

Lydia Mathis
Professor Cozzens
ENG-350
23 October 2016

Think Piece: The Land of Spices

I was really captured by the enormous amount of sexism against women in the book. I realized pretty early on that Kate O'Brien, a feminist, was showing sexism in order to make her audience realize how wrong the views on women were during this time. There were many times throughout the novel where women were made to seem only to be destined to be wives. While talking to the Reverend Mother about the education of the girl's, Father Conroy says, "Our young girls must be educated *nationally* now, Reverend Mother - to be the wives of *Irishmen* and to meet the changing times!" (97). Kate O'Brien also uses incidences in Anna's life, particularly incidences involving Anna's education, to persuade the reader that the views and treatment of women during this time were wrong.

When Anna is eight years old, she is promoted to the status of a Second Preparatory. Anna is on her way to being celebrated on Emulation Day, a holiday designed to reward those for good classwork. Anna needed to pass one test to be one of the few students to be "emulated". Anna at first passes her test with a 75 allowing her to be celebrated on Emulation Day, but Mother Scholastic, who seems to have a grudge of sorts against Anna, regrades her test and gives her a 0. She claims that Anna's previous mistake indicated that she knew nothing at all. In this part of the story, O'Brien makes the emotion of this stripping away of something Anna earned very powerful to the reader. After Anna has been stripped of her award and has been left alone, O'Brien writes, "Anna sank in a heap in her dark cubicle, on the strip of carpet. She did not cry out loud any more, but she was choking and shaking with tears. She had never before been the victim of an injustice which she could see; she had never been shaken and dragged, and arbitrarily refused a pleasure she had won and been promised. She had never been flung into a dark place, crying, and left to find her nightdress in the dark, and go to bed crying." (113). This scene elicits such powerful imagery that the reader can feel the injustice of the situation. The image of a helpless eight year old being thrown to the ground and stripped of something she has earned garners a strong emotional response. O'Brien uses this powerful scene to persuade the reader of the injustice done to women whenever they have been unfairly treated.

O'Brien does this again later in the book when Anna's grandmother tries to deny her the right to go to college after she has worked tremendously hard to get scholarships that would allow her to. It is obvious that Anna has worked hard academically throughout her life, so the fact that her grandmother would try to deprive her of something she has earned seems an injustice. Her grandmother says that she disapproves "of money wasted on the academic education of girls" (270). Anna grandmother's ideals presumably reflect the ideals of the society at the time the novel was written. O'Brien uses the wrongs done to Anna to spotlight ideals such as Anna's grandmother's to persuade the reader that those kinds of thoughts are wrong. O'Brien uses the information known about Anna's work ethic to bring a spotlight on any action that would try to deny Anna what she deserves. This works to convince readers that things that would try to do to women what was done to Anna is unfair.

Both of these scenes shows injustices done to women in this time. O'Brien writes many instances in the book that seem unfair to women to drive her feminist views.