Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is two-fold; primarily it endeavours to place some of the major novels by Edna O’Brien in the broader framework of postmodernism, in order to contribute to the trend of providing innovative approaches to her works. Secondly it brings out the importance of little known O’Brien as an eminent twentieth century writer, disregarding the criticism which consistently saw her works as autobiographical and romantic in nature. This work positions her as a daring woman who defies orthodox Roman Catholicism and literary conventionalism making her works iconoclastic.

As an author, she has persistently and deeply engaged herself in most of her works with issues relating to women. Her novels raise a wide range of questions about the position of women in relation to the society, men and religion. But her feminist preoccupations cannot be understood straightforwardly, so much so that many women writers and critics feel that O’Brien does not speak for women at all. Most of her novels have female protagonists, but they hanker after men. This leads them to have many relationships with men, and O’Brien is a master at
depicting the physical intimacy and emotional state of her female protagonists in a most candid and lyrical prose.

Such a view sees only half of the picture, because Edna O’Brien does speak for women. Her method of speaking for women works through the application of complicitous critique. This type of critique is not straightforward; it partakes equally in things that it wants to renounce. So if we find, on the one hand, women in O’Brien’s novels being harassed by husbands, fathers and lovers, we also find, on the contrary, constant deconstruction of those elements that are detrimental for women. Edna O’Brien constantly engages in the deconstruction of the romantic love, femininity, maternity and even masculinity.

*The High Road* brings the analysis of how women cannot maintain a homosocial relationship, let alone a lesbian one. The novel’s analysis points to the fact that heterosexuality has not of necessity gone down well with women. It also brings about the fact that the women who deviate from the norm set by the patriarchal society are bound to suffer in one way or the other.
Similarly *House of Splendid Isolation* has its focus on the negative repercussions of mandatory motherhood. Together with *Down by the River*, it makes a case for freedom of choice in the matter of abortion.

The use of the complicitous critique posits Edna O’Brien among the postmodern feminists, who “need not abandon the large theoretical tools needed to address large political problems.”¹

O’Brien’s novels are not only postmodernist in the above-mentioned sense, they are multidimensional, which yield to many types of postmodernist readings. A literary work can be postmodernist in many ways. It can exhibit stylistic characteristics such as the use of self-reflexivity, parody, fragmented narration and mixing of the opposites. Or it may present in its narration philosophical preoccupations ranging from the epistemological doubt, the constructed and not given nature of foundational truth to the disbelief in the agency of autonomous subject. Still another way of postmodernism in literary

works is to be preoccupied with the representation of postmodern life, i.e. the life in the digital age, age of simulacra and superficiality - saturated with images. O’Brien’s novels are postmodernist in all the above-mentioned ways. On the narrative level most of her novels are fragmented, formally and thematically most of them remain ambiguous and non-totalizing. Similarly her novels engage with the philosophical preoccupation of constructive and not given nature of truth, values and subjects.

Many writers have contributed to the literary output of postmodernism, which has by now developed into a full-fledged ‘ism’, giving rise to a multitude of doubts which in themselves are the product of a highly complex and undecipherable mechanism of human thought. Edna O’Brien too is prominent among such writers and has energetically contributed to its growth through her prolific literary output. One might say, her contribution to the culture and cult of postmodernism is by no means insignificant.