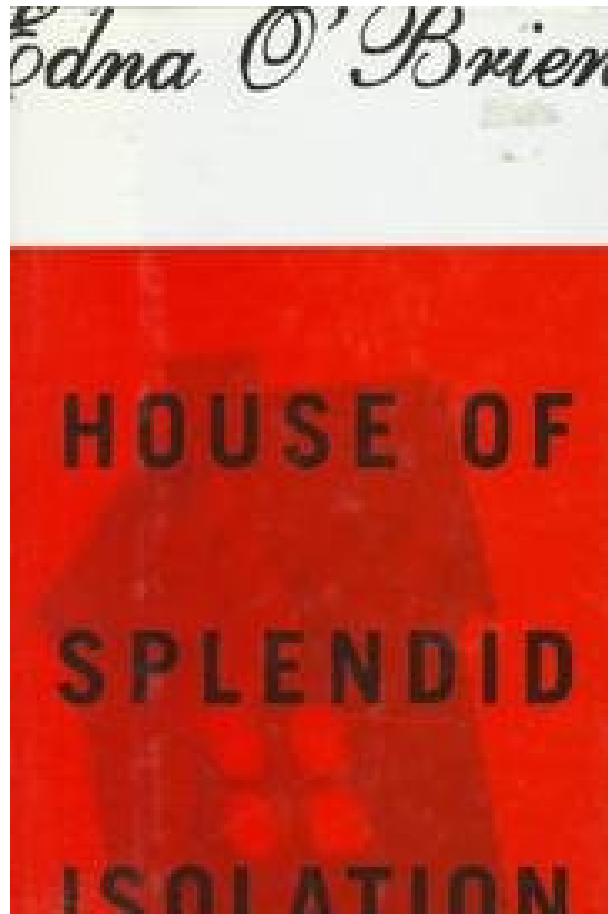
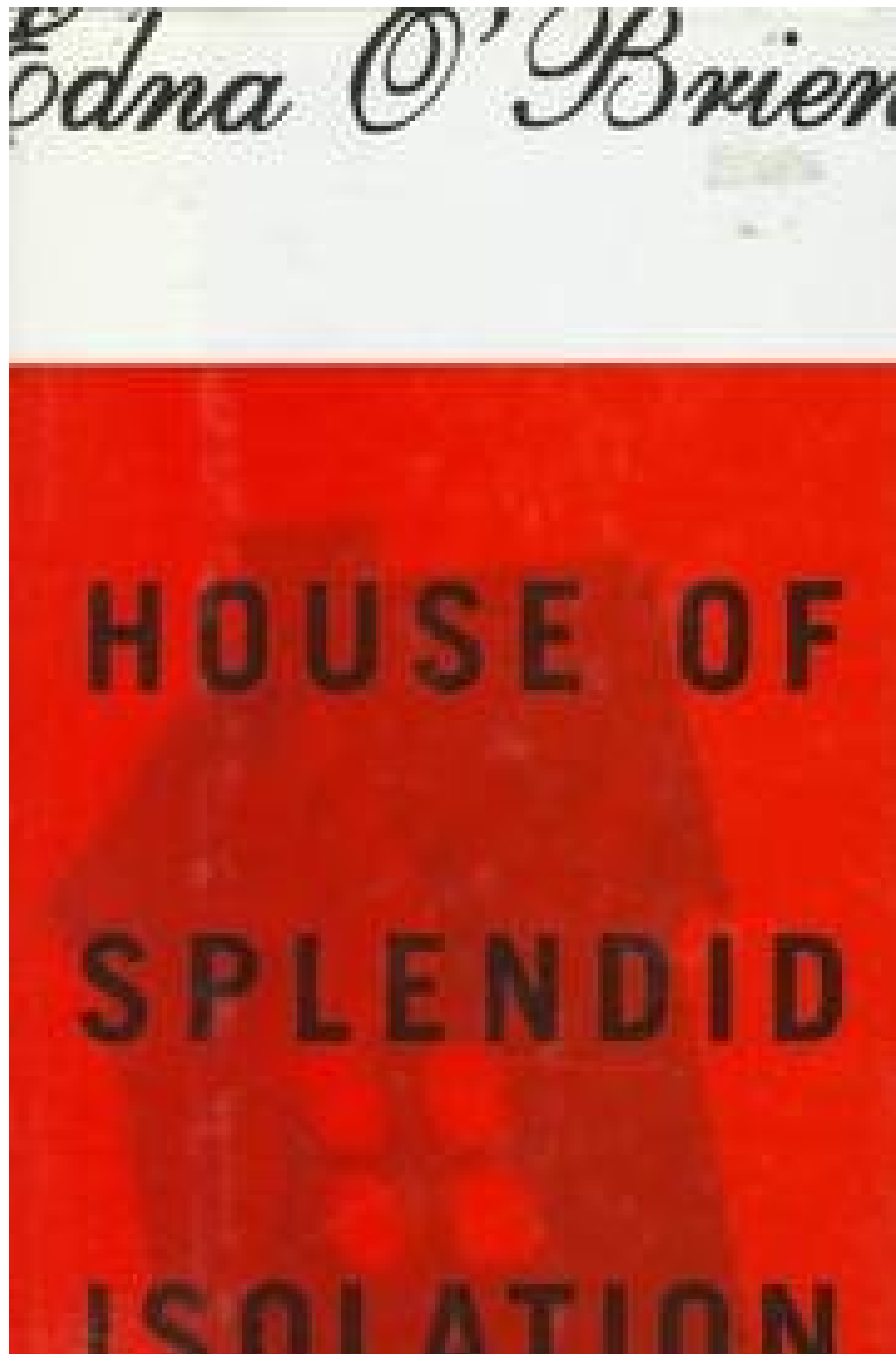


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Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Female writer gets it right

By Donna J. Oestreich-hart

I won't summarize the story, because you have several other summaries already. I will only say this: Several of the analytical comments below are simply wrong. O'Brien's view of Ireland's history is right on the mark. Ireland's "troubles" really started in the 1100's when Irishman Dermott McMurragh asked King Henry II of England to allow him to recruit Anglo-Norman mercenary soldiers to help him defeat his Irish enemy. Those mercenaries came, liked it, and stayed. THAT was the beginning of the English occupation of Ireland. But even before that, Irish families fought among themselves for control of the land and resources. You only have to read the "Cattle Raid of Cooley" to know that. In a very real sense, there IS blood in the very soil of Ireland. And O'Brien is RIGHT that the only way to ever solve that problem--or the Middle Eastern problem or the American racial problem--is for EVERY voice to be heard (that's why the narrative voice keeps changing; it is purposeful)and EVERY person to be known as a human being and not just as "them" or "the enemy."

She has these two unlikely people, each with their grievously painful stories, come to know and respect each other. She becomes like Mother Ireland (Cathleen ni Houlihan) to him, and he becomes to her like the child that she never had, the one she aborted.

It is a book that is about understanding and forgiveness, a theme amazingly and ultimately spoken through the voice of the aborted child itself. In the first chapter, this dead child's spirit hates her mother and wants her to suffer, but in the end, she understands and forgives. That is what the child prays for in the end, understanding and forgiveness.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Spare Prose and Extraordinary Power

By James Carragher

Edna O'Brien in general and this very fine novel in particular deserve a much greater readership. The plot here -- IRA fugitive, McGreevy, hides out in the crumbling home of an aged widow, Josie -- is the simple

premise on which O'Brien builds a vertiginous, multi-layered tale of fatefully intersecting interpersonal and national histories. The third person narrative points of view are multiple and, especially in the quick cuts to those on the fugitive's trail, occasionally confusing. McGreevy and Josie are both superbly drawn and utterly convincing, although their emotional linkage is achieved too quickly, just as the flashbacks to Josie's horrid marriage make her reveries of quiet good times with her husband scarcely credible. The prose is spare, with no wasted words, and one of the wonders of this novel is that O'Brien nonetheless thoroughly conveys the lushness of the drizzly Irish countryside, the complexity of the struggle and the underlying sense of national unity that all the characters -- no matter how harshly at war with one another -- feel. And she has packaged all that in what is also from start to finish a superbly suspenseful tale. The 230 or so pages flash by, making *The House of Splendid Isolation* an exciting and rewarding one-sitting read.

20 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Splendid writing, splendid story.

By Mary Whipple

If you read the Kirkus Review above, you won't even have to buy the book, if all you are interested in is the plot.

Fortunately, there's much more here, and I wish I knew how O'Brien does it! Of the thousands of books I've read, this is the first one which really made me feel that the author "let the story tell itself." For most of the book, there's no sense that an author is pulling strings or trying to create. She "merely" presents fully drawn characters, and they truly live on the page.

Yet at the conclusion, the admiring reader realizes that every conflict and ultimate reversal in the book has had a fine hand guiding, but never obviously controlling, it--from Josie's psychological imprisonment to McGreevy's escapes, from her frustrations in love to his satisfactions, from her experiences that life is something that happens to her to his belief that one must mobilize to work toward a higher goal, from their attitudes toward the church to their conflicted feelings about the IRA.

Somewhat extravagant in its romanticism at the end, that extravagance, nevertheless, is totally appropriate to its subject, its characters, and its Irish setting.

See all 9 customer reviews...

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