholicism „to strike against the Ireland that censored her," and adds that her Catholic protagonists usually possess „independence of belief and confidence in their right to moral self-determination and they exercise this right without hesitation" (2006: 86-87).

These characteristics, rather unusual for Irish Catholics of the time, feature most prominently when Mere Marie-Helene directly confronts Anna Murphy's grand-mother, a self-important woman who disapproves „of money wasted on the academic education of girls" (*The Land,* 2006: 270). Anna spends a considerable amount of time in the convent school during which time she is given the opportunity to absorb knowledge of wide range of subjects and is again, somewhat too idealistically, allowed to develop her potentialities (as opposed to Kate and Baba in *The Country Girls*). However, when she obtains a scholarship to go on to university, her aspirations are openly thwarted by her family, that is, the stubborn old matriarch. The character of Anna's grandmother thus perfectly embodies all the short-sightedness and repressiveness of Irish society which stands in stark contrast to the much more intellectual and open-minded Catholicism of Mere Marie-Helene. The English Reverend Mother vigorously fights for her protégé's right to university education:

> I will dare use any word which I believe to be just, Mrs. Condon. And I shall use those terms which seem to me accurate when I explain your attitude to the Bishop. Meantime and in conclusion let me say that, in opposition to you in this affair, you will not merely have his Lordship, but the entire strength of the Order of *Sainte Famille.* ... Our order is world-wide and powerful, Mrs Condon, and it takes care of its children. (*The Land,* 2006: 276)

The quarrel between the two strong-willed women over education stand for the clash between the two versions of Catholicism and the two totally opposed ideological state apparatuses. Ironically and somewhat unexpectedly, here the authority of religion also openly defies the repressive social force of family and wins the battle, so to speak. The young girl is, just like Kate in *The Country Girls* and numerous other heroines in Irish fiction of the twentieth century, in many ways typically limited by a dysfunctional family (a bungling alcoholic father and a submissive doleful mother juxtaposed by an authoritative grandmother). As they prove largely unable to make any meaningful decision for the well-being of their child and fail to provide her with a warm supporting family background, *La Compagnie de la Sainte Famille* seems to substitute family both literally and symbolically.[6] Anna's conservative grandmother eventually gives in and Kate O'Brien's vision of much more tolerant Catholicism thus indeed triumphs over the actual one, the intolerant Catholicism of de Valera's Ireland. Anna pursues a university education, a goal considered to be the preserve of young Irish males at the time. She thus demonstrates that she is one of the rare O'Brien's characters who successfully battles the chauvinism of the state and escapes the constraints of the prescribed ideal of womanhood in the national/Catholic discourse.[7] Kate O'Brien's idealized image of the convent school embodied in *La Compagnie de la Sainte Famille* therefore perforce subverts the then educational system whose aim was only to „train girls in nationalism and the Irish language, not train them to develop their talents

6 It has to be noted, of course, that both heroines in *The Land of Spices* find comfort and a kind of refuge in the substitute but unemotional family that convent life offers them. Reverend Mother grows attached to her young pupil, Anna Murphy, also because she can draw parallels between Anna's destiny and her own. Upon finding out about her father's homosexuality, young Helen Archer abruptly rejects family and parental control and turns her back on secular life by fleeing to the convent and becoming Mere Marie-Helene. In the context of Althusser's theory, one ideological state apparatus, that of the family, is thus substituted by another, that of religion.

7 Claire Boylan observes that just like Anna, Kate O'Brien won a university scholarship and was pressured by her family into accepting a „decent job" in a bank. However, she went to study at UCD and got a degree in English and French. Boylan mentions how O'Brien was outraged when an uncle of hers sent her a congratulation letter which ended: „I wonder what the next step will be – M.A. or Ma?" (2006: x).

and widen their horizons, but, ... , train them to be appropriate for Irish men" (Weekes Owens, 1990: 123).

This unsympathetic description of Irish educational apparatus for girls might as well be readily applied to the one Edna O'Brien conveys in *The Country Girls* some twenty years later. Unlike *The Land of Spices*, there is nothing subtle or idealized about her representations of nuns and convent life, as her „country girls," Baba especially, are very much loath to find a common language with the authoritative enforcers of religious ideology. Edna O'Brien's portrayal of the convent school in this novel simply recalls Nuala O'Faolain's real life account of nuns' power, but also Eithne Strong's poetic description given at the beginning of the paper. One of the first rules Kate and Baba are faced with when they arrive in the convent is the bizarre way each girl should be dressing and undressing. The nuns' instructs are unambiguous in this respect:

> Our girls, above anything else, are good and wholesome and modest. Our expression of modesty is the way a girl dresses and undresses. She should do so with decorum and modesty. … girls are requested to dress and undress under the shelter of their dressing gowns. Girls should face the foot of the bed doing this, as they might surprise each other if they face the side of the bed. (*The Trilogy,* 1988: 68)

The pronounced modesty the nuns so forcefully foster through the act of (un)dressing (only one in the string of countless codes of moral behaviour) functions symbolically as the desired, but at the same time the only acceptable way of feminine behaviour within Catholic ideology. Having to bashfully hide even the slightest trace of femininity and sensuality from the eyes of others regardless of their sex is an act which should mirror every woman's wish to aspire to the impossible ideal of the asexual and pure Virgin Mary. Female modesty should also reflect the way women of vocation consciously embrace the rule of abnegation and submissiveness. Nuns themselves tend to completely suppress and obliterate their personal identity and female sexuality with modest and drab black gowns.

In her essay simply titled, „Nuns: A Subject for a Woman Writer," Irish poet Eilean Ni Chuilleanain recounts how she has always been fascinated with the physicality of a nuns' vocation: „My physical ideal of beauty," she says, „remained and remains, the clean, pale, ageless face of a nun, the body which unself-consciously clothed itself in full plain cloth and moved as intently as a fish in water" (2001: 21). She also mentions how an uncle of hers laconically explained to her the whole issue of being a nun: „When I see a nun, I always think 'none.'" The feminine in a nun, she comments, is usually perceived „as lack and privation, most intensely seen in women who have neither a man nor a need for a man" (2001: 22). It is no wonder then that the severe rules of dressing and undressing made by women who hide their bodies in order to stress this physical lack and privation are heavily mocked by Edna O'Brien's girls: „Trying to undress under a dressing gown is a talent you must develop. Mine fell off six or seven times, but I finally managed to keep it on by stooping very low" (*The Trilogy,* 1988: 69).

However, unlike the astringent Baba who cannot be easily restrained, the dutiful Kate eventually fits faster to the austere convent life and unquestioningly subjects herself to the harsh rules of morality and modesty. Grainne O'Flynn explains that in Ireland in the forties, most girls „looked on nuns as being apart from the rest of humanity," and offers another image of convent education very much present in Edna O'Brien's *Trilogy*:

> Although we grew used to how they looked, we grew more convinced of their remoteness. They did not live in ordinary houses; they had to be accompanied by other females when they walked in the streets; they had exotic names; they were 'brides of Christ'. The other-wordliness which enveloped their lives added a mysterious and forceful dimension to their statements. Occasionally some of us were cheeky to nuns, but we knew from an early age that to argue with a nun would be a most grievous transgression. (qtd. in Bourke et al. IV, 2002: 591)

Whereas in *The Land of Spices*, nuns' „other-wordliness" and their unquestioned authority do not necessarily bear negative connotations, in *The Country Girls,* however, the air of aloofness and divine mystery

surrounding them help them successfully exert their authority as state educators, and prevent most of their young students from opposing them in any way. Kate certainly belongs to this quiet majority who never dare oppose a nun or any other authority, whereas Baba represents that stirring element unafraid of becoming a transgressor and get „cheeky to nuns." This isolated convent world in the context of *The Country Girls Trilogy* might be thus said to stand as a synecdoche of „the real world" outside the convent walls, as it were. Ways in which the two girls meet the demands of this kind of life perfectly underline and foreshadow the two completely opposed types of conduct. They behave differently not only when it comes to obedience and disobedience to the Catholic Church but to any other repressive social force as well in the two other novels of the *Trilogy,* as we will see later.

As opposed to Anna Murphy who successfully challenges the image of a typical young Irish woman whose main goal in life is marriage and motherhood once she finishes school, Kate and Baba cannot wait to break free from the highly repressive force of the convent school in order to pursue love and marriage. In this respect, the image of convent education that Edna O'Brien offers here is much more realistic and closer to real-life experiences that many Irish women had in the course of the twentieth century. Unlike Kate O'Brien who manages to beautifully recreate a fictional convent world in which notions of „Catholic" and „tolerant" do not counter but somewhat surprisingly complement each other, Edna O'Brien (mostly through Baba, of course) refers to it bluntly as „that jail" (*The Trilogy,* 1988: 99). Whereas in Kate O'Brien's fictional world Catholic education defies the parochial mindset of the Irish, in Edna O'Brien's novel, convent school is an institution which readily sustains this mindset: it gravely undermines girls' self-confidence and severely limits their rights to a more spontaneous way of life.

Although Kate Brady subjects herself more or less easily to the strict frugality of the school and unsurprisingly becomes one of the best students there, she goes along with Baba's scheme to provoke expulsion from school. Writing down a „dirty note" on a picture of the Virgin Mary and leaving it purposefully for everyone to find epitomizes Baba's

undeviating way of dealing with all kinds of repression. As Althusser claims, the ideological state apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function by repression. Thus schools, churches, and families use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc. to 'discipline' the disobedient (2006: 98). Baba of course laughs in the face of Catholicism by disregarding the fact that this audacious act pulled off in the middle of religious life is considered a most grievous transgression. Unsurprisingly, she does not experience the immediate and inevitable expulsion from school as any kind of punishment. For her it is quite simply a ticket to freedom from the restrictive convent principles. In this respect, it is truly hard to imagine that by using expulsion the educational ideological state apparatus will „discipline" someone as noncompliant and unrestrained as Baba. Being only the first in a string of punishments she will receive throughout her life, it only seems to strengthen her general tendency to mock every authority. Far from feeling that she is „interpellated" by the authority of the Church, or the authority of any other state apparatus, for that matter, Baba behaves in a way that Althusser terms „wicked" (2006: 113).

For Kate, on the other hand, who is so deeply ashamed of her friend's disobedience (and of any disobedience, for that matter) this sudden rejection means having to cope with the grave fact that already as a teenager she has inadvertently turned into a transgressor. Since she experiences the unyielding authority of nuns as a wall onto which she has painfully run into, she learns early on that to challenge any authority is not the smartest thing to do in life.

> Your mind is so despicable that I cannot conceive how you have gone unnoticed all these years. Poor Sister Margaret, she has suffered the greatest shock of her religious life. This afternoon you did a disgusting thing, and now you have done something outrageous," she said. Her voice was trembling and her poise was gone. She was really upset. I began to cry and Baba gave me a dig in the ribs to shut up. (*The Trilogy,* 1988: 106)

Harsh words used by the Reverend Mother describing the girls' misbehaviour are emphasized by Kate's furious father's reaction upon their

disgraceful return home: „You stinking little foul-mouth" (*The Trilogy,* 1988: 108) and his aggressiveness as he hits her. After she is heavily punished and expelled from the school, she is also for the first time both literally and symbolically rejected by her own family which should but, rather unsurprisingly, does not provide her with love and support. This heartless image of the Irish family thus comes close to the one depicted in *The Land of Spices* and the family once again turns out to be yet another controlling and unforgiving ideological state apparatus. When later in life (in the third book of the *Trilogy, Girls in Their Married Bliss*) Kate starts her own family, she cannot seem to escape the vicious circle as she is eventually rejected by her husband who just like once her father punished her „for not conforming to a stable category of womanhood" (Ingman, 2007: 44).[8]

Interestingly enough, the extent to what Kate is submissive and easily subjected to all kinds of authorities, including that of her energetic friend, is also demonstrated by the fact that although she has a scholarship and is actually free to finish school, she decides to follow Baba. The girls go to Dublin to find work. As Heather Ingman suggests, moving to the city provides „a counter-narrative to the nationalist construct of Ireland as a family-centred, rural nation" (2007: 42). This counter-narrative can be also read at the end of *The Land of Spices* as Anna Murphy anticipates going to Dublin and moving away from her family and the bigotry of rural Ireland. However, the path of Kate O'Brien's heroine is in a way completely opposite to the one conveyed in *The Country Girls*. Anna's new life in the city and the continuation of education, as it were, is made possible by those aspects of convent education non-existent in *The*

8 Neither of the girls and later mature women complies with the „stable category of womanhood." Kate fails to be a „good Catholic," a person she desperately strives to be her whole life, mainly because she marries a divorced non-Catholic man. The rejection by her husband and their subsequent divorce only seem to underline her transgression. She remains the submissive god-fearing girl who constantly gets involved in dead-end affairs with married men. Her antipode Baba, on the other hand, strives to challenge what it means to be a „good Catholic": a gold-digger, she marries a man she does not love, constantly cheats on her husband, tries to induce an abortion in a hot tub (one of the most infamous moments in the *Trilogy*), and gives birth to a child who is a product of a one-night stand. Baba thus perfectly encapsulates Edna O'Brien's famous statement about Irish heroines not having „to be good anymore" (E. O'Brien, „Why Irish Heroines": 1986).

Country Girls, the open-mindedness of intelligent nuns and freedom to develop one's potentialities. In the fictional convent world of Kate O'Brien's fiction, it is possible for women, both Mere Marie-Helene and Anna, to achieve a successful career and fully realize their female identity, in spite of many obstacles. In the words of Lorna Reynolds, religion in *The Land of Spices* largely functions „as a refuge of the bruised ego," „a moulder of character and conduct," „a sphere of moral development," and finally, it offers „a career with a scale of possible hierarchical advancement" (1987: 117).

On the other hand, what drives Kate and especially Baba to go to Dublin is the refusal to obey restrictions inextricably linked to the repressive social force of religion. They want to escape from the convent life and the tight-knit community in naive hope that it is city life that will finally allow them liberation. Whether the girls eventually break free from the boundaries of a jail-like existence in rural Ireland and whether life in Dublin and later in „swinging" London provides them with the eagerly awaited freedom is a subject of another article.

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