

Kate O'Brien: A Portrait of the Author in Older Age

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Abstract: This article explores Kate O'Brien's correspondence and memoir *Presentation Parlour* (1963) as life writing, and a vital mode of inscribing subjective experience. It draws a portrait of the author in her later life, a portrait which is often overlooked in favour of youth and its radical associations, to foreground instead an alternative image of what it means and how it looks to be an important Irish author. This article argues that, as O'Brien imagines her way into later life, older characters, such as her aunts in *Presentation Parlour*, emerge more vigorously than in her earlier fiction, alongside illuminations as to the freedoms or constraints afforded to older women across generations. It also illustrates how O'Brien's experimentation with narrative technique and embodiment in her memoir writes back to dominant social and cultural conceptions of what it means to be old.

Keywords: Kate O'Brien, ageing, life writing, correspondence, *Presentation Parlour*