

- **Michael Lamb** the central character, a man under pressure, who opted **'out of the adult world'** [139], is the hero of the story.
- **Michael** unselfishly attempted to save Owen Keane from a brutal life in the home and helped him escape although he became a hunted man, sought by the law as a result: **'A place that can treat a twelve year old boy as a criminal for mitching school and running away from home. That can't be right'**.
- **Michael** is idealistic, that is he has noble ideas, though the head brother, Benedict, doesn't agree with them: **'I admire your text-book idealism, Brother Sebastian but I have rarely seen it work'**
- Michael is a good man who **'found it difficult to lie'** [54].
- Michael hated what the home stood for and so he decided to do the heroic thing and save Owen: **'What we run here brother is a finishing school for the sons of the Idle Poor.../we teach them a little of God and a lot of fear'**—Benedict
- However, when he escapes the home with Owen, he has to carefully construct a life based on a lie—for a greater good: **'He and Owen's future depended on it'**.
- The hero, Michael's life is a contradiction or paradox. The paradox of his life fascinates the reader: **'Be kind to be cruel to be kind'** he thinks[p133].
- In the end Michael reflected that **'Hopelessness had paralysed him'**. He had no other option he felt than to prevent Owen from living a life of cruel mistreatment and then a life of crime and time spent in jail.
- When he was a Brother, he was untypical of the other Brothers—a moral rebel and therefore interesting and heroic to the reader. He cared about students and disliked punishments. He was fair minded and got upset when Brother Benedict punished Owen Kane for his initials (**OK**) when someone else wrote graffiti on a wall [70]. www.leavingcertlecturedays.ie ©

- Michael regarded the actions of the IRA in Northern Ireland as evil and argued against Brother Benedict's view that the IRA were men of vision. Thus Michael stood up for goodness, like a true hero.
- When he left the home with Owen he became a hunted criminal, adding to the interest of the plot: **“All his life he had been on the right side of the law. What he was doing now was right, but he knew that many wouldn't agree with him. No one, except himself, knew enough to make a judgement”**.
- While Michael is a hero to the reader, he becomes a fugitive from the law in the plot of the novel. Even though Michael went underground to do good, he became immediately a man on the run—a kidnapper in the eyes of the law [63].
- Michael was a caring man and heroically risked his freedom to care for Owen. He wanted a good life for him: **“It was this caring for the boy that Michael looked forward to...dressing him... taking him places...teaching him...there was more than enough time to salvage him...sacrifice was what was required”**.
- Michael's main fault was that when he looked ahead to Owen's future he decided that Owen's life was not worth living.
- He played God with Owen's life, something he shouldn't have done. A reader can make up his own mind as to whether Michael still remains a hero after the terrible final events. Michael drowned Owen at his happiest in order to save him from a life of horror: **“it was essential that Owen be ...loved, be happier than he had ever been in his live before”**.
- In the end, Michael became paranoid, suspicious of everyone. Therefore he became isolated and then began to make life or death decisions on his own.
- As a result of the pressure, some bad decisions and his isolation Michael became mentally ill. In this state he carried out the murder of Owen. Perhaps in the end he ceased to be a hero in our eyes.