

University of Toronto Archives and  
Records Management Services



Mary Mamie O'Brien  
Personal Records  
B2013-0019

Prepared by:  
E. Sommers  
November 2013

# UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES

B2013-0019

O'BRIEN, MARY

1941-1999

Access: Open

Textual; Publications; Graphic; Sound Recordings

0.73 m

## Biographical Note

Mary O'Brien was a renowned philosopher, feminist scholar and Professor in the Department of Sociology in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Born in Walmer, Kent, England on 8 July 1926, along with her brother Jimmy, Mary was raised by her aunts in Glasgow, Scotland. Upon completion of her secondary school studies, she trained and then began a career as a nurse and midwife, which would last for nearly twenty-seven years. She moved to Montreal in 1956, where she continued to work as a nurse and midwife in various capacities as a senior administrator and educator specializing in rehabilitation and gerontological care. Always a supporter of the front-line nurse, often against hospital administrators, she resigned as Director of Nursing at the Grace Dart Hospital in Montreal, to protest against the lower wages of female nurses' aides for work that was similar to that of male orderlies. In the late 1960's, she decided to go back to school, first taking courses at Sir George Williams University (Concordia University) in Montreal, and later enrolling at Atkinson College, York University. She obtained her B.A. (Sociology) in 1970, her M.A. (Political Science) in 1972, and her Ph.D. (Political Science) in 1976, all from York University.

During her doctoral studies, O'Brien was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Political Science at York University. Upon completion of her Ph.D., she became a Professor in the Department of Sociology in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Her Ph.D. thesis served as the basis of her first book, *The Politics of Reproduction*. The book was groundbreaking in its challenge of the entire Western philosophic tradition and her introduction of reproduction and women's experience as important fundamental theoretical concepts. This book was subsequently translated into French and Greek and it is still being read and taught by scholars around the world. Throughout the 1980's, O'Brien published extensively in journals and edited volumes. In 1989, her book *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* was published, featuring a compilation of O'Brien's essays and addresses about feminist theory. She was also involved with the journal *Resources for Feminist Research / Documentations de la Recherche Féministe*, serving on its Editorial Board from 1979-1982 and its Advisory Board from 1986-1989. Likewise, she supervised over two dozen M.A., Ed.D., and Ph.D. graduate students, serving as a mentor to the next generation of feminist scholars. In addition, O'Brien was a highly sought after speaker and gave addresses and lectures throughout North America and the United Kingdom.

Besides her academic duties, O'Brien was highly involved in the feminist movement in Canada and was one of the founders of the Feminist Party of Canada in 1979. She also was active with the Toronto group, Women Against Violence Against Women.

Mary O'Brien retired from OISE in 1987. She passed away on 17 October 1998 after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's disease.

## Sources:

"Remembering Mary O'Brien," *Canadian Woman Studies* 18 (4)(Winter 1999).

McNaughton, Cath and Frieda Forman. "Lives Lived: Mary O'Brien," *Globe and Mail*, 13 November 1998.

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## **Scope and Content**

Personal records of Mary Mamie O'Brien (1926-1998), philosopher and feminist scholar, Professor Emerita in the Department of Sociology in Education at OISE. Includes files on: her education; professional correspondence; extensive drafts and manuscripts of her research, writings, and addresses; artistic works (poetry, short stories and a play); and photographs of Mary O'Brien with colleagues and friends.

## **Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Records acquired from Mary O'Brien's partner, Catherine McNaughton, in June 2013.

## **Related records in a different fonds**

Margrit Eichler fonds (B2013-0022)

Helen Lenskyj fonds (B2013-0014)

Alison Prentice fonds (B1998-0017, B2009-0010)

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**SERIES 1 BIOGRAPHICAL FILES**

0.13 m; textual

1941-1999

2 cassette tapes

This series consists of records documenting Mary O'Brien's life and career as a nurse and midwife in Glasgow and Montreal, and her subsequent academic career as a feminist philosopher. Includes: articles and reviews of Mary O'Brien; records related to her involvement with the Feminist Party of Canada; letters from faculty, staff, academic community-at-large, and former students in support of Mary O'Brien for the 1987 OCUFA Teaching Award; sound recordings of an interview and awards ceremony; and obituaries and tributes to O'Brien following her death.

**B2013-0019**

<b>/Box (file)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates</b>
/001 (01)	Articles about Mary O'Brien	1984-1998
(02)	Reviews of O'Brien's work	1982-1991
(03)	Feminist Party of Canada	1979-1980
(04)-(05)	Letters of support – OCUFA Teaching Award	1987-1988
(06)	"Feminist Theory: The Influence of Mary O'Brien." – <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 18 (3)	Sept. 1989
(07)	"Remembering Mary O'Brien" – <i>Canadian Woman Studies</i> 18 (4)	Winter 1999
<i>Sound recordings</i>		
/001S	"Would the world be a better place if women ran it?" – Interview of Mary O'Brien on CBC Radio show <i>Cross Country Checkup</i>	Sept. 1985
/002S	Distinguished Educators' Night 1991, OISE	Fall 1991
<i>Oversize</i>		
/005 (01)	Nursing and midwifery certificates	1941-1951
(02)	York University degrees	1970-1976
(03)	Event posters	1983-1985

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**SERIES 2      CORRESPONDENCE**

0.07 m; textual

[1970]-1996

This series consists of correspondence to and from Mary O'Brien with colleagues at OISE, former students, and other academics. Included is correspondence about talks and addresses given by O'Brien and correspondence related to the French and Greek translations of O'Brien's book, *The Politics of Reproduction*.

B2013-0019/001 (08)-(11)

**SERIES 3      RESEARCH & WRITINGS**

0.39 m; textual

1960-1989

1 cassette tape

This series consists of unpublished and published manuscripts written by Mary O'Brien over the course of her career. Includes: coursework and M.A. dissertation proposal from her studies at York University; miscellaneous unpublished drafts; material relating to her books *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) and *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1989); French and Greek translations of *The Politics of Reproduction*; book reviews of works by other feminist scholars; drafts of journal articles and book chapters in edited volumes; and drafts of conference addresses, keynotes, and lectures given by O'Brien.

Also included is a sound recording of an address given by O'Brien at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education at OISE in 1985.

Files have been arranged by type and chronologically by the archivist.

B2013-0019/002 (01) - /004 (22)

*For file list – see Appendix A (page 5)*

**SERIES 4      ARTISTIC WORKS**

0.07 m; textual

[197-?]-[199-?]

This series consists of poetry, short stories, and a play written by O'Brien. The play was written as part of an assignment during her undergraduate studies. Some of her poetry has been published in *Resources for Feminist Research*.

B2013-0019/004 (23) & (24)

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**SERIES 5      PHOTOGRAPHS**

0.07 m; graphic

[194-]-[199-]

This series consists of personal photographs of Mary O'Brien with her partner Cath McNaughton, friends, and colleagues. Includes early photographs of O'Brien as a nurse in Scotland and Montreal, two photographs of O'Brien at the Annual Conference of the UK Labour Party in October 1956, O'Brien receiving the City of Toronto's Constance E. Hamilton award in 1982. Also included are professional portraits of O'Brien taken for her books and a 1985 interview with the Kingston Whig-Standard.

B2013-0019/001P & 002P



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## Appendix A – Research & Writings

B2013-0019 /Box (file)	Title	Dates
<b>Coursework</b>		
/002 (01)	Assignments	1960-1971; predominant 1969-1971
(02)	M.A. dissertation proposal	1974
<b>Research</b>		
(03)	Notebook: Political Theory [Notes on writings by Charles Taylor, Ralph Miliband, Erich Fromm, Jacob Bronowski, Hannah Arendt, and Jean-Paul Sartre]	[197-]
<b>Unpublished manuscripts</b>		
(04)-(06)	Miscellaneous loose papers [early drafts]	
(07)	[Unpublished, annotated transcript of a discussion between OISE faculty: Clive Beck, Carl Bereiter, Chad Gaffield, Mary O'Brien, David Olson, Alison Prentice, Marlene Scardamalia, and Ian Winchester]	n.d.
(08)	[Untitled essay on E.M. Forster's <i>A Passage to India</i> ]	n.d.
(09)	"The Hard and the Soft."	n.d.
(10)	"Building Feminist Theory."	n.d.
(11)	"Marxism, Motherhood, and Metatheory: The Problem of Praxis."	n.d.
(12)	(with Somer Brodribb) "Notes from the North: Canadian Feminism."	n.d.
(13)	"Women and Political Process: Participation or transformation?"	n.d.
(14)	"Raising Consciousness: The Personal and the Political in Feminist Pedagogy."	[198-?]
(15)	"Reproductive Technology: Who Benefits?"	[198-?]
<b>Book: <i>The Politics of Reproduction</i>. (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981)</b>		[197-]-[198-]
/003 (01)	Chapter summaries	
(02)	Draft – <i>Chapter 1: The Dialectics of Reproduction</i>	
(03)	Draft – <i>Chapter 2: Sorry, We Forgot Your Birthday</i>	
(04)	Draft – <i>Chapter 3: The Public and Private Realm</i>	
(05)	Draft – <i>Chapter 4: Creativity and Procreativity</i>	
(06)	Draft – <i>Chapter 5: Production and Reproduction</i>	

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B2013-0019 /Box (file)	Title	Dates
	<b>Book: <i>Reproducing the World</i>. (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1989)</b>	
/003 (07)	Draft – <i>Chapter 1: Reproducing the World</i>	[198-]
(08)	Draft – <i>Chapter 3: Abstract Thought and Feminist Theory</i>	[198-]
(09)	Draft – <i>Chapter 7: Resolute Anticipation: Heidegger and Beckett</i>	1985
(10)	Draft – <i>Chapter 8: The Root of the Mandrake: Machiavelli and Manliness</i>	[198-]
	<b>Journal articles / Book chapters</b>	
(11)	(with Margaret Owens and Jan Ralph) "The Nursing Approach to Prolonged Hospitalization of Handicapped Children." <i>Inter-Clinic Information Bulletin (ICIB)</i> 6 (4), 15-18.	1967
(12)	"Hegel: Man, Philosophy and Fate." G.R.O.W. Paper No. 12 (1977), Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.	1977
(13)	"At School on the Street." <i>Canadian Woman Studies</i> 1 (1).	1978
(14)	"The Dialectics of Reproduction." <i>Women's Studies International Forum</i> 1, 233-239.	1978
(15)	"Reproducing Marxist Man." In Lorenn Clarke and Lynda Lange (eds.), <i>Sexism of Social and Political Thought</i> (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).	1979
(16)	"Feminism and Revolution." In Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn (eds.), <i>Feminism in Canada</i> (Montreal: Black Rose, 1982): 252-8.	1982
(17)	"Feminist Theory and Feminist Practice." In Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn (eds.), <i>Feminism in Canada</i> (Montreal: Black Rose, 1982).	1982
(18)	"Reproductive Labour and the Creation of Value," <i>Atlantis</i> 8 (2), 1-10.	Spring 1983
(19)	"Feminism and Education: A Critical Review Essay," <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 12 (3), 3-15.	Nov. 1983
(20)	"The Commatization of Women: Patriarchal Fetishism in the Sociology of Education." <i>Interchange: A Quarterly Review of Education</i> 15 (2), 43-60.	1984
(21)	(with Sheila E. McIntyre) "Patriarchal Hegemony and Legal Education, <i>Canadian Journal of Women and the Law</i> 2 (1), 69-95.	1987
(22)	"Loving Wisdom." <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 16 (3), 6-7.	Sept. 1987
(23)	"RNAO Responds: A nursing perspective on events at the Hospital for Sick Children and the Grange Inquiry," <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 17 (1), 34-35.	March 1988



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B2013-0019 /Box (file)	Title	Dates
<b>Journal articles / Book chapters</b>		
/003 (24)	"Introduction." In Mary O'Brien and Frieda Forman (eds.), <i>Feminism and Education: A Canadian Perspective</i> (Toronto : Centre for Women's Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1990).	1989
(25)	"Periods." In Frieda Forman (ed.), <i>Taking our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality</i> (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989).	1989
<b>Addresses</b>		
/003S	"Collective Pilgrimage: The Political Personal", Public address by Mary O'Brien at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education, OISE. [later published under the title "A Way of Life," <i>Canadian Forum</i> (May 1986) and as chapter 6 in <i>Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory</i> (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).]	1985
/004 (01)	"Production and Reproduction." Public lecture	n.d.
(02)	"The Politics of Impotence." Paper presented to the Tenth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for American Studies, Ottawa, 1974.	1974
(03)	"Motherhood and Metatheory: The Problem of Praxis." Paper presented to a Conference on the Women's Movement in Canada, York University, Sept. 1977.	1977
(04)	"Don't Blame Mother." [draft conference address]	[198-]
(05)	"Reproducing the World."	[198-]
(06)	"Resolute Anticipation: Dasein and Godot." [early draft of "Resolute Anticipation: Heidegger and Beckett", Anniversary Lecture Series, York University, November 1987]	1980
(07)	"Reproductive Labour and the Creation of Value." Paper prepared for the Women's Studies Conference, University of Toronto, October 1981.	Oct. 1981
(08)	"Hegemony & Superheroes: A Feminist Critique of Neo-Marxism." [early draft of "Structure, State and Patriarchy", Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Ottawa, 1982 .]	1982
(09)	"The Commatization of Women: Patriarchal Fetishism in the Sociology of Education." Paper presented to the British Sociological Association, Manchester	1982
(10)	"The Tyranny of the Abstract: Structure, State and Patriarchy." The Maurice Manel Memorial Lecture Series, Atkinson College – York University.	Feb. 1983
(11)	"Reproductive Technology", Canadian Society for Women and the Law Conference, Ottawa.	Feb. 1985

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<b>B2013-0019</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates</b>
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**/Box (file)**

## Addresses

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|------|------|---|-----------|
| /004 | (12) | "Reproductive Technology and Women's Lives."<br>[early draft of "Reproductive Ethics: Parenthood in a Technological Age."<br>Keynote to Saskatchewan Planned Parenthood Association, December 1985] | Oct. 1985 |
|      | (13) | "Fiction (and Fact)." Keynote address presented to the Atkinson Women's<br>Studies Conference, York University, 12 April 1986.  | Apr. 1986 |
|      | (14) | "State, Reproduction, Law", University of West Virginia Law School.   | Apr. 1988 |

## Book reviews

- |      |      |   |           |
|------|------|---|-----------|
| /004 | (15) | Smith, Dorothy E. <i>Feminism and Marxism</i> (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977) &<br><i>Feminism and Materialism</i> . Annette Kuhn & Ann Marie Walpe, eds. (London:<br>Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).<br>– review published in <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 8 (1). | 1979      |
|      | (16) | <i>Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism</i> ,<br>Lydia Sargent, ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981).   | 1983      |
|      | (17) | Hartsock, Nancy. <i>Money, Sex, and Power</i> (Boston: Northeastern University Press,<br>1985). [early drafts; subsequently published in <i>Women's Review of Books</i> 1 (7), 9-11.]   | 1984      |
|      | (18) | French, Marilyn. <i>Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals</i> (New York: Summit<br>Books, 1985).<br>– review published in <i>Broadside: A Feminist Review</i> 8 (3), Dec. 1986 / Jan. 1987.  | 1986      |
|      | (19) | <i>Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory</i> . Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross,<br>eds. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).<br>– review published in <i>Resources for Feminist Research</i> 16 (2).  | June 1987 |

## Writings translated into other languages

- |      |      |   |      |
|------|------|---|------|
| /004 | (20) | [French translation of <i>The Politics of Reproduction</i> ]<br><i>La dialectique de la reproduction</i> . Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1987.  | 1987 |
|      | (21) | [Greek translation of <i>The Politics of Reproduction</i> ]<br><i>Filosofia tis anaparaggis: i avevaiotita tis patrótitas kai i ekmetállefsi tis mitrótitas</i> . Athina:<br>Néa sképsi, 1988.  | 1988 |
|      | (22) | [German translation of "The Dialectics of Reproduction" – Chapter 1 of <i>The<br/>                 Politics of Reproduction</i> ]<br>"Die Dialektik der Reproduktion" in Irene Dölling & Beate Krais (eds.)<br><i>Einalltägiges Spiel: Geschlechterkonstruktion in der sozialen Praxis</i> (Frankfurt am Main :<br>Suhrkamp, 1997): 75-103. | 1997 |