

BANNED IN SPAIN?
TRUTHS, LIES AND CENSORSHIP IN KATE O'BRIEN'S NOVELS

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This paper tries to shed some light on the reception of Kate O'Brien's works in Spain during Franco's dictatorship. As a lover of Spain, the Irish writer spent long periods of her life in that country and some of her experiences were later fictionalised in her novels. Characterised by her portrayal of strong female heroines who did not respond to social or gender expectations, it does not come as a surprise that some of O'Brien novels were banned in Ireland and Spain. Although both countries shared a strong Catholic background and a protectionist censorship system, the censor's spotting of the subversive and dangerous passages that were to be banned differed greatly. Besides, in the Spanish case, O'Brien was allegedly forbidden to enter the country until 1957, an affirmation that, up until now, has never been questioned. Bearing these aspects in mind, the present study focuses on a thorough analysis of the author's censorship files stored in Spain and on the research carried out to contest the undocumented assumption related to her expulsion from the country.

Keywords: Kate O'Brien; censorship; Catholicism; protectionist policies; reception; gender

¿PROHIBIDA EN ESPAÑA?:

VERDADES, MENTIRAS Y CENSURA EN LA OBRA DE KATE O'BRIEN

Este artículo trata de arrojar algo de luz sobre la recepción de la narrativa de Kate O'Brien en España durante la dictadura franquista. Amante de España, la autora pasó largas temporadas en el país y algunas de sus novelas recogen muchas de sus experiencias vividas aquí. De la obra de O'Brien destacan los retratos femeninos de heroínas que no encajan en las expectativas sociales y en los roles de género que la sociedad tradicional les había asignado, por lo que no sorprende que algunas novelas fueran censuradas tanto en Irlanda como en España. Aunque ambos países compartían una fuerte tradición católica y un sistema censor proteccionista, la identificación de los pasajes subversivos o peligrosos que debían ser eliminados fue muy distinta. En el caso de España, además, la crítica especializada sigue manteniendo que se le prohibió la entrada en el país hasta el año 1957, a pesar de no existir ningún documento que avale este hecho. Partiendo de las mencionadas circunstancias, el objetivo de este estudio se centra en el análisis de los archivos de censura que existen sobre Kate O'Brien en España, así como en la investigación llevada a cabo para poner en tela de juicio la supuesta expulsión de la autora del país.

Palabras clave: Kate O'Brien; censura; catolicismo; políticas proteccionistas; recepción; género

... the damning, unforgivable
evidence that society's greatest joy
was to part a writer from her words.
'Look at Kate O'Brien', I thundered,
'Banned! Banned! Banned'
Mary O'Donnell¹

1. Introduction

The reputation of Kate O'Brien (1897-1974) as a writer has been unanimously acknowledged by general readers and critics alike both within and outside Ireland.² A prolific novelist, playwright, essay writer and journalist, she developed a strong attachment to Spain. From the time of her first visit to the country when she was in her twenties to work as a governess in a Basque household, she became fascinated by a place that bore many similarities with her own hometown, Limerick, or *Mellick*, as she liked to call it.³ During the 1930s and until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, O'Brien spent her summers in Spain and later fictionalised some of these experiences in her novels.⁴ Her work has been generally praised for the unconventionality and openness of the themes dealt with and especially for the frank portrayal of female heroines that had to confront the constraints of a morally narrow society, for which reasons some of her books were banned in Ireland and Spain. However, although both Catholic and very conservative, the two countries differed greatly in their appreciation of the apparently subversive and dangerous passages that were to be expurgated from some of her texts.

Mary Lavelle (1936) and *The Land of Spices* (1941) were censored in Ireland on grounds of immorality.⁵ At the same time, in her travel book *Farewell Spain* (1937), O'Brien positioned herself against General Franco and his supporters, and it has been generally assumed that the book was censored in Spain and that she was barred from the country for more than twenty years. However, a thorough reading of the Spanish

¹ Extracted from O'Donnell's poem 'Kate O'Brien Weekender Meets La Leche Leaguers' (2005: 88).

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³ See Peter Gunning (2008) for the social and political similarities between the two countries, in terms of Catholicism, poverty, isolation and lack of female freedom.

⁴ As Lorna Reynolds has explained: "She fell in love immediately with the Spain she found, not the tourist Spain of red geraniums, clicking castanets and blazing sun, but northern, Basque Spain, of hardworking men and women, with a climate rather like that of Ireland, much given to rain and mud, where the 'strange sky gleamed with a familiar tenderness'; and later on with the Spain of austere Castile, of the great gold plain and the high, immaculate sky" (1987a: 97).

⁵ The exact dates that figure on the prohibition orders are: 29 December 1936, in the case of *Mary Lavelle*; and 6 May 1941, in the case of *Land of Spices*. The latter went through a revocation order and succeeded in its appeal to the Censorship of Publications Appeal Board (Adams 1968: 242-43).

copyright files reveals a different outcome. The Censorship Board approved the translation of *The Last of Summer* (1943) after many amendments and banned *Mary Lavelle*. But there are no existing records of any attempt to translate either *The Land of Spices* or *Farewell Spain*. Besides, the assumption that her entrance to the country was forbidden has never been questioned, in spite of the fact that no public document appears to exist that certifies the prohibition. Bearing these premises in mind, the purpose of this article will be, firstly, to provide detailed material of the kind of excisions required in the case of Kate O'Brien's novels and the reasons for their being censored in Spain; and, secondly, to discuss the circumstances within which the statement regarding her being banned from entering the country was made.

2. Censorship in Ireland and Spain

Spain and Ireland share many historical similarities that need to be pointed out as regards their procedure to censor books. From the thirties to the seventies, large numbers of works published at home and abroad were banned in the two nations. The result was an impoverishment of their respective cultural development since, in order to guarantee a strict sense of morality among the population, repressive and paternalistic measures were applied. In Ireland, Clair Wills explains that: "The official ideology of the state expressed a concern to preserve the supposed purity of a mainly rural and Catholic society from the corrosive effects of liberal individualism and social modernization", and it was not until the early nineteen sixties, with *Taoiseach* Sean Lemass, when the country "began to shift towards a new path of development" (2002: 1124).⁶ Therefore, the Irish Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 could ban any material on three grounds: indecency or obscenity, unjustified talk on crime, and "unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage" (Carlson 1990: 3-4).

Similarly, the Franco regime established a severe censorship system that was in charge of regulating the entrance and translation of any published material into the country, which had to comply with the moral, political and religious codes of the regime. Thus, the period between 1936 and 1983 was characterised by a firm and rigid censorship system that obliged publishing houses to ask the authorities for permission to publish any kind of written or visual material.⁷ This system had been established and regulated initially by the *Servicio Nacional de Propaganda*, a protective institution pertaining to the regime. Nowadays, the censorship files are held at the *Archivo General de la Administración* (hereafter, AGA), within the *Fondo de Cultura* section, placed in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), which is open to researchers.

⁶ Maurice Harmon calls the time span from the 1920s to the 1960s, the *Era of Inhibitions*, since for him: "Conditions in post-revolutionary Ireland were so uncongenial for the writer that it is remarkable, not so much that there was a decline in the quality and the volume of the literary output, but that any literature was even written. Seldom in the history of any country can so many forces have combined to inhibit the creative processes" (1966: 18). See also Ó Drisceoil (1996).

⁷ Although its allegedly strict procedures became more and more flexible in later decades.

Nonetheless, the implementation of censorship in the two countries for more than four decades was uneven, always determined by the laws that were passed as a result of the new policies adopted. The Spanish censorship system was particularly strict. The first press laws – the *Ley de Prensa e Imprenta*, passed by Minister Ramón Serrano Súñer in 1938 – were especially judgemental on writers due to the international isolation of the country, the consequence of which was the application of a protectionist policy. Thus, in Spain, the censorship board distributed the receipt of any material that could be published among readers, most of them priests, although there were also lay men, who filled in a questionnaire and reported on any subversive passage either asking for its excision, change into rephrasing or banning, or simply giving their consent for publication. The censors had to answer questions based on the morality of the text, on its religious dogma, and on whether it incurred in any offence to the Regime, the Church or any of their institutions. Significant differences between the two systems should also be pointed out in this regard. On the one hand, the Irish Board was not expected to justify the reasons for its decisions and sometimes it was difficult to know what exactly had displeased them (Walshe 2006: 67). And, on the other, while in Ireland the Board was constituted by five members,⁸ who would be in charge of reading and evaluating the work after it had been published, in Spain the censor was just one person, who decided whether the book would eventually be either published or imported. All in all, both systems protected the anonymity of their censors and their secret decisions.

In the case of Ireland, the strict regulations that were made effective from the late 1920s became more flexible two decades later until they gradually began to fade away. In 1949 a new law was passed which introduced an alternative committee, the *Board of Appeal*, to which publishers and authors could direct their requests for the revocation of the decisions (Carlson 1990: 4). The result was visible in the nineteen-sixties when, as Wills notes, “a relaxation of the law in 1967 made as many as five thousand suppressed titles available” (2002: 1127). Likewise, in the case of Spain, in 1966 a new press law – the promulgation of the *Ley de Prensa de Imprenta*, passed by Minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne – granted more freedom of expression and changed the consultancy of books from being obligatory to voluntary. A third stage in the history of censorship can also be distinguished in both countries. In 1967 in Ireland, a limit of twelve years was established during which time a ban on grounds of indecency or obscenity could be lifted (Carlson 1990: 5). In Spain, after Franco’s death in 1975 and the passing of the Constitution in 1978 these regulations became more flexible, until the practice of censorship had virtually disappeared by the early eighties.⁹

On the whole, the literature produced in the past or during the abovementioned decades was not received and/or translated in its entirety in either of the two countries. Concerning Spain, in some cases this was the result of a lack of interest in certain

⁸ According to section 3, Part II, the board “consist[s] of five ‘fit and proper persons’ (including a Chairman) appointed by the Minister for Justice for a term of three years and eligible for reappointment” (Adams 1968: 238).

⁹ For a more detailed account of the effects of Spanish laws on censorship, see Beneyto (1977), Abellán (1980) or Cisquella, Ervity and Sorolla (2002), among others.

subjects or authors. In others, it was due to the subversive potential of the text, which would be seen as a danger to the minds of Spanish readers, especially women. And in still others, it was because the political agenda of the time tried to keep the country internationally isolated, so that the maintenance of an ignorant population could be secured. As regards Ireland, it should be pointed out that although De Valera's role as a politician cannot be compared to that of Franco, both aimed at isolating the two countries, keeping them away from perceived foreign dangers: "The rhetoric by which the majority of people were swayed was that of Ireland's priests and politicians, who believed that by purging Ireland of all 'indecenties' and foreign influences, they could shape it into a spiritual model for the world.... The cultural isolationism that Shaw feared was, in effect, de Valera's ideal" (Carlson 1990: 8).

3. Kate O'Brien's Spanish Censorship Files

The presence of Spain in many of O'Brien's works has been unanimously acknowledged by critics. Thematically, the country was central in *Mary Lavelle*, *Farewell Spain*, *That Lady* (1946) and *Theresa of Avila* (1951).¹⁰ But apart from the obvious subject matter or setting employed, it was also common in O'Brien's novels to introduce quotes, expressions and even the headings of some of the chapters in the Spanish language. This is the case of *Mary Lavelle*, which opens with a quote in Spanish, and uses Spanish phrases as titles for certain chapters, such as: 'Don Pablo', 'A Corrida', 'Hasta luego', or 'A Matador's Cape'. Similarly, in *Farewell Spain* she follows in the same fashion introducing chapters under the headings 'Adiós, turismo', 'La montaña', 'Santa Teresa', 'No pasarán' and 'Arriba, España'.

Although there has been a prominent interest in the censorship process of O'Brien's novels in Ireland, to my knowledge nobody has attempted yet to offer a thorough analysis of the history of the censorship of her work in Spain. The only exception to this is Éibhear Walshe's recent biography on the writer, which includes a brief research conducted in the AGA in Alcalá by Sheile Quinn, to whom he thanks for the information that she was able to extract from some of the files. However, from her conclusions one can easily infer that she must have been able to see only a minor selection of the twelve O'Brien's files. As a result, Walshe ends up stating that *The Last of Summer* (1943), *The Ante-Room* (1934) and *Without My Cloak* (1931) were translated into Spanish and published in the country, having encountered no problems with censorship. He even adds that the only restriction that was applied to her work was the rejection of the jacket of *Without My Cloak*, on the grounds of immorality. Therefore, he concludes that: "Far from being outlawed, her fiction was available in Spain as in any

¹⁰ *Mary Lavelle* recounts in an autobiographical manner the experiences of the protagonist, who worked as a 'Miss' in a Basque household, through the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*. *Farewell Spain* is a travel book set in different parts of Spain, as much as a collection of memories about O'Brien's time spent in the country. *That Lady* is set in the sixteenth century and recounts the political intrigues of Philip II and Ana de Mendoza, Princess of Éboli. Finally, *Theresa of Avila* is a short biography of the Spanish nun. Interestingly, according to Reynolds, the setting of Spain in *That Lady* could well have been O'Brien's strategy for avoiding censorship (1987b: 186).

other country. Even the Hollywood film version of *That Lady* in 1955 was granted permission to be screened throughout Spain, despite what Kate described as ‘the initial fuss with Franco’” (2006: 75). However, a detailed look at the complete set of files stored at the AGA offers an entirely different picture, since *The Last of Summer* could only be published after a long list of emendations were made, as I will prove later. On the other hand, I should underline the fact that Walshe is probably the first scholar who has argued that, contrary to received interpretations, there is no evidence in the AGA which proves that *Farewell Spain* was censored in the country, since there were no requests for publication of this book during the Franco regime (2006: 75).¹¹

O’Brien’s first novel, *Without My Cloak* (1931), was translated into Spanish as early as 1943 with the title *Sin mi capa*. There are three files in the AGA that contain the details of the authorization of this translation by Fernando Calleja, and of the two reprints corresponding to the years 1951 and 1966 (Files 5119-43, 4919-51 and 1167-66). Interest in the book seems to have been notable since the publishing houses involved – Ediciones *La Nave*, *Planeta* and *Plaza y Janés* – signed for print runs of 5,000, 2,000 and 3,000 copies, respectively. In the report written by the censor in 1943, he emphasised its great literary merit even though he described the plot in terms of the adventures of an English gentleman in the mid nineteenth century, during Victorian times. Although Spanish censors were usually learned people, sometimes their reports revealed flaws and often a lack of specific knowledge on certain writers and literatures. This one in particular was apparently unable to distinguish between England and Ireland, considering that the novel portrays three generations of an Irish bourgeois family. The third file, corresponding to the year 1966, is the only one that includes a comment on the novel’s jacket. However, contrary to Walshe’s suggestion that it was rejected on grounds of immorality (2006: 75), according to the censor’s report, it was approved without modifications. This time, the form had been filled by a knowledgeable reader, who made more accurate comments on the plot and added that the novel had been awarded two literary prizes – the *Hawthornden* and the *James Tait Back* – which attested to its literary quality.

O’Brien’s second novel, *The Ante-Room* (1934), was translated into Spanish as *La antesala* in 1943 by José Marín de Bernardo, and there are also three files stored at the AGA that register the history of the acceptance of its reception and final publication in the country in 1944. The first censor who judged the novel does not seem to have understood the transgression of the Catholic and moral values embodied in the torrid and impossible love between a young woman and her brother-in-law. Instead, he praised the novel for its fervent Catholicism and for the protagonist’s final victimised decisions to devote her life to taking care of both her sick brother and mother, and to seek solace in religion (File 7329-43). The publishing house *La Nave*, which had taken

¹¹ One of the reasons that could explain why this research was incomplete is that in the computer database program at the AGA, there are different entries for the name of Kate O’Brien, which is spelled in three different ways: *Kate O’Brien*, *Kate O Brien* and *Kate Obrien*. A double-check was certainly necessary before one could offer a thorough and valid analysis on the existing censorship files stored at the archive.

the initiative of introducing O'Brien's first novel into Spain, was again in charge of this publication, ordering a print run of 5,000 copies.

The second file, which dates back to 1950, is a second permission to publish the novel again, this time by the publishing house *Dédalo*, signing for a print run of 3,000 copies, which adds a revision of the previously banned cover of the book. The most significant information contained in this file is the inclusion of some quotes from a letter that Kate O'Brien herself had sent to the Spanish publishers of *Without My Cloak*. In it, she affirmed that it had been an enormous pleasure for her to have witnessed the publication of her novels in Spain, a country that she loved and admired more than any other, that she had visited on a number of occasions and to which she wished she could go back (File 1282-58). This statement is the first public admission on the part of the author to having been banned from entering the country, as I shall discuss later.¹² The third file, dated in 1958 (File 1282-58), constitutes further permission to reprint the novel, this time with a print run of 10,000 copies – which was a large figure for the time – by the well-known publishing house *Plaza y Janés*. The short report written by the censor describes *La antesala* as a novel of love and conflict, written by an expert author in her attempt to portray the violent passions of the Irish peoples, for which reasons she is described as the last authentic English Romantic writer.

Following the favourable reception of O'Brien's two previous novels, the publishing house *La Nave* made a new request in 1943 to publish *Mary Lavelle* in Spain, translated by María Isabel Butler de Foley, this time with no success (File 8102-43). Unfortunately, the file does not contain the censor's record with the reasons for the prohibition of this autobiographical novel, which had been previously banned in Ireland on grounds of immorality. *Mary Lavelle* was based on the author's experiences as the governess of an affluent Basque family in Portugaleta, teaching English to their two children.¹³ Although Lorna Reynolds has insisted that there was nothing obscene in the novel (1987a: 62), it seems reasonable to understand that neither of these two Catholic countries would easily accept the adulterous relationship that takes place, the lesbian undertones, or the protagonist's ultimate motif to abandon her homeland in order "to cease being a daughter without immediately becoming a wife" (O'Brien 1984: 34).¹⁴ In this regard and, according to Heather Ingman, what Spain gave Mary was the possibility of attaining another identity, "that of lover of a married man. It is an identity which puritanical Irish society will not allow her. She has become excluded from her nation's construct of womanhood which denies unprompted sexual passion in females" (2007: 106).

¹² The exact words, as they were published later in the *Nota Preliminar* that opened the novel, were the following: "Es para mí una gran satisfacción y placer saber que mis libros pueden ahora ser leídos en España. Pues amo profundamente a España y la visité siempre que pude durante los años 1930 y 1936 y posteriormente he pensado continuamente en su amable país, siempre anhelando volver a él. ¡Ah! ¡cómo me gustaría eso!" (O'Brien 1944: 5).

¹³ See Legarreta (2009) for a recent study on the autobiographical elements related to the Basque setting and on the presence of Spanish politics in the novel.

¹⁴ See Katherine O'Donnell (2007) for a recent study on sexuality from the insights of lesbian and queer theory with a view of challenging received feminist interpretations of *Mary Lavelle*.

O'Brien's next publication, *Farewell Spain* (1937), constitutes a particularly interesting case because there are no existing records at the AGA of any request for the importation, translation or publication of this travel book during the decades of censorship, as Walshe has also noticed and in contrast to many received assumptions. At the same time, presupposing that O'Brien's prohibition to enter the country was related to the publication of this travelogue, many critics – including the previous Irish Ambassador in Spain – have been driven to the conclusion that the book was also banned (De Areilza 1985: 9; O'Neill 1987: xii; Gunning 2008: 152) when, curiously enough, it was never translated into the Spanish language. Although the text is a mixture of a memoir and a travel account of the author's visits to different parts of Spain, she also introduced subtle comments on the Franco regime, on Fascism and on the lack of freedom that was made effective in the country. Consequently, according to Aintzane Legarreta, O'Brien was "declared *persona non grata* by the Franco regime" for her defence of the Republic (2009: 71). On the other hand, Walshe has suggested that rather than directly attacking the nationalist cause, O'Brien takes certain icons of Castilian culture, and makes them her own through subversion. What she achieves is an "informed attack from within" (1993: 8). Since the controversy surrounding the publication of this text still needs to be unearthed, I will return to this issue later.

O'Brien's next novel, *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938), in which she criticised Ireland's narrow-minded Catholicism and overtly attacked censorship, was never published in Spain although, surprisingly, it was not banned in Ireland. Matt Costello, the protagonist, is a novelist whose reputation abroad clashes with the censorship of his publications in Ireland and with what he sees as an attack on his freedom. His words are very direct: "Too many negative regulations are a symptom of weakness in any authority.... I am not prepared to be saved on Ireland's dictated terms" (O'Brien 1938: 191). For whatever reason, however, the novel encountered no problems with the Irish Censorship Board.

Conversely, O'Brien's next novel, *The Land of Spices* (1941), was censored in Ireland a few months after it was published on the grounds of indecency and obscenity (Dalsimer 1990: 3).¹⁵ Apparently, the Board's resolution was based on one single sentence: "She [Helen Archer] saw Etienne and her father, in the embrace of love" (O'Brien 1941: 175), which alluded to a homosexual relationship between the protagonist's father and another man. This scene produces such a shock in the young Helen Archer that she decides to become a nun. Nevertheless, according to Mary Brenn, the protagonist's choice becomes in many ways utterly ironic. The irony lies in the fact that the censors were right in judging the novel dangerous although they focused on the wrong target since O'Brien presents this relationship as the source of Archer's religious vocation and eventual perturbation (1993: 169). As was the case with the previous two novels, there was no request to publish this one in Spain and, consequently, it was not accessible in the country during the decades of censorship.

¹⁵ For a brief analysis on censorship, nationalism and patriarchy within the novel, see Jacqueline Hurtle (2000: 289).

The Last of Summer (1943) is another interesting case. It was translated into Spanish in 1943 as *Final del verano*, by Diego Pedrosa and Juan Luis Camino, and there are two files stored in the AGA that record the history of the novel's reception. The first (File 3852-43) contains a long report that approves the publication of the text as long as major changes are made. Once again it was the publishing house *La Nave* which had requested permission, signing for a print run of 5,000 copies. The amendments that the censor demanded were those shown in table 1:

Original text	Amendments for the new version ¹⁶
"Like Hitler" (17)	" <i>Tal vez fuera la culpa suya</i> " / 'Perhaps it was his own fault'
"He's very keen on old Molotov all of a sudden" (26)	<i>Esta frase se suprimirá</i> / 'This sentence shall be deleted'
"Hitler and Mussolini are teetotallers" (29)	" <i>Algunos que no beben pueden hacer mucho daño</i> " / 'Teetotallers can cause a lot of damage'
"Hitler permitting" (31)	" <i>Si la guerra no empieza antes</i> " / 'If war does not start before'
"With the Germans up to no good again, as usual" (49)	" <i>Con la guerra, que puede estallar en cualquier momento</i> " / 'With war, which can break out any moment'
"He'll take Danzig and Poland any day now. When he does..." (50)	" <i>Los alemanes entrarán en Danzig y Polonia cualquier día de estos. Cuando lo hagan...</i> " / 'The Germans will take Danzig and Poland any day. When they do...'
"When Czechoslovakia was taken" (50)	" <i>Cuando lo de Checoslovaquia</i> " / 'When that happened with Czechoslovakia'
"All crossed out passages should be deleted" (99)	<i>Se suprimirá lo que aparece tachado</i> ¹⁷ / 'Whatever is crossed out shall be omitted'
"Nazis" (186)	<i>alemanes</i> / 'Germans' <i>La frase que aparece tachada a continuación se suprimirá</i> / 'The following sentence, which has been crossed out, shall be omitted'
"What had happened in Czechoslovakia in March, or on Good Friday in Albania, what was happening every day in Germany, and all day, and all night year out and year in, in China" (195)	" <i>lo que estaba ocurriendo en el mundo</i> " / 'What was happening in the world'
"every vestige of appeasement rope has petered out" (201)	<i>Esta frase se suprimirá</i> / 'This sentence shall be omitted'
"No civilized country is ready" (202)	<i>Esta frase se suprimirá</i> / 'This sentence shall be omitted'

¹⁶ All translations of the amended passages included in this table are mine.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the galley proofs were not included in this file, making it impossible to identify the passages that were to be deleted.

“And if England likes to make a pretext out of a mere frontier dispute between Germany and Poland” (203)	<i>Esta frase se suprimirá</i> / ‘This sentence shall be omitted’
“Yesterday morning Germany had invited Poland and taken Danzig” (227)	<i>“La mañana anterior Alemania había ocupado Danzig”</i> / ‘The previous morning Germany had taken Danzig’
“in Poland” (228)	<i>Estas dos palabras se suprimirán</i> / ‘These two words shall be omitted’
“And you are not a breeder. Every time you slept with Tom, you’d have to chance another litter” [sic] (231)	<i>“Un niño, y otro niño, y otro, y otro...”</i> / ‘A child, and another child, and another one, and yet another one’

Table 1: Censorship Amendments to *El final del verano*

The list of necessary amendments is accompanied by a note in which the censor adds that, although *Final del verano* is a good psychological novel, it contains many political references that are unnecessary and that, since they function as mere ornaments – for him, obviously – they should be deleted. He comments that the setting of the novel takes place ‘incidentally’ some time before the outbreak of the Second World War and that O’Brien shows the beauty of Ireland, its romanticism and the Catholic milieu. A detailed analysis of the censored passages marked for excision, together with the emphasis placed on the romanticised features that apparently characterise Ireland – later recalled by the publisher of *Ediciones La Nave* in the Preliminary Note that opened the final publication – clearly reveal his intention to divert the focus of attention and to obscure other political matters that are addressed in the novel.¹⁸

The second file concerning this novel consists of an application made by the publishing house *Dédalo*, which requested a reprint of the book in 1950 and which had signed for a print run of 3,000 copies. This was approved without any further hindrance, although the interesting aspect to note here is the censor’s report. In it, O’Brien is described as a prize-winning writer who needed no presentation in the country and whose work had been acknowledged by critics and the general public alike, especially after the success of *Sin mi capa*, which is presented as a masterpiece. Again, emphasis is placed on the beauty of Ireland, on the romanticism of the author and on the significant connections between Ireland and Spain (File 2947-50).

¹⁸ In the *Nota Preliminar* included in the first edition of *Final del verano*, the publisher brings to light the author’s descriptions of “*la bellísima Irlanda*” and goes on to emphasise: “*las maravillosas costas de Irlanda, esa isla panorámica y subyugadora, en que los españoles hallamos mucho que nos recuerda a nuestra península. La tranquilidad bucólica de Irlanda se ve alterada por la amenaza de un espantoso conflicto*” (O’Brien 1943: 5-6).

Finally, *That Lady* (1946)¹⁹ was translated in 1946 under two different titles: *Esa señora*, by Fernando de Diego and *Esa dama* by María José Rodellar. There are three files at the AGA corresponding to the publication of this novel. The censor involved in the assessment of the first translation (File 3154-46) alleges that the book could only be published on condition that it be accompanied by a note explaining that the novel was not a historical account but a mere invention.²⁰ He even recommended that those who wished to know more about the political intricacies of Ana de Mendoza and Philip II should not take this book seriously. He finally adds that O'Brien's unfaithful record of historical truth is admissible only because this is pure fiction created to entertain. Moreover, the report includes a further note in which the Spanish publisher of the novel announces that were he not to distribute it, the copyright of the translation would immediately pass to an Argentinean publisher, who would be allowed to publish the novel without the preliminary note and the polished aspects that could upset a perceptive Spanish reader. For that reason, the note reads, it is preferable to publish it in Spain with the required clarification.

The second file (File 5009-52), presented six years later, is another request for permission to publish it again by the well-known publishing house *Planeta* with a print run of 2,000 copies, which is approved without comment. The third file (File 6827-54) introduces a variation on the Spanish title – *señora* for *dama* – which seems more accurate, and again constitutes another request for permission to publish the novel by the publishing house *Germán Plaza*, with a print run of 5,000 copies, which is also accepted. One should only add that it is utterly ironic that the novel was published in Spain without any emendation considering that, according to Walshe, in *That Lady* O'Brien directly confronts censorship rather than evades it (1993: 7).

4. Kate O'Brien's expulsion from Spain

Having analysed the existing Spanish censorship files concerning O'Brien's works, I would now like to shed some light on her alleged expulsion from the country until 1957. Apparently, the first person that made this claim was the author herself, first in the

¹⁹ Two of the last oeuvres written of the author, *Theresa of Avila* (1951) and *The Flower of May* (1953), were never translated into Spanish. Her last novel, *As Music and Splendour* (1958), is still out of print. Tina O'Toole has explained in this regard that O'Brien became a stigmatized author after the ban of some of her publications (2005: 234). See also Anne Fogarty for a discussion of the lesbian subtext in this novel, "defy[ing] the social conventions that surround it in taboos and prohibitions" (1997: 171).

²⁰ This note has been included in all Spanish editions under the title *Nota de la autora*, where in fact we can read the following: "No es este libro una novela histórica. Es una invención inspirada en mis reflexiones acerca de la curiosa historia externa de Ana de Mendoza y Felipe II de España. No pueden los historiadores explicar el episodio y no he ensayado a hacerlo en esta obra imaginativa. Todos los personajes de esta historia vivieron, y he conservado la silueta histórica de los sucesos en que tomaron parte; pero todo lo que dicen o escriben en estas páginas es inventado, y, naturalmente, igualmente inventados son sus pensamientos y emociones. Con objeto de conservar la unidad de la invención me he abstenido de insertar en la novela cualquier parte tomada de sus cartas y observaciones" (O'Brien 1946: 5).

abovementioned letter that she had sent to the publisher of her novel *The Ante-Room* when it was first published in Spain (File 2949-50), and, secondly, to the *Association of Professional and Business Women*, in Canterbury, when she affirmed that she had never been welcome during the Franco regime and that all her novels had been banned for that reason: “It’s the only feather in my cap that all my works have been long ago banned in Spain and so remain” (qtd. by Walshe 2006: 75). As I hope to have proved in my discussion, this statement cannot be taken as a token of truth. Walshe has also explained that on several occasions O’Brien mentioned the efforts that had to be made to lift this prohibition and the lies that the current Ambassador of Ireland in Spain at that time had to provide: “He had to tell a lot of lies, I was a reformed character, a High Class Convent Girl” (qtd. by Walshe 1993: 13). A third source of information was provided by John Jordan, a critic and friend of the author, who in an article published in 1973 insisted on the truth of her expulsion, since it was the writer herself who had given him this information (Walshe 2006: 74-75).

Although there is no apparent public evidence of such a veto on the author, this assertion was taken for granted by critics and general readers alike. Reynolds, for instance, asserts that in *Farewell Spain* “she expressed such anti-Fascist views that Franco banned her from the country for over twenty years” (1987b: 181). Geraldine Meaney affirms that the publication of this novel “resulted in her exclusion from Spain for two decades by the Franco regime” (2002: 1080), and likewise Tina O’Toole states that: “Because of her outspoken criticism of the regime of Franco in *Farewell Spain*, she was barred from Spain until 1957” (2005: 234). Many others have also shared the view that her anti-Franco position and her comments on the Spanish dictator and his supporters led to the ban on entering the country until 1957 (O’Neill 1987: xiii; Reynolds 1987a: 97 and 104; Walshe 1993: 13; Michael O’Toole 1993: 131; Giménez Bon 1994: 175). In Kate O’Brien’s biography, Walshe even adds that “Kate was deprived of any contact with her Spain for the next twenty years and censorship had the effect of making her impulse towards Europe suspect within her own country” (2006: 76). And further on, he states again that “In May 1957, she was granted permission to return to Spain and so she rented out The Fort again and travelled to Madrid, revisiting a country she had last seen more than twenty years before” (2006: 127-28).

Very recently, in 2008, the then Ambassador of Ireland in Spain, Mr. Peter Gunning, published an article on Kate O’Brien in which he explained that it had been the former Ambassador of Ireland in Spain during the fifties, Dr. Michael Rynne, who had lifted the prohibition since he was also a relative of O’Brien (2008: 152).²¹ In a conversation that I maintained with Gunning and with his First Secretary, Sonja Hyland, he actually admitted that the only evidence he had was a telephone conversation with Etienne Rynne – Michael Rynne’s son – who had told him the story

²¹ In his own words: “Farewell Spain fue prohibido en España durante la época de Franco por su retrato solidario con la Segunda República y, desde luego, a la propia Kate O’Brien se le prohibió viajar a España a raíz de su publicación. La prohibición duró hasta 1957 cuando, aparentemente, intervino uno de mis ilustres predecesores como embajador de Irlanda en España: el Dr. Michael Rynne, embajador en Madrid durante los años cincuenta y pariente político de Kate O’Brien” (Gunning 2008: 152).

of the supposed intervention with the Spanish government to rescind the ban and allow the author back into Spain. Since there was no other documentary evidence, I was given information about those places where I could find the files of the Embassies abroad (after thirty years they are sent back to Ireland, to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and are then stored at the National Archives) so that I could research into them hoping to shed some light on this matter.

Carrying out this research in the National Archives of Ireland, in Dublin, was not unproblematic, to say the least. Although there were only three files that I needed to verify (on Dr. Michael Rynne's personal correspondence, on the expulsion of Irish citizens from Spain, and on the censorship of publications)²² I was only allowed to look through the last one, which actually included no information of any use for the present purpose. Curiously enough, I went through other files, one of them called 'Regulations affecting Irish citizens in Spain (1935-75)', which held the procedures all Irish citizens had to go through when entering or leaving the country and contained a necessary certificate of 'good conduct'. Surprisingly, in the abovementioned file or in others, including File CON 2/1/1, dedicated to the issuing of General certificates (1956-75), there was not one single note that included any of Kate O'Brien's visits to the country, either before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil war or after it, which is to me sufficiently suspicious. This can only perhaps be explained because, since O'Brien was a cousin of the Ambassador, her application forms went directly to him. As the report 'Formalities affecting Irish Citizens entering or leaving Spain', dated August 11th, 1939 included in this file states: "the mere fact that a passport is endorsed with a Spanish visa is not in itself sufficient to enable an Irish citizen to leave Spain; it is also necessary to obtain a safe-conduct from the Military Governor at the frontier before being able to cross later" (File CON 2/1).

The reasons I was not granted access to the other two files were based on the fact that, according to the members of staff at the National Archives, they were protected by their privacy legislation, meaning by this that they could not be released for public access, as the files might contain information that could be considered sensitive by other parties. They finally suggested that the Archive Unit would review the files on my behalf and let me know in due course if the material I required was contained within. As regards the file on Dr. Michael Rynne, the Archive Unit reported that it included nothing other than correspondence of a personal nature between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassador and that there was no correspondence on Kate O'Brien. As regards the last file, the Archive Unit reported that it dealt with the expulsion of a named individual from Spain, who was not O'Brien.²³ Adding to this, I should also note that in the National Library of Ireland, in Dublin, there is a folder which is missing and that corresponds precisely to the letters that Kate O'Brien sent to her friend, the critic John Jordan.

²² The file numbers that figured in the records of the Irish Embassy in Madrid are the following: File OA 3/2/1, File CON 4/1/20, and File ES 9/18, respectively.

²³ I would like to express my gratitude to Maureen Sweeney and Jean McManus, both members of staff in the archive unit, for their efforts trying to provide an answer to all my queries.

Apart from the National Archives and the National Library, the largest Kate O'Brien archive is located in a Special Collection in the library of the University of Limerick, where O'Brien's godson, Austin Hall, deposited the papers in 2002. Although the six sections into which it has been arranged cover a wide array of subjects, including personal correspondence and official documentation to her literary letters, diaries, media coverage, printed and photographic material, travel plans, financial matters and reports of her sickness and final death, none of the documents stored there registers any kind of information on this issue. Besides, and in order to revise all the possible resources that might lead me to either confirm or reject the existence of the official alleged ban, I have also checked the *Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica*, in Salamanca, the Police files stored at the *Archivo Histórico Nacional*, and the *Archivo General del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación*, these two in Madrid, again finding no textual evidence.²⁴

5. Conclusion

To conclude, I should like to emphasise the fact that a thorough research into the Spanish censorship files concerning O'Brien's oeuvre was needed since the information that has circulated so far is either partial or wrong. The analysis of the files stored at the AGA reveal that, although Ireland and Spain have historically shared a Catholic status and a protectionist censorship system, the two countries differed in their procedures and final resolutions that led to the banning of some of O'Brien's novels. Furthermore, as I hope to have demonstrated, there is so far no existing textual evidence of the expulsion of the author from Spain. Quite to the contrary, a large part of the information spread by O'Brien herself, and which has never before been contested by scholars, contradicts the truth that lies behind the absence of written proof. Finally, as regards the unveiled information stored in the files of the National Archives of Ireland, I find it very appropriate to refer to Julia Carlson, who began her study *Banned in Ireland* by affirming that the censorship of publications had "been a fact of life in Southern Ireland for sixty years.... the paternalism that perpetuates Irish censorship succeeded for many years in blocking the interchange of ideas between Irish society and its writers" (1990: 1). Now, more than twenty years later, some kind of censorship still exists, not granting access to existing files that could reveal new insights into their own writers and, ultimately, into their own cultural heritage. Leaving aside the impossibility of trying to find textual evidence of O'Brien's alleged prohibition to enter Spain, with this discussion I hope to have been able to shed some light on the history of the reception of Kate O'Brien's oeuvre in this country.

²⁴ I would like to thank Pilar Casado, chief archivist of the *Archivo General del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación*, and M^a del Rocío Sánchez, archivist technician of the *Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica*, for their kind and helpful assistance in this matter.

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