Suffragists, New Woman and Nationalists: Representations of Female Identity in the Novels of Rosamond Jacob

By
Deirdre Brady

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Abstract
Writer and activist Rosamond Jacob (1888-1960) contributed valuable works to Ireland’s literary tradition and her novels map the changes in Irish society during the period in which they were written. As a political activist, Jacob challenged the authority of the State and church to dominate women’s lives and her novels reflect the resistance to conform to dominant ideals of womanhood. This thesis will examine the representations of female identity in Jacob’s novels and will focus on the novels Callaghan (1920), The Troubled House (1938), The Rebel’s Wife (1957) and her unpublished novella Theo and Nix (1924). In the novel Callaghan, I will focus on the interplay between suffragetism and nationalism and propose that Jacob considers these two ideologies as indivisible entities. I will consider the representation of motherhood and New Woman in The Troubled House and the complexities of their relationship within their social context. I will also consider the unpublished novella Theo and Nix and the space for the subaltern within the cultural sphere. Jacob’s most successful novel The Rebel’s Wife has received little critical research and I hope to redress that by examining how Jacob contested a space for an important woman in history and debated the need for contemporary Ireland to remember the contribution of women to Irish history. In conclusion, my thesis will show how Jacob introduced themes of nationalism, religion, gender and culture into her novels and how she intervenes in their debates. By doing so, I aim to add to the canon of critical work which exists on Jacob’s work to date and enhance our understanding of an important Irish feminist writer of the first part of the twentieth century.
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Introduction

Irish literature of the first half of the twentieth century tends to be read against the background of the literary revival which was dominated by the works of predominately male writers like Yeats, George Moore and AE Russell. Lesser known writers and activists like Rosamond Jacob (1888-1960) also contributed valuable works to Ireland’s literary tradition and reflect the cultural, political and social period in which they were written. As a political activist, Jacob challenged the authority of the State and church to dominate women’s lives and her novels reflect the resistance to conform to dominant ideals of womanhood. Throughout her life, she fought tirelessly for human rights, as a suffragette and nationalist in the first quarter of the twentieth century and as a human rights campaigner and peace activist in the next quarter. Jacob was always sensitive to what she saw as the marginalization of women in Irish society. She contested the issue of censorship, the ban on contraception and the legal barriers to women working outside the home and she sought through her political and literary activities to get recognition of women’s role in the formation of the new Irish State. A prolific writer, Jacob wrote about a different Ireland to the one which existed along with the hegemonic male Catholic state that followed independence. As a woman writer, she identified the struggles of gender identity within nationalism, the conflict between maternity and self-realization, and the subversive identity of the New Woman. As a nationalist, her novels sought to valorize
nationalism but never extolled its violence and extremity. Her writing portrayed strong female characters whose role of mother, wife or single woman was represented as intelligent, independent and autonomous, and who operated within their social framework whilst insisting on equality. From a historical view, her novels presented a microcosm of the time they were set, and her earlier novels present a picture of an Ireland in chaos, where nationalism, feminism and sexuality is conflicting and society is unraveling. As Ireland became more conservative, her later works remind us of a different historical lineage, and explore the link between nationalism and Protestantism in Ireland’s heritage in *The Rebel’s Wife* or its matrilineal Celtic heritage in her children’s novel *The Raven’s Glen*. Jacob’s novels present us with historical facts within a fictional setting and mirror her own view of the Ireland in which she wrote. Her female characters question the moral fabric of their society, often presenting subversive identities and cultural values. It is these gender identities and values which I will examine in my thesis, and I will illustrate the diversity of these female characters who as Ingman remarked “are astonishingly modern, compared with later fictional portrayals of the limited horizons, mental and physical of Irish Women’s lives” (Ingman 2003).

My own introduction to Rosamond Jacob was through a newspaper article written about her in the *Irish Times* in March 2003 (Ingman, 2003) which outlined the works of Jacob and suggested that her novels portrayed women as modern and progressive instead of oppressed and passive. My curiosity was aroused by the ideals of a woman, whose political and religious background was alien to me and I decided to travel to the National Library of Ireland to read her diaries. I wanted to gain an insight into the mind of this writer and to expand my limited knowledge of the social mores and political background
in which she lived. What I found surprised me. The women described in Jacob’s diaries were not oppressed and silenced. They were political and involved. They understood the barriers to their gender but refused to accept them. During these two years, I began to feel I could do more to highlight the existence of such writers like Jacob, and my own feminist consciousness was aroused. I decided to undertake a Masters degree in Women’s Studies and present a thesis on her works. From the beginning, my wish was to produce a thesis which could highlight the existence of these political figures long forgotten as well as their contribution to feminism today. When I read her novels, I felt that they were an extension of her political and feminist outlook. Jacob’s legacy lives on and at a time where there is increasing interest in the cultural background of the Irish nation, I hope my thesis will help in the dissemination of this information and help revive the memory of a woman whose contribution to Irish society, culture and politics was important.

Chapter One will outline the biography of Jacob and her progression as a writer. I will consider her influences, her literary activities and the responses to her novels during her lifetime. I will also summarize more recent research briefly outlining what has already been written about her works. My methodology will concentrate on examining cultural artifacts and include sources from recent critical research as well as from historical sources and from the private diaries and family papers which exist in the National Irish library. Within the next three chapters, I will illustrate with examples from the texts, how her writing was informed by the New Woman movement, the connections between the Irish suffragette movement and nationalism and the position of women in post-colonial Ireland. Chapter two will examine the novel *Callaghan* and outline the interplay between nationalism and feminism, in the period before the Easter rising of 1916. Chapter Three
will consider the novel *The Troubled House* and the novella *Theo and Nix* and outline the underlying dissident voice in Ireland during the culturally repressive years of the 1920s. Chapter Four will analyze the historical figure Matilda Tone in *The Rebel’s Wife* and will consider Jacob’s reasons for returning to this historical figure in the 1940s. Chapter Five will conclude and review my findings, and suggest what in my view are the dominant themes and preoccupations in Jacob’s literary work.
Chapter One – ‘Rosamond Jacob – Social, Literary and Cultural Contexts’.

Jacob was born into an upper middle class Quaker family in Waterford in 1888. Throughout her life which ended in a road accident in 1960, she was an influential writer, feminist activist and a nationalist who wrote and published five books, three works comprising of fiction, a historical novel and a history of the Rise of the United Irishmen. A prolific writer, she also wrote political articles for the suffrage newspaper The Irish Citizen, plays, poetry and some unpublished novels. Living most of her adult life in Dublin, Jacob was highly politicized and was involved in many organizations including suffragette, nationalist and peace organizations.

Like many of the women involved in political life at the beginning of the twentieth century, Jacob’s status came from her upper middle class family background, whose nationalist view were influenced by their friendships with politicians like Charles Stewart Parnell (MS33146) and his sister Anna Parnell (MS33144). From a young age, Jacobs was predisposed to the suffragette movement, influenced by politically active women in her family and their particular interest in the issue of the vote. Correspondence in the Papers of Rosamond Jacob, indicate a visit by her Aunt Hannah Harvey to the House of Commons debate on Women’s Suffrage in June 1884 (MS 33,133/1-5) while political events like the visit of Queen Mary in 1911 were thwarted by her mother, Henrietta Harvey Jacob, who petitioned an anti-Mary resolution in Waterford to indicate strong resistance to the English monarchy in Ireland. Feminist influences included the Irish Quaker feminist Anna Haslem who formed the first Irish suffragette society (Cullen and
Luddy 1995) as well as influences from international feminists like the Quaker Lucretia Mott (Doyle 2001, pp169-192). These women shared Jacob’s natural sense of justice and their belief in equality for all mankind, as well as their strong pacifist ethos, greatly influenced Jacob’s frame of reference which is evident throughout her writing. Her father, Louis Jacob, an estate agent in the family business, never became publicly involved in politics, preferring to preoccupy himself with his artistic endeavors. Jacob herself loved to sketch and became a reasonable painter (MS 33139) and wrote poetry and stories from a young age. Her love of nature which inspired her artwork was carried forward into her writing with scenes of descriptive landscape used in her novels, reflecting her own deep attachment to the Irish landscape.

Jacob was also very involved in the cultural revival of the late nineteenth century and was a member of the Gaelic League. A lover of the Irish language and Irish dancing, Jacob mentions Irish poetry and ballads throughout her novels. Her children’s novel *The Ravens Glen* (1960) represents the feminization of Gaelic Ireland as it tells the story of an ancient Irish goddess and the matrilineal heritage of a long forgotten icon. Jacob’s love of all things Irish informed her cultural life and she joined nationalist parties such as Inghnidhe na hEireann, “daughters of Erin”, a organization set up to achieve independence for Ireland, and to promote Irish goods and customs. Plays put on by Inghnidhe na hEireann such as George Russell’s (AE) *Deirdre* and W.B.Yeat’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, were a precursor to the Irish National Theatre Society, which evolved later into the Abbey Theatre (McCoole 2004, p.20). As a writer Jacob circulated in artistic circles, and features a ‘woman as artist’ a subject in two of her novels, *The Troubled House* (1938) and her unfinished novella *Theo and Nix* (1924). She considered the writer and poet A/E Russell
and writer Susan Mitchell amongst her friends, as evidenced on the petition for her release from prison during the War of Independence in 1922 (MS33125). Jacob spent most of her adult life in Dublin, dividing her time between her hometown of Newtown, Co. Waterford and the capital city, which was an epicenter of cultural resurgence and political activity in the early part of the twentieth century. At that time, it was popular for artists and political activists to be involved in more than one resistance movement. Examples include playwright Sean O’Casey who was a leading member of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, Constance Markieviez who was involved in the Labour and Women’s movement and William Butler Yeats who was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Many emancipatory movements intertwined as part of a general resistance to the status quo (Coulter 1993). Jacob joined Cumann na mBan, the women’s arm of the Irish Volunteers, as well as the suffragette organization the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL), an organization set up in 1908 to get home rule and the vote for women. During this period, she befriended one of the founding members of the IWFL, the militant suffragette Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, who became a lifelong friend.

Although these suffragette associations were to become more militant as the struggle for home rule and the vote for women became major issues, Jacob retained her moral objection to violence, participating in organizational rather than military activities. During these turbulent times in Irish society, she wrote for the Irish suffrage newspaper *The Irish Citizen*, outlining her views of nationalism and suffragetism. Writers such as Jacob, wrote with a “highly sophisticated” feminism whilst demonstrating a comfort with the dichotomy of equality and difference (Valiulis 1997), a theme explored later in Jacob’s novels. After women received the vote in 1918 [to all women over thirty and later in 1921
to all women over eighteen], Jacob and her female contemporaries found themselves on the margins of Irish society. Jacob became secretary to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a position she held for the next ten years. By 1937 when the constitution of Ireland was written, the ideals of a free state with equal opportunities for both sexes had waned and women’s presence in the public sphere was all but absent, with legalized barriers in the civil service, censorship, barriers to women on juries boards and the banning of contraceptives. Ireland was now a new republic and the nationalist fight was over. Jacob spent the next thirty years resisting these barriers in a literary and political role. Her novels write against the grain and portray alternative and sometimes subversive narratives of women in the new nation. Up to the day she died in September 1960, she worked tirelessly for the benefit of women’s issues and a pluralist society.

Jacob’s career as a novelist started in 1913 when she began her first novel *Callaghan*, later published under the pseudonym of F. Winthrop. Although the novel was finished in 1916, it was not published until 1920. Its delay in publication can be attributed to the fact that Jacob lived in Waterford until 1919 (Doyle 2000). When she moved permanently to Dublin, she actively sought and eventually succeeded in getting a publisher. This period was politically turbulent with the Rebellion of 1916 and the Anglo-Irish War 1919-1921. The novel *Callaghan* expressed strong anti-British sentiment and editors were unlikely to take the risk in publishing such an overtly nationalist novel. By 1920, the resurgence of nationalism and the truce in the war of independence meant that *Callaghan* had an audience - albeit with the feminist content substantially reduced. Doyle recounts that the publisher insisted on Jacob removing “most of the suffrage lecture “
According to O'Regan, *Callaghan* was not commercially successful because its heroic characters were portrayed as flawed, and because a pacifist, Jacob’s novels questioned the actions and violence of nationalism (O’Regan 2003). O’Regan compares her nationalist novels to Smithson, a contemporary Irish writer whose books of valiant republicans flourished. Unlike Jacob, Smithson never questioned the motives behind her hero’s actions and these ideal figures appealed more to the Irish reading republic of the 1920s (O’Regan 2003).

At the time of publishing, the reviews of the novel were diverse with the national newspaper *The Irish Times* commenting on its unusual and independent view, whilst the national paper *The Irish Press* concentrated on its flaws in characterization. Well respected Gaelic Irish writer Daniel Corkery considered it one of Ireland’s best novels. In a letter dated July 1921, reviewing the novel, Corkery, whose own works dominated the literary output of this period, commented that it was “pleasantly free from the vulgarity of style” which he found in the English novel (see Appendix I and II). He deemed it one of the “best-told, brightest, and most convincing novels that have been written about the Ireland of our days” and he likes the character of Callaghan: “Callaghan is a real man, we like him. We laugh not only with him, but also at him, on occasions” (MS 33115). He also observed that the novel contained the word ‘sexual’ but dismissed its use as a ‘passing fashion’ unlike the “English of *The Daily Mail*”. Another review in the national paper the *Irish Independent* (MS33108) described the story as “but a sketch, a fragment, an episode” and also questioned whether it was written by a man or a woman. It is suggested that it should be longer to be “really great” but considered the style, “beautiful and the insight into character very wonderful”. Nonetheless this reviewer disliked the
character Callaghan, considering him “unlovable” and “uncouth” and “nationally speaking uncommon”. This last line concurs with O’Regan’s assessment, that the nationalist figure of Callaghan did not inspire the reading public, and it illustrates the unpopularity of a weak nationalist hero.

The complexity of the novel in dealing with religion, societal norms and nationalism is captured by a review in the *Irish Times* in January 1921 (see Appendix III). In this article, the reviewer assumes that the writer is a female and “a militant suffragette” and suggests that she is “not unacquainted with the inside of a jail” (MS33108). Noting the contradictions in the novel, the reviewer interprets the reading of the novel by the Irish public:

Roman Catholics will follow Callaghan’s career with interest and comparative satisfaction till they read of his marriage in a registry office. Protestants probably will be of the same opinion as their co-religionists of Kilmartin, who thought that Frances Morrin was only half-loyal to her own religion, and they will probably disapprove of her marriage to a man like Callaghan, who, while he avowed that he was a Roman Catholic, declared that he “was never much stock on the church”. Constitutional nationalists may regard Callaghan as almost insane in his hatred of England and in his contempt for John Redmond and the old parliamentary leaders……only the young militant Sinn Feiners will have the good word for him, and even they with reserve” (Irish Times 14th Jan 1921, MS33108).

Despite the obvious feminist content in the novel *Callaghan*, none of the reviewers commented on the novel’s feminism. In a newly formed Irish state on the brink of civil war, such a novel may have seemed too volatile for the general reading public and the novel was never commercially successful. To this day, the novel remains out of print and a copy of it could only be found in one public library in Ireland.

Jacob’s second novel *The Troubled House* was written in the early 1920s but failed to find a publisher until 1938 and then only after Jacob paid for the publication (Doyle 2000, p.155). The novel is written through the feminist lens of the main heroine Margaret
Cullen, incorporating a sense of history and providing a social commentary on the political and feminist scene of Ireland. Doyle suggests that the realistic portrayal of the period and its volatile material is possibly a reason it only got published in 1938 – after the success of her history *The Rise of the United Irishmen* the previous year. Reviews written at the time of publication indicate a good general reception of the novel. The *Daily Telegraph* considers it a moving and well written story:

“Raids, arrests, rescues, fear and excitement provide plenty of action, but the strength of this remarkable novel lies in the characters, all of them immensely and unfailingly individual “(MS33115).

The Irish paper the *Sunday Independent* in July 1938, reviewed it as a tale that has “freshness, vitality, and a satisfying mature outlook” (MS33115). The reviewer notes its departure from the normal rhetoric and comments that it avoids “the bombastic heroics of the romantic school and the sordid “debunking” of the realist” (see Appendix IV). Other reviews such as one in *The Manchester Guardian* considered it a narrative told “simply, honestly, and devastatingly”(MS33115) and the *Reynolds News* in July 1938 remarked that it was “the best first novel I have ever reviewed”(MS33115), a telling observation that Jacob has not received credit as author of *Callaghan* The *Daily Worker* in July 1938, comments on the novel’s social history remarking that, “The whole story rings so true that the book will remain for a long time in the memory for a long time after reading it” (The Daily Worker, MS33115). Despite these good reviews from both English and Irish newspapers, it was not a commercial success. Although the novel is now out of print, it is currently receiving renewed critical attention and an excerpt has been included in *The Field Day Anthology Of Irish Writing* Vol.V.
An amateur historian, Jacob was enthralled by the stories of Irish nationalist leaders like Wolfe Tone and Emmet and wrote a significant work *The Rise of the United Irishmen, 1791-4* (1937). According to Smith, Jacob’s aim was to show Irish people the roots of their nation’s republican tradition (Smith 2006). The book was intended for the general reader and as such was successful. As a history book, it was considered a “masterly work” and was distinguished by “fine writing”, though it is clear that Jacob valorized the revolutionary United Irishman Wolfe Tone above the statesman Henry Grattan (Pomfret 1938). Following on from this, Jacob also tried to publish a memoir of Wolfe Tone’s wife Matilda entitled *Matilda Tone* but was unable to find a publisher. In 1952 the book was refused by two publishing houses, Talbott Press and Gills and Devin Adair and in 1953 received the same fate from the Cork University Press and the Kerryman. Rewritten as a historical novel entitled *The Rebel’s Wife*, it was published by the Kerryman (Tralee) and was awarded the ‘Book of the Year’ by the Women’s Writers Club in 1957 (Doyle 2001).

*The Rebel’s Wife* was one of the most successful of Jacob’s works and a copy is attainable easily in most libraries. At the time of its publication, the reviews claimed it as Jacob’s best work and the newspaper *Kilkenny People* remarked on the author’s “genius for research” in bringing the “Ireland of Tone’s day very near to us” (MS33109). All reviews I found were cognizant of the dominant feminist role played by its protagonist, albeit as a devoted and domesticated wife who shared “all Tone’s interest, his hopes and aspiration” (MS33109) The *Irish Press* devoted a half page to its review in which it said that *The Rebel’s Wife* was written with “loving care” for the family details and the *Irish Times* recommended it as an “authentic account of his [Tone’s] heroic wife” (MS33109).
Only one review was critical. The reviewer for the *Irish Independent* in Jan 1958, comments that Jacob leaves out most of the flaws of Tone and considers the dialogue for the most part “stilted, artificial and over sentimental” (MS33109). Nonetheless the reviewer goes on to praise the storyline and remarks that the reader “will not be overcritical or indeed dissatisfied when he comes to the end of the tragedy”.

Just weeks before she died, Jacob’s final book *The Ravens Glen* was published in 1960 (Doyle 2000). Although written in 1945 and repeatedly rejected by publishers, it was finally accepted. A novel written mainly for adolescents but with a mythological theme of the matrilineal culture in Celtic Ireland, it is widely available in our public libraries. A prolific writer of plays and short stories, Jacob also has other works which remain unpublished but are available in the *Papers of Rosamond Jacob* in the National Library of Ireland. This includes a novella entitled “Theo and Nix” (1924) which was never published as it would be considered as Meaney observes an “untellable tale” in 1920s Ireland (Meaney 2004).

Over the next three decades, Jacob’s work got little attention and her books remained out of print. However, in recent years in Ireland, there is a renewed interest being shown in the traditions of Irish women’s writing. The Field Day volumes IV and V (2002) have been instrumental in reviving forgotten women writers. Under the editorial of Geraldine Meaney, volume four has included Jacob in its canon, with passages from *The Troubled House* (Meaney 2002, pp 978-1010). Other projects such as the Munster Women Writers Project include biographical and literary information on Jacob (O’Toole 2005), and at present a project researching the diaries of Rosamond Jacob is being undertaken by Dublin City University and the University of Warwick. This renewed
interest has brought some new critical attention to Jacob and this is evidenced in three recent scholarly works published since 2000 which I will consider in my thesis.

Damien Doyle’s PhD *A Bio-Critical Study of Rosamond Jacob and her Contemporaries* (Doyle 2000), offers important biographical information and outlines his interpretation on Jacob’s literary works. Doyle suggests that Jacob has been critically ignored by patriarchal literary and political establishments because of her volatile nationalist feminist views. He comments that the same issues that consumed Jacob’s political activism continuously surfaced in her fiction. Of *Callaghan*, Doyle remarks that the main female protagonist Frances Morrin, is a woman actively involved in social change but finds that her energy is sapped by political involvement. Because of this, her beliefs in women’s equality are “constantly compromised for the “nationalist cause”. As a novel, he suggests that Jacob offers a feminist novel that would work within the nationalist movement. *The Troubled House* addresses the problems of the time through a woman’s point of view. The main theme, the right to use violence, is central to the conflict in the family. The book, he suggests is “infused” with debates on pacifism versus activism and passive resistance versus militarism. The New Woman Nix is symbolic of the positive and liberating direction Ireland was going in the early twentieth century and Nix personal and sexual freedom contrasts starkly to the self-sacrifices of Margaret Cullen. Of New Women Nix and Josephine, Doyle states that their sexuality confronts heterosexuality and their independent lifestyles force the protagonist to reassess her own life, which is spent mediating between father and sons. Doyle also suggests that the subject of Nix in the last chapter is important as it documents the existence of women like Nix in Ireland. He comments that Nix’s character offers a possibility of multiple identities in a new emerging
state whilst illustrating how these diversities pose a threat to the narrow definition of national and sexual identity represented by the son Liam. According to Doyle, Jacob’s books inform the literary, feminist and cultural history of that time (Doyle 2000).

In the essay entitled “Representations and attitudes of republican women in the novel of Annie M.P. Smithson (1873-1948) and Rosamond Jacob (1888-1960)”, Danae O’Regan comments on the novels Callaghan, The Troubled House and The Rebels Wife, from the perspective of nationalism and the representation of republican women in these novels (O’Regan 2003). She describes Callaghan as a novel of complex characters with possible flaws, which question the actions of violence within the nationalist movement. O’Regan suggests that this portrayal of a flawed hero may be the reason for its lack of success within the mainly Catholic nationalist Ireland of the early twentieth century. The Troubled House, which is also a nationalist novel, is, she states, a novel of ideas where moral issues, motivation of characters and the justification of violence are explored. O’Regan considers The Troubled House unconventional with regard to its ideas on women, sexuality and art and suggests that the novel is written possibly with a more sophisticated audience in mind. O’Regan also comments on The Rebel’s Wife and its portrayal of the biography of Matilda Tone. She notes the novel’s observations on the evils of war and the suffering caused to women and she outlines the courage and bravery of Matilda. The essay notes that all three novels portray female characters as strong, independent minded feminist types who question rather than accept the beliefs of their time. This she suggests may be the reason for their unpopularity during Jacob’s lifetime and she considers that “sadly, pre-1960’s Ireland was not ready for Jacob’s writings, and she never had the success that she felt her work deserved” (O’Regan 2003).
Geraldine Meaney’s essay “Regendering Modernism: The Woman Artist in Irish Women’s Fiction” (2004) suggests that the character of the artist Nix in The Troubled House and Theo and Nix, “inverts almost all the conventions of modernism” (Meaney 2004). She cites Nix as the primary erotic object for the troubled Cullen’s and a lesbian relationship between Nix and her live in partner is suggested. Meaney considers that the novel has a sense of historical possibilities lost in the cultural hegemony of Catholic nationalism and conservatism, as evidenced when the authorities raid Nix’s house and destroy her paintings. Meaney also discusses Jacob’s novella Theo and Nix which she says expanded the identity of woman on the margins of society and comments that its depiction of the New Woman was more daring than anything published in Jacob’s lifetime.

In my own research, I hope to add to the existing critical literature on Rosamond Jacob’s fiction and suggest new critical reading. By reading through a feminist lens, I hope to provide further insights into the diverse female identities within the works, Callaghan, The Troubled House, Theo and Nix and The Rebel’s Wife. My approach for Callaghan will focus on the interplay between suffragetism and nationalism and propose that Jacob considers these two ideologies as indivisible entities. I will consider the representation of motherhood and New Woman in The Troubled House and the complexities of their relationship within their social context. I will also consider the unpublished novella Theo and Nix and Jacob’s view that the subaltern New Woman can exist alongside mainstream society, within the cultural sphere. Jacob’s most successful novel The Rebel’s Wife has received little critical research and I hope to redress that by examining how Jacob contested a space for an important woman in history and debated
the need for contemporary Ireland to remember the contribution of women to Irish history.

In conclusion, I will show how Jacob introduced themes of nationalism, religion, gender and culture into her novels, how she intervenes in their debates and how she remains optimistic about the possibilities for social change. By doing so, I aim to add to the canon of critical work which exists on Jacobs work to date and enhance our understanding of an important Irish feminist writer of the first part of the twentieth century.
Chapter Two – Home Rule for Half Ireland’: Conflicts of Suffragetism and Nationalism in the novel Callaghan

Jacob’s first novel Callaghan was written in 1913 when Jacob was a young woman of twenty five. It was a critical time in Ireland with the emergence of feminist organizations seeking the franchise for women, the resurgence of nationalism and the possibility of Home Rule from Britain. There was a growing optimism of an independent state, with an alternative vision to the culturally narrow state that was to become the hallmark of modern Ireland (Lyons 1978). In Jacob’s novel Callaghan we see this optimism during a critical time in Ireland when cultural identities were shifting and indeterminate and where spaces existed for the emancipatory movements such as suffragetism and nationalism which are described in the novel. Within these frameworks, identities of feminist, nationalist, Protestant and Catholic were fluid and interchangeable. Jacob posits the novel as an overtly nationalist novel with a feminist political agenda and the tale is narrated mainly through the feminist lens of Frances Morrin. Through the romance and the eventual marriage of the two protagonists, the Protestant suffragette Frances Morrin and the Catholic nationalist Andy Callaghan, the novel presents us with a traditional tale of love and romance. Yet its text is complicated by the extremities of its characters and their political activities as nationalist and suffragist. Because of its subversive text, the novel suggests a dissident modernity at play and serves as a political vehicle for espousing Jacob’s own views. Yet it stops short of moralizing and leaves the reader to reach her own
conclusion. My aim in this chapter is to illustrate how Jacob envisions space for more than one ideology and presents an optimistic vision of a secular, modern independent nation with equality for all citizens. I aim to illustrate this proposal by considering the ideology of feminism/suffragetism within the novel and its relationship with nationalism and by examining the emerging identities of womanhood in the Ireland of 1913.

The literature written in early modern Ireland was according to Deane a “heroic literature” which embodied “outstanding individuals” (Deane 1986). Callaghan, as the heroic patriot, continues this theme. The novel depicts the existence of the Irish cultural revival, a movement inspired by artists such as Yeats, to promote Irish identity through culture and language. One such organization, the Gaelic League, is mentioned throughout the novel and the main characters express their nationalism by supporting the league in its cultural activities. The novel highlights a different and more sinister type of nationalist, for whom the development of a cultural identity is not enough. This extreme nationalist is represented by the character Callaghan, who resisted folklore and language as the only means of redefining Irishness, and was impatient with progress “You can see it’s not the poetry of people that are going to take any partial steps towards what they want” (Jacob 1920 p. 179). Callaghan’s form of nationalism is a violent form and his anti-British sentiments “amounted to mania” (p. 43). Jacob, as a nationalist, was very aware of the existence of this extreme nationalism that predated the republican uprising of 1916 and she questions in the novel, the actions of violence within the nationalist movement (O’Regan 2003).

As a social history, the novel depicts the period before World War 1, when the power of British colonialism in Ireland was waning and the prospect of Home Rule was
almost assured. As leader of the Irish Parliamentary party, John Redmond supported the bill for Home Rule and was backed by an army of volunteers who were based around the country of Ireland. He recommended that the volunteers should join the British war effort against Germany and recruitment rallies were held throughout Ireland. This caused a split in the Volunteers (McCoole 1997), and nationalist extremists such as the character Callaghan in the novel, thwarted these efforts with disturbances at rallies. Their resistance to the authorities was often met with incarceration and in the novel, Callaghan is arrested and imprisoned for disturbances and assaults during one of these rallies. The social importance of the novel is also significant because it locates another identity often forgotten in history - that of the dissident Irish suffragette. At a time when women’s involvement in any political activity was seen as unfeminine (McCoole 1997), Jacob writes against the norm and establishes the main female protagonist as a suffragette.

**Callaghan** tells the story of a young, single, middle class Protestant woman, Frances Morrin, whom we discover is both a nationalist and a suffragette (Winthrop/Jacob 1920). The novel is set in 1913 and 1914 and documents a typical rural town and the events leading up to the republican rising of 1916. The plot centres around Andy Callaghan, a wealthy Catholic landowner, recently returned from America, whose fierce anti-British behaviour lands him in trouble with the authorities. As a member of the local branch of the volunteers, he is involved in organizing anti-recruitment rallies, gun-running escapades and in one instance murder. Frances is portrayed as a woman of independent means and action, who lives with her brother Dr. Morrin and her sister-in-law Christina Morrin. She is very attracted to Callaghan and the story revolves around their courtship and eventual marriage.
The identity of Frances as suffragette inverts early twentieth century notions of femininity and is oppositional to the conservatism of Callaghan. Frances who defies gender expectations, conventions and societal expectations of her womanhood travels alone, smokes, attends hurling matches, joins a suffragette organization and defies the religious impediments to her marriage with Callaghan. Their first meeting sets up their oppositional stance when Callaghan offers her a cigarette out of politeness and she proceeds to smoke it with “every appearance of indolent enjoyment” (p. 3). Callaghan immediately reproaches her: “I’m not sure that I approve of women smoking” to which she replies, “then why did you give me a cigarette” and continues the act. Unlike her nemesis Lily, Frances does not adhere to traditional notions of femininity and it is her intellect rather than her femininity that eventually attracts Callaghan. Nonetheless he is mystified when he realizes that Frances intends to continue her suffragette work when engaged. It has never occurred to him that “a woman might have public duties which seemed so important as a man’s” (p. 174). Frances uses her intellect rather than her femininity to transform Callaghan’s view of womanhood. As Christine remarks after their engagement:

“she had found herself able to tolerate Callaghan when she saw the interest he seemed to take in Frances’s mind; being immensely stronger, she said, than is usually taken by the most ardent lover in the mental process of his mistress”. (p. 175)

It is interesting that the conservative Callaghan’s first choice of bride is not the independent suffragette Frances but the vanity fair Lily, to whom he proposes marriage after a short courtship. Lily symbolizes the old colonial pro-British establishment and her desire to remain under this hierarchy eventually repulses Callaghan. Jacob presents Lily as doubly oppressed by linking her with her imperial colonizer and her gender role as
woman, under its patriarchal influence. Lily’s gender oppression is represented by her need to marry well and her interest in Callaghan is purely monetary. As a woman, Lily’s powerlessness is further aggravated by marriage as commented by Callaghan:

“Lily would have to entertain his guests, economize for the sake of objects she cared nothing about, furnish all suits of social help to his schemes, keep as many secrets as could not be concealed from her, uncomplainingly endure loneliness, anxiety and the disapproval of all her influential neighbours. In return for this, his house and a comparatively small part of his money would be at her disposal and he would be an affectionate husband to her in his leisure time. Her bargain was not so brilliant as it might and he wished he knew how far she understood what sits before her” (p.99).

Lily’s identity is rigidly based on her Anglo-Irish upbringing and the implication is that her marriage would be disastrous for Callaghan and for the nation, as it would imply a preservation of the status quo. Instead, Jacob uses the characters to highlight the consequences their union would have for both characters. For Lily, her identity is based on her need to rise in society and her desire to mix in the “best society”. This would be restricted by Callaghan’s anti-Britishness and his refusal for his wife to be “seen at the Viceregal Court” (p. 109). For Callaghan, a marriage to Lily would leave no space for his socialist views as she does not share his vision of human rights. Lily is “shocked to the foundation of her being by his [Callaghan’s] inclusion of the servant in the conversation”. and it makes her blush“ to think that her future husband could be guilty of such a vulgar action” (p. 59). When she corrects what she sees as his uncivilized manners, she is reflecting the customs of her social class and demonstrating her resistance to change. She retorts in answer to his probing of her views on the matter: “You don’t want to have everyone on the same level”(p.65). Instead, Jacob advocates an alternative oppositional character to Lily, in the form of Frances, and suggests that a union between the feminist in
the form of Frances and the nationalist in the form of Callaghan would present the best opportunity for a new emerging nation.

The form of romance between Frances and Callaghan is a dissident form of love with the protagonists’ differences in nationalism, religion and gender. Moore suggests this type of romance is used in novels to represent the type of love for one’s country “as a passionate personal relationship” (Moore 2000). This she argues makes it possible for the male protagonist to fall in love with a nation “by falling in love with a woman who embodies that nation”. In the novel Callaghan, the marriage of Frances and Callaghan symbolizes this love of nation and suggests that their union represents the marriage of differences in a new future independent Irish state. It is interesting that the protagonist, on seeing Frances in a green dress feels “an unconscious feeling of comfort and quietness in connection with that green gown” (p.111). This connection, I suggest is the connection of their nation and the nationalism it embodies. Similarly, Callaghan has an extreme passionate love for his newly acquired home Rossnagar. Callaghan’s love of Rossnagar [and its implied symbolism of nation] is remarked upon by his cousin Bridie “He’d talk about Rossnagar to the hangman on the gallows!” (p.47). Rossnagar has been reclaimed from the English colonizer by what the Protestant community see as this “nouveau-riche” Callaghan (p. 56).

This new emerging Catholic middle class is also paradigmed with the growing modernization of the Irish nation. This is represented by the returning emigrant in the form of the American Callaghan who disrupts the notion of nationalist as home-grown Irish and by the introduction of modernity in the paintings in the drawing room of Rossnagar of “two fine French examples of the nude, and a painting of a great dancer practicing her art”
alongside a picture of the Irish landscape Slievenamon, painted by a female artist (p.23). Despite the intention of Jacob of portraying Callaghan as an extreme nationalist, she also suggests that within this identity, there can be a place for modernity in the form of culture and art:

“All his enthusiasm was for the beauty of the objects represented. He seemed to take an unusual delight in the physical perfection of human beings, pointing out the delicate moulding of a limb or a face, the fine proportion of a body, or the power and grace of an attitude, with an appreciation of material beauty, which Dr. Morrin pronounced very un-Irish” (p.23)

This place also has a space for suffragetism as expressed in the identity of Frances. Frances embodies a militant form of suffragist whose activism is inspired by the nationalist issue of Home Rule and its exclusion of the vote for women. Frances’ feminism is aroused when she sees a woman selling the suffragette newspaper *The Irish Suffragist* on a visit to Dublin city. Beside the woman is a poster which reads “Home Rule for Half Ireland” (p.67). It is then she realizes that “she had been a suffragist ever since she was old enough to know what a vote was” (p.69). Frances becomes further aware of women’s marginality in society, when she attends a talk on the life of feminist Josephine Butler. The discussion is on Butler’s work with the Contagious Diseases Act and is sponsored by the fictional organization the I.W.S.L. The speaker discusses the helplessness of working class women in particular, without the vote:

“Men had made the social system themselves and for themselves, had made the laws that placed the outcast women in bondage to the police and deprived them of all the rights of free citizens” (p.72).

This passage is significant as Jacob is being deliberately confrontational by quoting an Act that would have been familiar to her readership. The text is overtly political as it outlines
the inequality that exists not only within gender but within class. The passage also serves to warn its female audience that they have no rights as citizens unless they have political power and thus, I suggest, promotes the message that suffragettes represent the interests of all classes, not just urban middle class women.

Resistance to the nationalist movement in the form of the British authorities is paralleled in *Callaghan* with the resistance to the Suffragette movement from the Church authorities and from the male perspective. Jacob mirrors the view of the Church to the Suffragettes when the woman selling the *Irish Suffragist* newspaper is rebuked loudly by a passing priest “Have you lost your sense of dignity?” (p.68). Similarly, when Callaghan meets Frances selling the suffragist paper on a Dublin street, he remarks he “never met a woman who said she wanted it, or who wouldn’t laugh at the mention of a suffragette” (p.78). This derision of the suffragettes was not uncommon and the movement was often renounced from the pulpit (Sheehy Skeffington 1941). Resistance to the movement also came from women and Jacob’s personal diaries indicate the collusion of women with the male view. In December 1913, she refers to a suffrage debate held in Dublin, where an anti-suffragette lady said that women could do as much already without the vote and that they didn’t need it. “if you can cut bread, with infinite labor and difficulty with a spoon, you shouldn’t ask for a knife” (MS32582/25). However it is Frances’s militancy that defines her identity and the courage and bravery that Frances demonstrates when she intends to protest on behalf of the suffragettes. When Frances plans an altercation during the visit of John Redmond, Callaghan thwarts these efforts by physically restraining her. He anticipates the violence from the men that support Redmond’s visit who “would kick a suffragette down a flight of stairs before he look at her, even when they’re sober” (p.135).
These dangers to a suffragette from certain male elements of Irish society were not uncommon (Mc Ardle 1993). As Skeffington famously quoted “suff’s were fair game” (Sheehy Skeffington 1941).

By the end of the novel, Callaghan’s conversion to suffragetism is complete. France’s friend Una confirms this when she comments on a letter sent to France’s by Callaghan, who has been jailed for assault. The letter asks about France’s suffragette activities and requests a copy of Lady Wilde’s book Ancient Legends, a book about Ireland’s folklore written by the pro-revolutionary Lady ‘Speranza’ Wilde. Una remarks that Callaghan’s resolve is as good as a woman and I propose, suggests the ideologies of suffrage and nationalism can be combined:

“What masculine man ever wanted to know what was on a suffrage poster that a girl was carrying? What masculine man would ever want that book of Lady Wilde’s? And look at that peculiar sort of implacability and independence of rules that makes him so restful to think about. You once said that, whatever circumstances he was in, you thought he’d be physically incapable of the act of surrender. Now, it’s only a woman or an animal here and there that’s made like that. The most masculine man will surrender quite pleasantly and drop all bitter feeling as soon as his cause is hopeless, because of his respect for rules, which in one light is a virtue. You think Andy is masculine because he looks like a man, and has a fine gift of bad language, and loves fighting, but the fact is he’s only a man on the surface – at bottom he’s just a combination of a woman and a wild beast” (p. 231).

Una’s role in the novel is minor but her voice is important in the novel. Through the character Una, Jacob complicates the notion of suffragette with another identity and one closer to her own perspective – that of the Irish nationalist and suffragette. Una voices the nationalist viewpoint within the Irish suffrage debate which chooses nation before gender and criticizes the interference of the British Suffrage organizations in Irish affairs. When Una attends the meeting of the I.W.S.L. with Frances, she refuses to join the organization.
When accused of being an anti-suffragette, Una explains that she refuses to accept the vote for women under a British parliament:

“I couldn’t make friends with British Suffrage societies or belong to any political organization that recognizes this country as part of the United Kingdom, and mixes itself up in British politics the way all Irish suffrage societies do” (p.73).

This view was also shared by the author who wrote in the suffrage newspaper *The Irish Citizen*, in May 1913, that “there are some Irish Suffragists who claim the title of nationalist, and who yet advocate and practice union….with British Suffragists” (Jacob 1913 cited in Owens 1977). For Jacob, the issue of suffrage first, at any price was not a view promoted by the author and she observed that a woman who believes this is “a true suffragist, no doubt, but no one can call her a nationalist”(Jacob 1914 cited in Ward 1995).

Nevertheless, Jacob chooses to represent Suffragists in the form proposed by Frances and by doing so, I suggest, Jacob is positing this ideology on a level platform with nationalism.

When Frances and Callaghan eventually get married in a registry office, they are indifferent to the reproach of society as indicated by their neighbour Bessie Richards remark “if you can call it a marriage”(p.241). The marriage of Frances and Callaghan is subversive in the way that both characters defy the religious divide between Catholicism and Protestantism and are indifferent to the responses of society. Jacob uses satire to portray societal response to the engagement of Callaghan and Frances. From the Protestant position, the mixed marriage is seen as “a form of degradation – a sort of disreputable shadow” by her sister in law Christine. When she remonstrates to her husband, he remarks: “I suppose ‘twould be hard to say whether her friends or his will think worse of it” (p.158) Her indignation is highly amusing to her husband, so he continues: “You
mustn’t think your friends have all the bigotry on their side” (p.159). The prospect of a Protestant marrying a Catholic is further parodied when the Morrin’s Protestant circle wonder if Frances has lost her mind. “They were all talking about the war and thinking of Frances and watching her to see if insanity was visible in her appearance” (p. 169). On the Catholic side, Callaghan makes light of the issue. When confronted by Dr. Morrin about the strict laws of the Catholic Church regarding mixed marriages, it is Callaghan who retorts “with a slight smile” that he will “have to choose between the Church and Frances” and goes onto say “I was never much stuck on the Church” (p. 164). The author by using satire to illustrate the absurdity of the divide between the two religions, enhances her message that a space must be created for the embodiment of more than one religious identity. However the text becomes more provocative when Callaghan is questioned about his religion. When queried by Dr. Morrin about his readiness to reject his religion, Callaghan responds indignantly, and accuses the Church of undermining state and family matters:

“England could never have held us for three centuries without the church’s help. Whatever thing you want to do, the Church hinders you. People are like children now; only for the Church, they might have a chance to grow up” (p. 165)

This condemnation of the Catholic Church is quite subversive as it warns of the dangers of combining religion with matters of state whilst suggesting the possibility of a form of neo-colonialism in a new Irish state, under the influence of the Church. I propose that Callaghan’s response also suggests that nationalism and Catholicism are not exclusive, as he places his love of nation and Frances [and the symbol of what she represents] first.
Through Callaghan’s response, the author informs the reader that the state and not religion should be the legitimate authority.

In this chapter, I have explored the intertwined issues of nationalism, feminism, religion and political upheaval in Jacob’s novel. I have examined representations of female identity in the form of the repressed Lily and the independent minded Frances. Callaghan is written from a feminist perspective and informs the reader about the separate issues of nationalism and suffragetism. Yet the author succeeds in finding a commonality between the two and no one ideology is submerged by the other. Callaghan is primarily an optimistic novel but the ending is left open. It is implied rather than stated that Frances will give up her suffragette activities when she marries but this is unclear as she insists on paying for half of the reception, remarking “You don’t know what you may let yourself in for when you marry a suffragette” (p.240). It also ends with a raid on Rossnagar on their wedding night and the destruction and theft of interior furnishings. For some, this represents a foreboding of things to come in a more narrow culturally simplistic state but I propose it represents a more positive outlook as the house survives the raid and the couple continue with their plans to have dinner. This incident confirms the resilience of the marriage of Frances and Callaghan against the opposing authorities, and I suggest succeeds in portraying the possibilities of an alternative vision of a modern independent Ireland. The novel is a mixture of fiction and fact and as historical fiction, it represents a microcosm of events of this period. It also serves as a vehicle for espousing Jacob’s view of nationalism and feminism, and stands as a reflection of contemporary society and ideologies in the early twentieth century.
Chapter Three – ‘Lip Sticking Flappers’ and Unconventional Mothers in The Troubled House and Theo and Nix

Jacob’s second novel The Troubled House is what O’Regan describes as a ‘novel of ideas’ (O’Regan 2003). It embodies ideas of nationalism and colonialism, ideas of conflict within families, ideas of motherhood and ideas of feminism and sexual expression. During the late 1920s when The Troubled House was being written, the Irish Free State government was asserting its power against women and trying to circumvent their efforts to become political participants. Restrictions on women in jury service, the outlawing of abortion, prohibiting wage earning by mothers and imposing female dress codes were all means of controlling and restricting women (Valiulus 1995). Jacob and her contemporaries resisted this separation of women from the public sphere and remained on the fringe of political participation, channeling their feminist energies into the cultural critique. Meaney remarks that the “pulse of oppositional discourse kept beating” and writers like Jacob continued to present subversive identities through their fictional works (Meaney 2002, p 978).

The Troubled House is written in the first person narrative of the main protagonist Margaret Cullen whose two eldest sons are drawn into the military struggle of the War of Independence. Like Margaret, both sons believe passionately in a free Ireland but disagree on how to achieve it. Her eldest son Theo is a pacifist who gets pulled into the activities of the military IRA in which his brother Liam is an activist and the storyline centres round
his arrest and the consequences for their family. The complex moral question of the use of violence versus peaceful methods is a dominant theme throughout the novel and Jacob’s own pacifist views are evident throughout the text. Set in the city of Dublin, the plot centres around the realities of raids, curfews and ambushes which were a feature of daily life in the city during this period (1920-1921) and the historical events are centered around what became known as the ‘Bloody Sunday’ massacre which occurred in Croke Park on November 21st 1920. Written in the late 1920s, it is an important fiction of social history, which like Jacob’s first novel Callaghan intersperses fact with fiction and presents to its reader a realistic narrative of life under occupation.

Apart from the main theme of nationalism, which is dramatic and at times melodramatic, the novel also introduces themes of unconventional motherhood and alternative sexuality. Jacob along with other women writers of the time used their writing to create a gap for new emerging sexual identities and unconventional ideas of motherhood (Meaney 2002). These gaps subverted Irish identities of heterosexuality which Doyle suggests “problematize the notions of Irish female-identity and the sexual supremacy of motherhood” (Doyle 2000 p 131). My aim in this chapter will be to examine how Jacob subverts notions of maternal identity and sexual identity and presents a representation of the modern New Woman within this novel. I will also examine Jacob’s novella Theo and Nix which appears to be written almost as a supplement to The Troubled House but was never published. This novella expands on the idea of the New Woman and the ensuing relationship between the character Theo and Nix of The Troubled House and extends our understanding of Jacob’s feminist standpoint.
The novel opens with the return of the mother of the Cullen household. Margaret Cullen arrives back from a visit to her ill sister in Australia whom she nursed her so that her daughter could continue her education. We are immediately confronted with an oppositional wife and mother, who by her absence from the home, circumvents the social role of mother; although she is taking on a ‘maternal’ (i.e.nurturing role), in her absence too. As the family was considered the basic social unit of the new emerging state, the reader is confronted with an opposing identity from the start of the novel. Margaret Cullen immediately tries to take rein of her family’s activities but finds that they are outside her control:

“It was not even as if I could use them as artist’s material and mould them to my will; they would act as they chose; live and grow as fate and their own hearts directed them. I could, at the most, influence them slightly by what I was, not by anything I tried to do” (p.91).

Margaret ponders the loss of her own self for the sake of her sons and realizes that her own identity has been submerged by her maternal role. She questions the purpose of her life remarking:

“What a queer thing it was that my life should spend itself thus, almost entirely in love and care and fear and thought and anxiety over three men and a boy. Was I nothing but being relative to them, without real existence of my own? “(p.91).

There is a sense of opportunity lost and regret at a life unlived as she questions whether it is necessary to be so singularly focused and self-sacrificing:

“My energy had all gone into one channel; I could not liberate enough of it to concentrate on any life of my own. But was it necessary for wives and mothers to be like that?”(p.91)
Written at a time when the boundaries of motherhood and womanhood were blurring as women’s role became relegated to the private sphere, this expression of discontent contrasts with the prevailing ideal of Irish womanhood. The Irish woman was first and foremost a mother, whose role according to the dominant Irish male political belief of the period was, “to produce and educate sons in the nationalist tradition to be good and virtuous citizens of the new state” (Valiulis 1995). Jacob questions the need for women’s role as mother to be so socially and psychologically restrictive and poses an oppositional stance to the one being espoused in particular by ecclesiastical authorities of the time.

Valiulis remarks in her essay ‘Power, Gender, and Identity in the Irish Free State’ that Lenten Pastorals increasingly endorsed the idea of women in the home and preached about the deterioration of the world and in particular the family, blaming women who had forgotten their true identity (Valiulus 1995). She comments that this view was generally condoned by patriarchal political elements, citing an example from the newspaper The Kilkenny People, which declared that women who left their natural habitat of the home would become “fag-smoking, jazz-dancing, lip-sticking flappers”. These outpourings of rage against the independent woman were indicative of the fears of the influence of the New Woman movement which had dominated American and British social circles around the turn of the twentieth century. The emergence of this New Woman was becoming more common not only in literary fiction but in real life too and is a subject which Jacob considers in depth in this novel and which I will return to later in this chapter.

Margaret Cullen’s identity as mother continues to play out as nurturer, protector and mediator and although she questions her position as outlined above, she fulfils her expected role as nationalist mother. She negotiates disputes between her children and her
husband who argue incessantly about the virtues of militarism versus pacifism and their methods of resistance to the occupying British forces. She herself expresses a mainly pacifist view although on occasion her rage causes her to consider slaughtering all of the Black and Tan occupying force. Nonetheless it is through her identity as mother and her relationality with other mothers that she can better express her reaction to the consequences of war:

“During those days, I had a hideous feeling that every elderly woman I met in the street might be the mother of one of those six condemned men. I went with my eyes on the ground, not daring to look at a woman for fear I should see confirmation in her eyes. How I expected to see it I did not know, but I was certain I should know it at once” (p 234).

Margaret Cullen’s two eldest sons Theo and Liam are depicted as “the man of peace and the fighter” respectively (p.111), although her own favorite appears to be the fighter Liam whom she considers as a child and she believes “cannot get on without his mother” (p.119). Margaret Cullen’s nationalistic tendencies are the antithesis to her husbands. He is a Catholic home ruler whose conservative views cause him to argue incessantly with his son Liam. She thwarts any efforts by her husband to discipline him for bringing trouble from the authorities on his family and uses her own financial resources to support Liam.

The portrayal of the patriarch of the family as weak and ineffectual is according to Kiberd common in societies on the brink of revolution (Kiberd 1995 p.380). The son and father role is often reversed as the father’s role becomes discredited for his role under the occupying force and the act of patricide is necessary for the emergence of a new beginning. In The Troubled House the father Jim is killed by his son Liam. In classic texts such as these, Kiberd indicates that the role of mother is often dominant, as in the case of Margaret Cullen, when the father is lacking and the “space vacated by the ineffectual
father” is filled by the all powerful mother who then becomes, wife, mother and surrogate father (Kiberd, 1995, p381). This is evidenced in the novel when Jim refuses to allow Liam into his home. The mother responds by siding with her son Liam stating “I’ll take rooms somewhere, and go and live with you”(p.239). If as O’Regan remarks, the Cullen family are a symbol of the nation of Ireland (O’Regan 2003), then it is clear that the author understands that the replacement of the father and his symbolism of the old order, is necessary for social progress.

By introducing the character of Nix, Jacob is introducing a contrast to the ideal of motherhood discussed earlier in this chapter. The New Woman character Nix is an inversion of the self-sacrificing, feminine, gentle woman, favoured by patriarchy and her sexual expression as bi-sexual is stereotypical of the public perception of what New Woman stood for. Jacob describes her in accordance with masculine values of femininity:

“she also had all the faults which they usually dislike in women. She was openly selfish and cynical, she had no petty pretences (if that be a fault), she never gave herself the trouble of controlling of disguising her impulses. Certainly she never flattered a man in any way, open or subtle”(p. 186)

The ideal of the New Woman is important to this novel as it depicts the changing identities of womanhood following the achievement of the vote. Restrictions on women’s movements, dress codes and sexuality were being lifted and women were rejecting the outmoded Victorian ideals of femininity. By the turn of the twentieth century and right through the early decades, the discourse of the feminization of men and the masculinity of women became dominant and boundaries and categories had to be redrawn and renamed (Gardiner 1993). New Woman fiction was written into the literary genre and this fictional character became evident in literature. The symbol of the New Woman was two-fold. It
could mark sexual freedom, female independence and a bright democratic future or it could symbolize a degenerate female, non-maternal and a threat to respectable womanhood (Johnson 1975). In many New Woman fictions of the time, the female characters were represented as non-conformist and had careers as artists, musicians, journalists who engaged in a non-bourgeois way of life. Always middle-class or upper class, the New Woman was sometimes depicted as sexually deviant which in the late nineteenth century often meant lesbianism or promiscuity. This is outlined in Johnson’s book on a ‘real’ New Woman, Ms. Florence Farr, a divorcee and actress lover of George Bernard Shaw. Complicit with fashion, Farr cuts her hair in the mode of the New Woman and was a “rather saucy, tom-boyish arrogant new woman” who boldly expressed her opposition of marriage. She spoke freely of sex, believing herself to be part of the fin de siècle females who were free from Victorian taboos. Farr willingly admitted that women were capable of several love affairs and on the subject of sex she remarked;

“It gives us every happiness we know on the condition that we never give way to it in our serious relations. For heir certainly. For diversion yes. As for “hygienic gymnastics”, yes” (Johnson 1975, p.36)

Like Farr, Nix, the artist in The Troubled House, typifies the stereotype of decadent woman. It is implied that Nix is sexually active with male and female partners and her attributes fit in with the image of an arrogant, sexually deviant and non conformist type of New Woman. Nix’s views echo that of women like Farr whose view on marriage agrees with the socialist doctrine of abolishing wedlock and this perspective is reiterated in the novel. When Margaret Cullen interrogates Nix regarding her intentions towards her son Theo, she replies that she is only flirting with him, “I promise you I’ll never marry him” (p.116). Here, Jacob inverts the boundaries of convention, where a father asks a man of
his intentions towards his daughter. Instead it is the mother who asks the woman [Nix] of her intentions towards her son.

The issue of motherhood was often contentious amongst New Woman writers, with some valorizing it and some denigrating it (Sage 1999, p. 465). In The Troubled House, Jacob deals with these issues sensitively by presenting a linkage between motherhood and art and introducing a commonality in Theo between the two women. The link between motherhood and art is evidenced with the introduction of the woman artist Nix in the novel. In the way that Margaret Cullen gives birth to life, so too does Nix create life in the form of her art. This conjoining of mother and artist resonates with the texts of New Woman writer Egerton, who uses women’s interaction with each other to reconsider the relationship between women’s creative and procreative work (Fluhr 2001). Both mother and artist in this novel try to mould their creations – one through guidance and nurturing of her sons and the other through painting what she sees as “the possibilities of men” (p. 122). Nonetheless, the conflict between the supremacy of maternity and the subversive nature of the New Woman is explored. The initial reaction from the mother is suspicion as she observes her son’s attraction to Nix when he first met her “I did not like the girl at that moment, you understand, for I thought there was something a little sinister about his silence” (p. 65). Her concern is fuelled by a conversation with her friend Josephine Carol, who shares an apartment and it is implied, a bed with Nix. Josephine warns her that her son is “just a toy ” for Nix and remarks that Nix is “casual in sex matters”(p. 107). When Theo writes a letter from jail to Nix as well as his mother Margaret, his mother becomes jealous: “It made me angry to hear that he had written to
her” and becomes enraged when she discovers that Nix taunts him with her letters, while he’s incarcerated:

“At that moment, I hated her, and hated her the more because I felt so helpless before her. The look of her face, the sound of her laughter, made me want to drive a spear of realization into her heart, and I knew that her heart, if it existed at all, was as far out of the reach of any weapons at my command as the walls of Jerico. (p.183).

The passion of Margaret Cullen’s outrage suggests more than just her emotion as a mother and hints at a passion in the form of a dissident form of female sexual desire, as suggested by her reaction to a portrait of a naked Nix:

“ She was leaning back, with her hands clasped behind her head, watching the movements of a big black and white cat, that sat, licking himself, on the floor before her. How beautiful they both were! How the light slid along the women’s creamy skin and gleamed on the cat’s silky fur! How like they were, in their strong, lithe gracefulness! I have said that Miss Ogilvie’s face was not beautiful, but her naked form, portrayed here, gave me a shock of admiration as strong as I had felt at the sight of the diver. I wondered if the human form were often so austerely lovely. It was a relief to see it represented here without conscious gestures or toilet accessories – she sat there as if it were the most natural thing in the world to have no clothes on, and the grave inscrutable eyes and lips told that all her attention was centered on the cat at her feet” (p.63)

The Diver referred to in this passage is the subject of a cubist painting by Nix Ogilvie of a naked young man which Margaret admires: “the beauty of it was blinding” (p.60).

Margaret’s reaction is complex as it arouses powerful emotions and suggests that she believes Nix to be blindingly beautiful as reaffirmed later in the novel:

“I found Nix there, in a marvelous purple and yellow Cubist dressing-gown, laying the table. She looked very fascinating, with her shapely bare ankles, and the whiteness of her neck and breast gleaming against the strange purple garment, and the light shining from above on her cloud of bright brown hair. I was glad Theo did not see her”(p.115).

Although Margaret works within a heterosexual framework as evidenced by her mentioning the relationship between Theo and Nix, the novel does have a ‘queer’ edge to
it and suggests the emergence of a more fluid female sexual identity. Geraldine Meaney writes that *The Troubled House* can be regarded as utopian, in the sense proposed by Stephen Maddison ‘characterized by a radical inclusion of resistant identities’ as it offers a “glimpse of a dissident form of female desire for a different sex” (Meaney 2004).

Jacob’s decision to introduce such transgressional thinking into her novel, suggests her belief that there was a space for diversity in the new Ireland and a hope that the new nation would embody these values.

The novel ends with a truce between Britain and Ireland and the freedom of all citizens. Similarly there is a form of truce between the opposing factions of maternity and New Woman and there is a sense of acceptance of the place in the new nation for each other’s diversity. Throughout the novel, Margaret Cullen questions her identity as mother but it ends with her development from the discontented self-sacrificing mother to the strong resilient widow. For Margaret, she has put nation before gender and her reward is the reunification of her family. The supremacy of maternity is maintained but it is suggested that there is also a space for the subaltern, as remarked by Margaret Cullen:

“there will probably be more like her [Nix], as time goes on” (p. 271). Whilst the public of the 1920s was not yet ready for the New Woman Nix, “[Theo] They mostly don’t like her, neither men nor women, They’re all afraid of her” (p.270), there is the suggestion that there is a place for the New Woman within the intellectual sphere. The novel ends when Margaret finds Theo painting pictures of Nix in the garden. By signaling the return to cultural pursuits, I propose that Jacob is indicating the location of marginal identities within their cultural sphere and the new possibilities for women within this field. Despite the increasing restrictions placed on women in the public sphere, Jacob negotiated a
platform for these marginal texts within the cultural field and presents in *The Troubled House* an optimistic novel of possibilities.

**Theo and Nix**

Jacob’s novella *Theo and Nix* was written in 1924 in four small notebooks (unpaginated) and remains unpublished in the *Papers of Rosamond Jacob* in the National Library of Ireland. The narrative is a follow up on the relationship between the characters of Theo and Nix in *The Troubled House*. The plot centres on a rendezvous between the two characters that are going on what Theo calls their “honeymoon” in the Glen. Nix uses their time together to “experiment” with Theo, both physically and psychologically. During this time Theo loses his virginity and is transformed from a type of womanly man to a more masculine man. The issues of sexual identity, feminism and nation are suggested in this novella and add to the exploration of these ideas in the novel *The Troubled House*.

Theo is obsessively attracted to Nix whom he describes as having a good figure and pleasant looking. She follows the typical fashion of the New Woman character with bobbed hair, a short tweed skirt and a jumper “cut unusually low, showing the beautiful round neck and the upper part of the bosom very delicately tanned”. He expresses his love for her “I wish you were a little bit in love with me” to which she replies “sure I am in love with you, in my own way”. Nix’s “own way” takes an unconventional masculine form and suggests a type of androgyny. Her character inverts the norms of femininity in many instances. She books the accommodation under her surname as Mr. and Mrs N. Ogilvie, and aggressively initiates all love making. Nix has no inhibitions leading Theo to believe that it isn’t the first time she has shared a bedroom with a man. Theo is a virgin.
and he is uncomfortable with the deceit in the hotel “he had a sense of wrongness, of indecency, that almost seemed like conviction of sin”. In this novella, the woman is hunter and the man is the prey.

By creating a more stereotypical manly woman and womanly man, Jacob is troubling the distinction between masculine and feminine. According to Kiberd, artists in Ireland in the 20s and 30s were keenly aware of the popular notion of Irish identity as Catholic and often imbued their heroines with power and androgyny (Kiberd 1995). He illustrates this claim with the example of the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who set out to show Freud’s contention that “manly women were attracted to and attracted by womanly men” (Kiberd 1995, p.431). Meaney also reiterates the Freudian connection and indicates that Jacob uses this novella to engage with psychoanalysis by experimenting with what she describes as “sado-masochistic dynamic” (Meaney 2004). This is evident in their lovemaking which both excites and vexes Theo into “such a fury” and is suggestively violent. Nix explains to Theo that she is experimenting with him and playing these games to excite and vex him:

“I had the pleasure of the thing itself, the pleasure of feeling how frightfully you wanted it, the pleasure of feeling how strong you were, and the pleasure of seeing something in you that I never saw before. What women enjoy in cave-man methods is seeing the violence of the effect they’re having, that’s all”.

The manly woman was fashionable in society in the 1920s but was also a subject of condemnation, particularly from the Catholic Church. In Theo and Nix, it is Nix who wears the “breeches” at a time when the wearing of masculine clothes by the opposite sex was considered by the Catholic church to be “an abomination onto the Lord thy God”. (Kiberd 1995 p.429). This androgynous vision in Jacob’s novel where gender identities
are regularly inverted also illustrates a wider political meaning. Kiberd suggests that the artists of the Irish renaissance positioned themselves on the margins between colonizer and colonized, between male and female. This uncertainty of gender boundaries illustrated the fragility of the nation, which was vehemently disallowed at the time (Kiberd 1995). Throughout the novella, Nix considers Theo’s passivity annoying and at times “half pathetic” yet by the end, she yields to his masculinity, wears a skirt to please him and assumes “the soft, submissive role, yielding to the violence she delighted in, trembling under his strength like a delicate instrument too roughly treated”. It appears that patriarchy has assumed dominance.

Jacob as an activist, was clearly aware of the pressures from Irish society to conform to the cultural norms of Catholicism, patriarchy and heterosexuality. She indicates this through the scene at the end when Nix makes a crown out of spiky furze and places it on Theo, to indicate the presence of religion. Nonetheless, Nix refuses to see this as an obstacle but rather views it from an aesthetic viewpoint. A cubist artist will disassemble an object, analyse it and reassemble it in an abstract form and as cubist artist, Nix intends to subvert this object of patriarchy and reassemble in her own way with the last line indicating her intentions “I simply must paint you in it”. The reader is left with the optimism that the subaltern can co-exist alongside patriarchy as evidenced when Theo indicates his acceptance of her identity. “I don’t want you like other women, that are so absorbed in souls and in their own faces”. His feminist consciousness is raised and he sees things from an alternative perspective “I’m beginning to understand now why women sometimes feel insulted when men gas about their beauty, It always puzzled me before”.

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The novella ends with an understanding reached between the two lovers but it is unclear whether they will continue in a conventional relationship. Although Nix’s sexual identity is within a heterosexual framework in this text, the form of sexual identity is unclear. Jacob presents us with an expectation that this vague marginal identity can exist alongside mainstream society but her ending as with most of her writing, is left open to the reader’s subjectivity.
Chapter Four – ‘A Different Sort of Wife’ : Representation of Womanhood in The Rebel’s Wife

“From the materials, tantalizingly incomplete as they are, we know her, and we see her as a human being surpassed in quality by scarcely any character in our history, although in that history, technically speaking, she has no place” (MS33107).

As Rosamond Jacob wrote these words, she was echoing the sentiments of her American contemporary Mary Ritter Beard who wrote about prevailing notions of what she calls women’s “nothingness in history” (Beard 1931). Jacob was writing her major historical work The Rise of the United Irishmen 1791–4 (Jacob 1937), a history of the Protestant republican Theobald Wolfe Tone and the activities of the United Irishmen, a secretive society who planned the 1798 rebellion against British rule in Ireland. As a lifelong admirer of Tone, Jacob’s aim was to show Irish people the Protestant roots of their nation’s republican tradition and the book was intended for the general reader (Smith 2003). It was during her research for this history that Jacob became aware of the role Tone’s wife Matilda played in his life, as wife, mother and confidant and as supporter of republican aims. For the next ten years, she wrote a biography of Matilda’s life entitled Matilda Tone (MS33107), but was unable to find a publisher. She re-wrote it as a historical novel in the 1950s and it was published in 1957 to great acclaim, winning the Women’s Book of the Year in 1958. The Rebel’s Wife is based on sources from autobiographies of Tone, letters of Matilda and Matilda’s own account of her life in France between 1798 and 1816 (Doyle 2000). Jacob used documentary evidence as well
as writings from the feminist republican Mary Ann McCracken and letters written by the Tone family. This chapter will outline how the novel challenges the notion that women played a lesser role than men in achieving Ireland’s freedom from British rule, by illustrating the influence of Matilda on her husband and the sacrifices she made for Irish freedom. I will also examine how Jacob observed the popular notions of womanhood as oppressed and subservient in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and rejected this notion by presenting female identities as socially and politically active.

Politically at this time, Jacob was a member and honorary secretary of the feminist organization, the Women’s Social and Political League (WSPL), which was set up to “promote and protect the political, social and economic status of women and to further their work and usefulness as citizens”. The form of political activism had changed from the call for suffrage to the needs of wives and mothers (Luddy 2005). Jacob and other feminists worked with other women’s groups such as the Irish Countrywomen’s Association (ICA) and the Irish Housewives Association (IHA) to improve women’s lives. Their aims were to represent women as intelligent and responsible members of society and they focused on the role of woman in the home, her role in the community and on consumer prices (Beaumont 1997 pp.173-188). Despite all the changes in education, voting and matrimonial legislation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the role of women in the home had hardly changed and there was a political apathy amongst women generally. In writing The Rebel’s Wife, Jacob attempts to reconcile this by portraying strong intellectual women at a time where the public/private spheres were not so defined and Victorian ideals of domesticity had not yet been established (Luddy 1997 pp.89-108). In the novel, Jacob seeks to highlight a time when women were politically
and socially active, even within the constraints of their gender and the barriers of having no vote. By doing so, I suggest she proposed to illustrate to her readership of the 1950s the importance of political engagement within their roles as wife and mother.

Literary artists in the 1930s and 1940s were beginning to suffer the effects of a dominant Catholic society which censored and banned material which was considered subversive. Protestants and the Anglo-Irish had lost their power and a division arose between the Protestant and Catholic population. Deane refers to this as a “species of apartheid in Irish society” providing examples from Irish authors such as Elizabeth Bowen, who wrote about the existence of Catholics in her Anglo-Irish world:

“I took the existence of Roman Catholics for granted but met few and was not interested in them. They were simply ‘the others’, whose world lay alongside ours but never touched” (Bowen cited in Deane 1986)

Jacob’s friend writer AE aspired towards “the balancing of our diversities in a wide tolerance” but these aspirations were met with a parochialism and philistinism in an increasingly anti-modernist society (Deane 1986, pp.168-249). Home Rule was becoming Rome Rule and because of partition, over ninety percent of the Irish population was Catholic. The 1937 Constitution, on which the laws were based, involved consultation with clerics and clearance from the Vatican church on all matters of interest – health, family and education -issues of particular concern to women. Most commentators of the time called it a “Catholic Constitution” (Chubb 1991 pp.33-44) and it succeeded in further subjugating the status of the ‘other’ in Irish society. The ‘other’ in this case was Jacob, a middle-class Quaker, and her non Catholic feminist contemporaries who were becoming increasingly despondent with these narrowing Catholic views and the increasingly provincialism of the cultural space. Writers who wrote against the norm, had been
censored by what Deane calls a “long declension into nullity” (Deane 1986). The Second World War of 1939 – 1945 had brought with it rationing of oil and food and economic activity had slowed down. Ireland had become more inward looking as Kiberd notes “a sense of unreality pervaded cultural life” (Kiberd 1995).

*The Rebel’s Wife* was a departure from Jacob’s previous novels in which she wrote about events within her own lifetime. The novel is prefaced with a note from the author in which she remarks that the book is based on fact: “scarcely any of the incidents in this tale are imaginary”. She mentions a visit by Matilda Tone to Dublin in 1816 which “may very possibly have happened” (Jacob 1957). This introduction has echoes of Irish writer Maria Edgeworth and her fellow nineteenth century Irish novelists who regularly prefaced their novels with assertions of the truth of their tale. Their aim was to present their fiction as reliable sources to an often “incredulous audience” (Deane 1986). Like those nineteenth century authors, Jacob expresses her view that the tale of Matilda is true but it also admits to a certain artistic license in her fictional novel. This calls to mind Ann Fogarty’s comment of the “power of art to override and supplement history and make good its omissions and lacks” (Fogarty 2007, pp147-163). Jacob by supplementing her own version of events completes the narrative of Matilda and presents a more believable and authentic version of events. By writing subjectively, Jacob brings to the reader what Smith refers to as a “feminist sensibility” to her fictional text (Smith 2006).

The novel begins with the courtship of Matilda and Theobald and their whirlwind romance and elopement at a young age. The story centres on the struggles of Matilda as wife and mother of three children, who is frequently left with familial and financial responsibilities. The novel tracks the upheaval of the Tone family in its exile from Ireland,
its travels to America and France and its dispossession from its native land. It traces the evolution of Matilda from a love-struck adolescent to a forceful self-reliant woman and outlines the sacrifice of Matilda and her family to the nationalist cause. Throughout the novel, we get glimpses of the feminist consciousness of its heroine, her sister in law Mary and the feminist Mary Mc Cracken. Gender is central to the plot and female identities are represented as courageous and self-reliant.

Matilda is conscious of her oppression as a woman from a young age and the gender discrimination that exists. When the liberal Theobald Tone consults her on everything as an equal, Matilda at a young age of sixteen, knows this is unusual. “Men told you things, they did not ask your opinion – their opinions were all that mattered” (p. 4). When they marry, Tone consults with this wife as an intellectual, equal in politics “You are right, as usual! he would say when she commented on his talk” (p.15), he helps with the children “as if it were a matter of course that a father should mind his own child” (p.20) and he is domesticated. When embarking on a trip, Matilda starts to pack for him but he refuses her help “No, no, Matty – you’re not my servant” (p.130). Matilda responds to this by acknowledging her equality with her husband and replies “We’ll pack them together”.

The women in this novel operate within the social framework in which the novel is set but subvert the normal conventions of femininity. The female protagonists do not fully conform to the stereotypical Lady as described by eighteenth century author Elizabeth Hamilton:

“Meekness, gentleness, temperance and chastity; that command over the passions which is obtained by frequent self-denial; and that willingness to sacrifice every selfish wish, and every selfish feeling, to the happiness of others, which is the consequence of subdued self-will, and the cultivation of the social and benevolent affection” (Raughter,1997 p. 75).
Matilda is gentle but not meek and it is Matilda who inverts the discourse of delicate femininity. Tone is the first to first recognize her courage when he asks his new wife Martha to change her name to Matilda - the name of a “mighty battle-heroine” (p. 5) It is Matilda not Tone who is the rescuer and her bravery saves Tone from many potential disasters. As newly weds, the Tone family home is ransacked by armed robbers and they are tied up. As the family breaks free and flees the house, they realize that Tone is missing and the young mother Matilda races back unafraid of the robbers to rescue her husband. Later in the novel, as they flee from the British authorities to America, Matilda throws herself at the mercy of a British Navy officer and saves Tone from virtual “slavery” when the British Navy board their ship and conscript some of the men for their war efforts. When Tone’s final assault on the British in Ireland is thwarted, his ship is captured by the British authorities and he is sent to the gallows. It is Matilda who makes representations to the French government for his release.

Matilda’s identity as a woman is inspired by her maternal identity. Despite the loss of her husband and her two eldest children to illness, Matilda rises above her bereavement and struggles to provide for her youngest son’s future. On the advice of the doctor she travels with her son William to America. When he recovers, they return to France and again she uses her resourcefulness to ensure a career in military school. She contacts all Tone’s friends, Ministers, Dukes and Marshals for their support and on finding it lacking decides to contact the Emperor Napoleon directly. She makes inquiries and finds out where Napoleon stops to change horses, on his way back from hunting in St. Germains. She approaches his carriage, hands him a historical essay written by her son William, whilst invoking his memory of Theobald Wolfe Tone and requests
naturalization by the French government for her son. Her plan works and her son is naturalized, thereby ensuring that her son cannot be legally hanged as an Irishman if captured in battle by the British forces. She also secures a scholarship for William at cavalry school, thus enabling her to return a loan to her friend and future second husband Thomas Wilson and retain her financial independence.

Matilda’s maternal identity also informs her criticism of the pains of war and their effect on woman and children. This theme is continuous throughout the novel and it is remarked that wars would not occur if women had the political power to stop them, as Mary observes:

“Women will suffer like you as long as they can make us; ‘tis time women took some of the power themselves, and stopped them” (p. 135)

Matilda echoes Mary’s discontent with women’s lack of political power and answers “there should be women in parliaments” foretelling the emergence of the New Woman movement and the later campaigns of the suffragettes for the vote.

If Matilda’s identity is consumed by her role as wife and mother, the character of Mary is identified as a more prototypical New Woman of the eighteenth century, characterized by her independent thought and action. Unlike her contemporaries, Mary is interested in politics, hardworking and adventurous. Her self-determination and autonomy is acknowledged by her parents when she resolves to return home from America after her travels with Matilda and Tone:

“Losing Mary did not hurt them so much, for she had vowed she would come home again - no, she would not settle down with an American husband; if she took one at all, he must come home with her” (p.46).
When Mary does fall in love with a Frenchman Monsieur Louis Giauque, he asks her brother Tone for approval to marry her. Mary’s response to this is “I would marry Louis, let The [Theobald] swear his head off” (p.95). She marries under the pseudonym of Smith, the name the Tones use in traveling, remarking afterwards that she “could always use this as evidence of invalid marriage if she wanted to get rid of her husband” (p. 102). Mary determines her own destiny and her perspective mirrors the feminist principles proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft who asked in “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792), if freedom is a value, by what right are women deprived of it (Beard 1946 p.162-8). In a period where a married woman had no legal entitlements, and divorce was a scandal, Mary Tone’s statement is cognizant of the growth in feminist consciousness and enlightenment in western Europe.

It is also Mary who mentions the feminist and nationalist Mary McCracken, who as a follower of Mary Wollstonecraft was concerned with women’s rights and took an active part in the anti-slavery campaign. Mary admires McCracken: “Miss McCracken is as good as any man there – or better,” but it is Matilda who appreciates her value as a role model for women, describing her as follows:

“[a] noble girl who carried on cotton manufacture herself, like a man, and loved and served those around her, like a woman – independent, gentle, self-sacrificing and quite unconscious of her own nobility – the men should be all at her feet. She would be braver than any man, thought Matilda, in situations where I should do nothing but faint and scream” (p. 57)

These characteristics are an interesting combination of attributes conventionally associated with masculinity and femininity – independence, bravery, self-sufficiency alongside gentleness, self-sacrificing, modesty. Yet they are not characteristics admired by men in
the eighteenth century. Matilda and Tone argue this point with Tone reflecting the contemporary feelings towards women of independence and intellect:

[Matilda] “And are you clever enough to see how lucky a man would be if Mary McCracken loved him?’ No’, said Theobald, ‘for he would then have to live up to her. But I grant you she is the finest woman in Belfast.’ ‘‘Tis a pity,’ said Matilda, ‘that a man can’t love a fine woman as well as a woman can love a fine man.” (p. 71).

By contrasting the historical figure of Mary McCracken and her female identity with the ideal of eighteenth century womanhood, Jacob exposes the complexities of gender identity. McCracken is outwardly feminist, running a business and using her intellect to advocate women’s rights and her actions subvert the convention of femininity. In the eighteenth century, textual notions of femininity were being presented in conduct books and magazines which portrayed the concept of a ‘lady’ as one based on outward appearances where passiveness and dependency were the ideal (Skeggs 2002 p.312). A “Lady” did not run cotton mill industries. By moving outside the boundaries allocated to femininity, McCracken risked exclusion from the most patriarchal institution of that time – marriage, as Tone’s comment suggests. The author by informing the reader of the cost for women of non-conformity invites our sympathy for this character and I suggest, may be reflecting her own position as a single independent politically active woman in the patriarchal society of Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s.

As a Quaker and human rights advocate, Jacob was always aware of class distinction and we see elements of her socialism in her novels. Just as she highlighted Lily’s abhorrence in Callaghan at the notion that her fiancé would speak with a servant, in The Rebel’s Wife, she illustrates the disdain of the British officers for the Irish peasantry and their treatment of women according to class. In the chapter entitled The Press-Gang at
Sea (p.59-68), the author criticizes the ill effects of war, colonial oppression and the oppression of women. The passage depicts the journey to America of the Tone family and their unfortunate encounter with the British Navy. In the novel, a man is dragged “into slavery” by the navy leaving his wife and children in despair. The officer strikes the woman when she pleads with him for mercy and Tone intervenes. He is not dressed as a gentleman that day and is mistaken for a peasant. As he is being led away, Matilda falls on her knees entreating the officer to release her husband. She is joined by her sister in-law Mary, both women alarming the officer with their shrieking. It is then he notices their class position:

“He heard their screams of entreaty and half-consciously he felt there was something wrong. Their dress, their faces, their voices – why, these were ladies. Very charming ladies too, even the naked violence of their anguish could not hide that. He had been brought up to show consideration and politeness to Ladies. Poor women could be treated like slaves, but not Ladies” (p. 61)

This passage highlights the disparity between women of the middle and upper classes and women of the lower and working classes but also hints at the political issue of slavery pertinent at that time. This division of class resonates with the class and racial distinctions observed by former slave Sojourner Truth in regard to the different treatment of ladies who “need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches” and the treatment of her as a black slave woman who says “nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?” (Truth 1851). The chapter also highlights the inequalities of war and the consequences for the poor, as evidenced by the navy’s conscription only of peasant men like the man mentioned above resulting in the prospect of starvation for his family left behind, as Tone comments:

“These are his wife, his children; what will they do without him? they’ll starve” (p.60).
The novel, written in the period of the World War II, also serves to remind the reader of the destitution of the poor, especially of poor women and children, who are left behind to fend for themselves when their men go off to battle.

Jacob gives authority to Matilda, as wife of Tone, as the site of truth about her husband’s ideals. This is represented in the novel by Matilda’s son William who together with his mother, compiled the biography of Tone entitled *Life and Adventures of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (Tone 18-). William acknowledges his mother’s authority as the voice of history as he remarks “‘Of course you knew his mind better than anyone,’ said William, ‘and what you believe is probably the truth’” (p.209). In the novel’s epilogue, Matilda expresses the concern that the history book of the United Irishmen – *Lives and Times of the United Irishmen* by Dr. R. R. Madden is flawed in its account of her husband’s role: “Now it would always have that lie in it”, a reference to the quotation the doctor used of Tone as a violent man when he refers to the “violence of his [Tone’s] measures” (p. 216). Matilda addresses this by writing letters to the newspapers to correct what she sees as a misrepresentation of events but is hopeful of the success of her own book “Well, let them say what they would, Theobald’s own *Life* would give the truth” (p. 216). It appears that Jacob is suggesting a misreading of events by historians and is anticipating later feminist research by acknowledging the gaps and omissions of a history that excludes women’s stories.

There is a sense of lack or of dispossession in the life of Matilda, in her exile from her beloved home Chateaboue in Ireland and her various homes in France and America. This is highlighted on her last visit to Dublin as she reflects on the bloodshed and murders
of her husband, the revolutionary Robert Emmet and other men who’d been hanged for their nationalist activities:

“she had a strange unearthly sense of two lives at once; impossible that these streets should exist, nearly unchanged without Theobald. Was he with her there? Sure he must be” (p. 205).

Jacob not only mirrors the feelings of isolation that Matilda feels but suggests the isolation of the ‘other’ in a changing Ireland as its memory of its Protestant nationalist background wanes. As this chapter is fiction and not based on documentary evidence, it is probable that Jacob was reflecting her own isolation and the isolation felt by the artistic community in the 1940s and 1950s with the introversion of Irish cultural work. It is interesting that Jacob uses this chapter to narrate the growing influence of the Catholic Church, as observed by Matilda when she meets the “Catholic people’s leader, Daniel O’Connell, the lawyer from Kerry” on the streets of Dublin (p.205). A tale is told of a Dublin city church that rings its bell for Sunday mass - which was outlawed at the time. The Corporation prosecutes the Church but when O’Connell is retained as a lawyer for the Church, the case is dropped as “the name of O’Connell was enough, and the Corporation had abandoned their case” (p. 205).

By end of the novel, Matilda gains recognition of her status as a nationalist figure in her own right within her identity as wife and mother. As a guest of honour at an address by the Hibernian Provident Society in New York, her friend Dr. McNevan acknowledges this:

“You are more than his shadow, my dear Matilda, they know you, and they will be falling over each other to kiss your hands” (p. 167)
Jacob’s own representation of Matilda as heroine goes as far as suggesting that Matilda is in a sense an uncrowned queen of Ireland. At the funeral of Matilda’s second husband Wilson, the author presents us with a representation of a funeral with regal undertones:

“the poor crowded to it, bewailing the man who had always been ready to give his brains and time to their help, the committees he had worked on were there to a man, some of them hardly able to speak for grief…..men from home whose names were dimly familiar to her came to pay respect and sympathy to Matilda, and having done so, they spoke to her and William [Matilda’s son], with quiet reverence, of Tone. Katherine Sampson, standing on William’s other side, thought they treated her like a bereaved queen.” (p. 213)

Echoing Jacob’s perspective on the role that Matilda played in the destiny of her nation Mary remarks “If ever we do win the day…I hope the people will have sense enough to pay some of the honour to you” (p.82).

Jacob aimed to commemorate women’s lives and fill the historical silence regarding the stories of the ‘other’ sex. The significance of The Rebel’s Wife is that it revises dominant ideas of womanhood in a time which preceded the dawn of feminism and subverts the notions of women in the eighteenth century as weak and delicate. Jacob achieves this by remaining true to events but portraying them through a feminist lens. The author shows that women can be politically active, even in their role of mother and wife, and this theme is confirmed in the final line of the novel. When Matilda’s son remarks on the greatness of her two husband, both son and mother smile in agreement. It is her daughter in-law Katherine who remarks:

“It does not occur to either of them that that may have been partly her own work. With a different sort of wife – who knows?” (p. 214)

In suggesting that Matilda’s role was more significant than previously considered, I believe Jacob is suggesting a re-evaluation of history and the value of a woman’s role in
shaping this history. Matilda sacrificed herself and her children for nationalism and yet is a forgotten figure in Irish history.

Despite the fact Matilda controlled the compilation of Tone’s journals for his autobiography, it was her son William who got credit for the work. The novel corrects these omissions by portraying in *The Rebel’s Wife*, the life experiences of a woman who had great influence on one of the important figures in Ireland’s history. Jacob presents a woman whose identity revolves around her husband and children and yet who remains self-reliant in the face of the many obstacles she faces in her life. Her life as presented in the novel shows us a woman who endured exile, the deaths of her children and husband, ill-health, financial strain and upheaval. As wife and mother, she sacrificed her life for these endeavors without complaint and refused to be considered a victim of destiny. “I want to tell you – I want to make it quite plain that I would not change my life-my history – for that of any woman in France or Ireland” (p.157). *The Rebel’s Wife* is testament to a woman whom her son described in his father’s autobiography as a woman with “a courage and spirits worthy of the name she bore” (Tone 18- p. 227). I suggest the novel is also testament to another woman, Jacob herself, who wrote this novel with the scarcest of resources and brought to our attention an important woman in Irish history.
Conclusion

Jacob writes against the norms and conventions of the Ireland in which she lived, challenging conventional expectations of both gender and nationalism. From a feminist perspective, she writes from the viewpoint of women – yet her novels can never be categorized under one grouping. They are instead novels of ideas, and they represent political and social themes of nationalism and feminism, which are relevant to the period in which they are set. Jacob’s political activities inform her writing. As she wrote *Callaghan*, she was herself involved in the struggle for Home Rule and the vote for women. *The Troubled House* was written in the 1920s when the roles of women and the role of motherhood were fiercely debated issues. In the 1950s, as Ireland developed into a hegemonic male Catholic state, women’s political role diminished. To subvert this, Jacob wrote about Ireland’s Protestant past and the heroic adventures of Matilda Tone. Her strategy of presenting strong and politically active women served to illustrate to her readers a less passive notion of womanhood, in contrast to that being advocated by the State by the Catholic church. Yet her novels stop short of moralizing and she leaves them open to the interpretation of her reader. She introduces oppositional themes – motherhood versus New Woman, pacifism versus militarism, nation versus family, and refuses to idealize her characters. Frances Morrin reneges on her suffragette activities after marriage, Margaret Cullen sacrifices her individualism for her sons, Matilda puts nation before her family and Nix reverts to heterosexuality in *Theo and Nix*. Despite this and perhaps
because of this her female characters are never passive. They question the moral fabric of their society and decide their own destiny. In which ever role they chose, they consider themselves equal and their independent spirit is never completely suppressed.

One of the main debates that have emerged in my reading of the novels is that of the relationship between nationalism and feminism. In Callaghan, we are presented with this debate through the extremities of the violent nationalist Callaghan and the suffragette Frances. The conflict between the two ideologies is seemingly resolved by their marriage at the end of the novel and the author leaves us wondering what their future might be in a new independent state. This debate is continued within The Troubled House with the conflict between the nationalist mother Margaret Cullen and the New Woman Nix and is again resolved, with a declaration from each of their acceptance of the other. Jacob confirms the New Woman is here to stay but this claim comes with a reservation. She suggests that it is only within the cultural sphere that this identity can remain, as the New Woman is not yet accepted by the wider general public. It is interesting that Jacob also situates her other feminist identities within this same location. During an escape plot for Theo in The Troubled House, Jacob reintroduces the characters Callaghan and Frances from the novel Callaghan, whose role, here, is to assist in the escape of Theo. They present their three year old daughter Aideen, who it is remarked, is like her father in ways and perhaps, I propose, foretells the continuance of a republican dissidence in the future state. Frances’s nationalist activity is as messenger and she communicates with Margaret Cullen in an art gallery. They meet the New Woman Nix, who again thwarts convention by turning up with an English officer. It is at this junction that the three main feminist identities of her first two novels are conjoined. Maternal, feminist and New Woman.
identities are located in one space and all within the cultural space of the museum. In the late 1920s in which *The Troubled House* was written, women’s role in public life was being increasingly constricted and Jacob suggests that the only space left for subversive, alternative identities was within the cultural sphere of Irish art and literature.

*The Rebel’s Wife* was written with a different purpose. It was originally intended as a memoir and draft copies of this memoir *Matilda Tone* are available in the National Irish Library. This memoir does not read with the same sentimental language of *The Rebel’s Wife* but we have to assume that it was changed in her fictional novel to appeal to a general reader. As mentioned earlier, this was one of her most successful novels and it is attractive in its representation of an idyllic patriotism. Matilda’s nationalism is played out by her support of her husband’s republican activities but also by her companionship and intellectual support for his activities. Her feminism is informed by her actions and her courage and bravery when the need arises. The importance of her role as wife in shaping her husband’s life is emphasized and her maternal role as single parent highlights her resilience and bravery in the face of uncertainty. As a novel, it is the least subversive of the three, in that Matilda remains firmly within the roles of wife and mother. Yet there is a sense that the character achieves more than any of Jacob’s earlier heroines. Despite her efforts to save her family from illness and execution, Matilda loses them to death one by one. Through financial difficulties, she retains her independence when she could more easily have taken financial support from Wilson. Through to the end of her life, she is still actively supporting her husband’s cause and is acknowledged as a nationalist hero in her own right, by her contemporaries.
Within this thesis, there are many issues which I cannot cover in detail but they deserve mentioning. In all of the novels which I have discussed, Jacob refers to Theobald Wolfe Tone and even calls the character Theo in *The Troubled House* after him. Her novels and her novella *Theo and Nix* invoke a love of Irish ballads and poetry and all novels feature these cultural icons. Her novels mention some of the issues she felt strongly about, including vegetarianism and cruelty to animals. Dr. Morrin in *Callaghan* reveals that he is a vegetarian (p. 23), and Matilda’s son William in *The Rebels Wife* remarks on a new law against cruelty to animals (p.208). These issues represent the political involvement of the author. She was a vegetarian and a member of the Waterford branch of the ICPCA (Doyle 2001) and as mentioned in chapter one, she was actively involved in the Gaelic League. Jacob finds a space for her political views, to intervene in all her novels, and yet they never interrupt the style of her writings.

Jacob developed from a woman of letters to a writer of novels. Although she never achieved the success she deserved within her lifetime (O’Regan i2003), Jacob finally got recognition as a novelist when she was awarded with the prestigious award for “Book of the Year” in 1957 (see Appendix V). As a political activist, she herself was subversive and she challenged the establishment whenever attempts were made to restrict women’s rights. Her diaries reveal a woman of intelligence who was forthright and outspoken politically and personally. She embraced her beliefs with activism and believed in the responsibility of women to be politically active, as evidenced in her diaries:

“People do make me wild when they boast about taking no part in politics and not taking either side, as if such conduct showed their transcendent wisdom and virtue, instead of plain cowardice and inertia (MS32582)
From a literary perspective, it is only recently that women writers like Jacob are getting attention. As novelists, their work is important to the canon of Irish writing. I hope that by examining Jacobs works from a feminist perspective, I have shown how she approached her literary works and how her characters challenge the conventions and norms of their time. The female characters I have discussed, present an alternative image of womanhood in the first half of the twentieth century and are refreshingly modern. As readers, we find sympathy with their struggles and empathize with their restrictions and yet we are certain that these subversive identities will survive. Unlike many of her contemporary writers and novelists of a later decade, Jacob’s optimism stands out. If we read her diaries we see a woman who at seventy eight was still politically and intellectually active. We can take some example from her. She challenged authority and wrote about and spoke up for the marginalized. As her good friend Lucy Kingston commented after her death, Jacob “never let anything in the nature of a backwash towards anti-feminism pass without protest” (Doyle 2000).
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