

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this thesis, the present writer analyses the conflicts found in Down by the River, a novel written by Edna O'Brien, one of the contemporary Irish novelists.

The present writer has chosen novel for her thesis because it provides more details in describing characters, setting, and plot. In Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory it is suggested that novel is 'a prose narrative about characters and their actions in everyday life and usually in the present...it is a form of a story or prose narrative containing characters, action and incident, and perhaps, a plot' (Cuddon, 1997: 430-431). A novel has many aspects, namely theme, characters, plot, setting and conflicts. The fact that it is easier to understand a novel rather than a drama or a poem makes the present writer interested in reading novel rather than the other literary genres.

The present writer is interested in O'Brien's works because she is a famous Irish writer who admires the classic works of James Joyce and she has also won many international awards. These include the Kingsley Amis Award in 1962, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 1990, and the European Prize for

Literature in 1995. She has also written several collections of short stories, screenplays and plays.

Down by the River, which the present writer has chosen, describes a young girl, Mary, who becomes a victim after being raped by her father. The terrible feeling of being raped makes Mary decide to end her life by committing suicide, either by drowning herself in a river or cutting her own wrist. Things get worse when Mary learns that she is pregnant. She is able to escape from death because her neighbour Betty manages to help her. Betty arranges to take her to England for an abortion because this procedure is illegal in Ireland. Before she has the abortion, Mary is forced to return to her home town in rural Ireland, and she becomes the centre of a nationwide debate about abortion.

The present writer chooses to analyse conflict because it is the most prominent aspect in the novel. Shaw (1972: 91-92) has presented the following theories of conflict. A conflict is 'the opposition of persons or forces upon which the action depends in drama or fiction'. There are three types of conflict, namely 'elemental or physical conflict, social conflict, and internal conflict or psychological conflict'. The elemental or physical conflict is a 'struggle between one and the physical world while social conflict is a struggle between one and another or one and society; the internal conflict or psychological conflict is a struggle between desires within one'.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems of this study are formulated as follows:

- 1] What kinds of conflicts can be found in the novel?
- 2] What are the causes of the conflicts?
- 3] Are the conflicts resolved? If so, how?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the study are:

- 1] to show the conflicts found in the novel.
- 2] to show the causes of the conflicts.
- 3] to show if (and how) the conflicts are resolved.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The present writer uses formalism for her thesis. Formalism deals primarily ‘with the text and not with any of the outside considerations such as author, the real world, audience, or other literature’ (lecture notes, March 2005). The method which the present writer uses is library research. She begins by reading Edna O’Brien’s Down by the River and several books which are relevant to the topic discussed. After that, she analyses the primary text by using some references and materials which can support the analysis and help her in writing this thesis. Finally, she draws some conclusions from what has been discussed.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The present writer divides her thesis into three chapters, which are preceded by the Preface and the Abstract.

Chapter One is the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains an analysis of the conflicts in Edna O'Brien's Down By The River. The last chapter, Chapter Three, contains the Conclusion.

This thesis ends with the Bibliography, which lists the references the present writer has used in her thesis, and the Appendices, which contain the Synopsis of the Novel and the Biography of the Author