

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSION

Having analysed the inner conflicts and social conflicts in Edna O'Brien's Down by the River, the present writer finds that the main cause of the conflicts is the rape of Mary by her father. It is made even worse by the divisions in Irish society regarding abortion. On the one hand, the Catholic groups and conservatives argue against abortion. On the other hand, liberal groups argue for a change to Irish law about abortion and support 'pro-choice.' Pro choice means that women should be free to decide whether they have an abortion or not. In the middle of this national debate is Mary, a young woman who has become pregnant after being raped by her father and wants an abortion. These differences result in conflicts between people, between society, and even conflicts within oneself.

In Down by the River, Mary Macnamara, the protagonist of the story, has to deal with some inner conflicts because she is raped by her father, James. While Mary wants to run away from her father, she realizes that he is the only family member she has and so she wants to stay with him. After the second rape happens, Mary becomes pregnant and her inner conflict becomes more complicated. She does not want to have the baby because it is unnatural, but she does not want to have an abortion

because it is forbidden in Ireland and against her religion.

As for social conflicts, Mary Macnamara has to deal with her community in rural Ireland as well as Irish society as a whole. Her tragedy becomes the subject of a national debate about abortion. In Irish society, the majority of the public argues that there are no exceptions; abortion is forbidden in every case. The groups that reject abortion are mainly religious groups, claiming that abortion is a sin and is forbidden according to the principles of Catholicism. In contrast, a smaller section of the public argues that the issue of abortion should be decided based on each individual case. If it is proven that a woman has been raped, she should be allowed to leave the country to have an abortion.

The present writer is of the opinion that the issue of abortion should be decided on a 'case by case' basis. In cases like Mary's, a woman should be allowed to leave Ireland in order to have an abortion if it is proved that she is a victim of rape or incest. The law of the country does not have to change. They will just have to be updated in order to allow exceptions in cases of abortion. The opinions of people like Roisin are that there are no exceptions in the case of abortion. The present writer feels that this is not a fair attitude. The suffering of Mary shows that there should be exceptions and that in some cases abortion should be allowed. If Irish communities could be more open to discussions of these sensitive issues, then many conflicts could be dealt with in better ways, and victims like Mary might not suffer from fear, shame and loneliness.

People like Roisin claim to want the best for Mary, and act as though they represent the highest morals and principles of Catholic Irish society. However, when

they are actually speaking to Mary directly and have to confront her problems, they usually treat Mary badly and show little concern for her personal suffering. The author seems to be suggesting that people like Roisin are more concerned with their own public image, and therefore they often compete amongst each other for status and popularity, using religion for selfish reasons.

Another interesting point that appears from the novel is the way in which Irish communities struggle to communicate with one another. When something terrible is happening right in the middle of a small community, none of Mary's neighbours are able to say or do anything to stop it. Many of them, it seems, have suspicions that something is wrong in Mary's house, but no one wants to learn the truth or do anything to help Mary. Yet, it seems so hard for her so-called caring neighbours who feel so strongly about issues like sex and abortion, to actually come forward and help Mary. At the same time Mary, the victim, is so afraid to actually tell anyone in her community about the times that her father raped her.

Obviously, something is wrong in the community that is so closed and divided and similarly, something is wrong in the community that preaches such strong Catholic values but does not seem to practice them. The problems in Mary's community are the same as the problems faced in communities throughout Britain, some European countries and also in Asia. The present writer recommends Down by the River because it deals with difficult issues, and it challenges the reader to 'read between the lines' in order to understand the subtle arguments the author is making.

