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Edna O'Brien, Margaret Atwood: Frustration, Hope and Gender in Their Works

Frustrace, naděje a gender v dílech Edny O'Brien a Margaret Atwood

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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is the literal analysis of the chosen works of Irish writer Edna O'Brien and Canadian Margaret Atwood. The main focus is on the novels, *The Country Girls* trilogy, *The Edible Woman* and the autobiographical memoir, *Mother Ireland* which are analysed on the cultural, historical and social backgrounds. The brief introduction into Irish and Canadian history and literature is added as well. The thesis also deals with history and various approaches to feministic theories and terminology. The main female and male protagonists are described as well as the historical settings and plots. It also tries to seek the purposes why our characters feel frustrated and depressed and in which they might seek hope.

Anotace

Diplomová práce nesoucí název Frustrace, deprese a naděje v dílech Edny O'Brien a Margaret Atwoodové se primárně zabývá analýzou vybraných děl, *The Country Girls*, *Mother Ireland*, *The Edible Woman*. Sekundárně práce zkoumá feminismus, kde vysvětluje klíčové pojmy, a s ním související dobové myšlenky. Teoretická část pojednává o sociokulturních vlivech a odlišné historii ve dvou anglicky mluvících zemích, Irsku a Kanadě. Z obou těchto zemí nelze opomenout ani významné předchůdce, kteří utvářeli charakter národní literatury a identity. Diplomová práce je založená na analýze hlavních protagonistů, ženských a mužských literárních hrdinů. Práce shrnuje podobnosti a odlišnosti, jak samotných spisovatelek, tak i hlavních hrdinek. Hledá důvody, které jednotlivým postavám způsobují pocity deprese a frustrace, ale také ty, jež mohou nalézt naději.

Table of Contents:

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1. Authors' Biographies | 3 |
| 1.1. Margaret Atwood..... | 3 |
| 1.2. Edna O'Brien..... | 5 |
| 1.2.1. Positive and Negative Criticisms on her Work | 6 |
| 2. Irish Literature..... | 7 |
| 2.1. Introduction | 7 |
| 2.1.1. Representation of Ireland in Literature | 7 |
| 2.2. James Joyce (1882-1941) | 8 |
| 2.2.1. Edna O'Brien on James Joyce..... | 9 |
| 2.3. O'Brien's Women Novelist Predecessors | 10 |
| 3. Overview of Modern History of the Republic of Ireland..... | 12 |
| 3.1. The War of Independence..... | 12 |
| 3.2. The British Response to the IRA- "The Black and Tans" | 12 |
| 3.3. Censorship and the New Constitution in Ireland..... | 13 |
| 3.4. Civil War in Ireland "a Brother against Brother" | 14 |
| 3.5. The Build up to WWII and a False Sense of Peace..... | 15 |
| 3.6. The Troubles and Turmoil in Ireland..... | 16 |
| 3.6.1. Northern Ireland- A Religious Division..... | 17 |
| 3.7. The Celtic Tiger and a New Ireland | 18 |
| 4. Canadian Literature | 19 |
| 4.1. A Brief History of Canada..... | 19 |
| 4.2. The Birth of National Canadian Literature..... | 19 |
| 4.3. The Development of Canadian Literature over Two Centuries | 20 |
| 4.4. Seeking the National Identity | 21 |
| 5. Feminism | 23 |
| 5.1. The Brief History of Feminism | 23 |
| 5.2. Feminism in Canada | 25 |
| 5.3. Simone de Beauvoir and <i>The Second Sex</i> | 25 |

| | | |
|--------|--|----|
| 5.4. | Michel Foucault: The Relationship Based on Power | 26 |
| 5.5. | Judith Butler and <i>Gender Troubles</i> | 27 |
| 6. | <i>Mother Ireland</i> | 30 |
| 6.1. | Freedom in Exile | 30 |
| 6.2. | The Charm and Love for Her Motherland..... | 31 |
| 6.3. | O'Brien's Clash with Religion: A Life in a Convent | 32 |
| 6.4. | A Picture of Love and Sexuality according to The Church..... | 33 |
| 6.5. | Magdalene's Laundries..... | 34 |
| 7. | <i>The Country Girls Trilogy</i> | 36 |
| 7.1. | The Plot..... | 37 |
| 7.2. | The Epilogue..... | 43 |
| 7.3. | Male Protagonists in the trilogy..... | 45 |
| 7.3.1. | Men's Entertainment - The Problem of Alcoholism | 48 |
| 7.4. | Female Heroines | 48 |
| 7.5. | 'Martyred' Mothers | 50 |
| 7.6. | The Role of Food and Clothes as a means of Female Oppression | 54 |
| 8. | Gothic fiction..... | 58 |
| 8.1. | Gothic elements | 58 |
| 8.2. | Grotesque..... | 60 |
| 8.3. | Intertextuality in <i>The Edible Woman</i> and Angela Carter | 61 |
| 9. | <i>The Edible Woman</i> | 62 |
| 9.1. | The Representation of Self through Appetite | 62 |
| 9.2. | Eating Disorders and a Changing Ideal of Human Body | 63 |
| 9.3. | Hunger and Eating as a Metaphor | 65 |
| 9.4. | Brief Overview of the Plot..... | 65 |
| 9.5. | Main Protagonists in the Novel | 70 |
| | Summary | 72 |
| | Resumé..... | 77 |
| | Bibliography..... | 80 |

Introduction

This master's thesis entitled, *Edna O'Brien and Margaret Atwood: Frustration, Depression and Hope in Their Works*, aims to analyse the chosen novels and a memoir on the basics of socio-cultural, historical and backgrounds. Compare the styles and attitudes of two woman writers; seek their similarities and differences in creating their protagonist. It is also focused on tracing autobiographical and gothic features in their works. It should reveal the reasons for the oppression of women in society across the globe in the period of the 1960s.

I was reading *The Country Girls Trilogy* during my compulsory seminar from Irish Studies at university for the first time. This was my first introduction into the world of the unknown and an unheard of Irish woman writer, Edna O'Brien. Having stayed in her homeland and visiting the same places as Edna O'Brien did decades ago. I had been thinking about the topic of my thesis very hard and for quite a long time before I made the final decision. After working three times as an au pair in Ireland, I have totally fallen in love with the Emerald Island and even more with the Irish literature. The country of a thousand welcomes as Ireland is very often nicknamed has become the source of my inspiration and motivation not only for writing this piece of work. Thinking about another "boundaries-breaking book" Margaret Atwood and her *The Edible Woman* crossed my mind. These two women writers have indeed quite a lot in common, their unique style and the language. In the case of O'Brien we can point out her usage of challenging Irish English slang words and phrases which makes her works 'spicy'. Both writers had the courage to stand up against conventions, traditions, society and men in their personal life. They tried to pass their life experience into the books' characters. Their works were first published in the 1960s during the second- wave of feminism. Their novels are read as proto-feminist and their personas thought to be followers of some feministic ideas and theories which are applied in the works.

The first chapter briefly introduces the biographies of the authors as they are inevitable for seeking autobiographical features in the novels as well as general understanding. The second one is dedicated to the persona of James Joyce as an Irish Literary Father in a position of the greatest, honoured, Nobel Prize winner in the 20th century. His literal technique of the stream of consciousness and his beneficial influence on Edna O'Brien's writing.

The third chapter gives us an overview of the Irish cultural and political milestones of the 20th century, especially the era of the 1960s. The events essential for establishing Irish identity and nationalism and rooting down the Catholic religion are mentioned.

The fourth chapter draws attention towards the history of the national Canadian literature during the 20th century. It mentions the struggles which Canadian writers had to undergo before publishing their works in their homeland. It shows Atwood's position on the literary stage as an icon and star and her contribution to the recognition of Canadian literature.

The fifth chapter deals with feministic and gender theories. It briefly explains the rise of feminism as a movement across the world in the 1960s. The philosophical thoughts of Michael Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir are compared with Judith Butler. It also explains the basic terms connected to feminism such as an identity, sex and the human body.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to Edna O'Brien's autobiographical memoir, *Mother Ireland*. Her biography and the analysis of trilogy based on *Mother Ireland*.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to the analysis of *The Country Girls* trilogy. The main female and male protagonists are described as well as the role of mothers and fathers in the future lives of the protagonists.

The eighth chapter links the novels with the Gothic literature and traces gothic and grotesque elements in the works.

The ninth and the last chapter at the same time analyses *The Edible Woman* on the behalf of feminist theory. General comments on a psychological view of mental eating disorders and the changing ideal of a human body will follow as well. The analysis will put light on the description of relationships dominated by men and society. The main plot of the story and a detailed description of the main protagonists are included.

1. Authors' Biographies

1.1. Margaret Atwood

Gaining a deeper insight into a writer's life is mostly essential for further examination of her works.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood, was born in Ottawa on 18th November 1939. She is a national icon and best known Canadian author of critical studies, radio scripts and children books. She is also a short-story writer, poet and novelist. Her works have been translated into 30 languages¹.

She was the second child of Carl and Margaret Atwood. Due to his father's profession Margret's childhood and adolescence was divided into an urban life in Toronto where the family owned a residence or the wild life in the northern Canada (North Quebec). Hardly any of us can imagine staying in a cabin log cut off the electricity, running water and the access to a television or a radio for many months. Her father's occupation was a forest entomologist. Her mother worked as a dietician and had a talent for a story-telling which Margaret obviously inherited. Both parents were open- minded, supportive and encouraging. They tried to raise their children in tolerance and use critical thinking. While being cut off from the ordinary life of her mates and mostly educated at home by her parents, Atwood developed a long- life passion for literature. Reading the Brothers Grimm and Edgar Allan Poe's collections took up most of her free time. She has lived in many places in Europe including England, Scotland and France but finally settled down back in her homeland. She lives in Toronto now.²

As a five –year old girl she wrote her first book called *In the Red Shoes*. Having cut the pages out from her notebook and sewing the drafts together, her first childhood masterpiece was finished in 1944. At the age of 16 she decided to be a poet. "*When I started to write poetry I had no audience, nor could I imagine one [...]. The year was 1956, the proper stance for girls was collecting and waiting to get married.*"³

¹British Council.[online].[Last accessed August 28, 2015].Retrieved from: <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/margaret-atwood>

² GALENS, D.(2011). *Novels for Students*. The United States: Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning.[online]. [Last accessed August 3, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.gale.com>

³ British Council.[online]. [Last accessed August 28, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/margaret-atwood>

She graduated from Leaside High School in Toronto in 1957. Continuing her studies at Victoria College at the University of Toronto and later on at Radcliffe College where she completed a Master's degree in English literature in 1962. Encouraged and reassured about her talent from a university professor, Northrop Frye, the opportunity of studying doctorate opened before her. She has been a full-time writer since 1972. Except writing, Atwood gave lectures of English literature at several Canadian and American universities. She let campaigns for human rights and environmental issues. Together with Susanna Moodie, they established their own publishing house, the House of Anansi in the middle of the 1960s, to meet demand for original Canadian books to be published. In fact, they wanted to promote nationalism and Canadian culture through literature.

Atwood is known for her novels rather than her collections of poems which are also worth reading. The novel genre dominated at the markets for a long time when poetry was 'forgotten'. Atwood was fascinated by human behaviour, celebrated the natural world, and condemned materialism in her early poetry collections published in the seventies which consist of the volumes as *Double Persephone* (1961), *The Circle Game* (1964) and *The Animals in That Country* (1968).⁴

She writes about various topics e.g. art, sexual politics and the dangers of ideologies. Her work carries gothic elements and therefore became popular among the broader readership. The simplicity is the key to Atwood's writing no matter of the genre. The background of her fictional stories is made up from her description of contemporary urban life and the current sexual situation or political issues. She excels at telling open-ended stories which allow readers to finish a story themselves.⁵ Atwood herself calls her first published novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) 'proto-feminist'. It preceded the key years of the women's movement. Her later novels worth mentioning are *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976); *Cat's Eye* (1988); *The Robber Bride* (1993) and *Alias Grace* (1996).⁶

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ ERHARTOVÁ, O.(1996). *Sto současných zahraničních autorů*. Brno: Knihovna Jiřího Mahena.p.84

⁶British Council.[online].[Lastassessed August 28, 2015].Retrieved from: <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/margaret-atwood>

1.2. Edna O'Brien

Edna O'Brien is an Irish author writing in English, the writer of novels and short stories. She was born on 15th December in 1932 in a small village, Tuamgraney, in County Clare situated on the west coast of Ireland. Edna O'Brien was born into the independent state, The Republic of Ireland, after the division of the island into the northern and the southern part establishing two states, Catholic Ireland and Northern Ireland, the protestant country with the ruling British government. There were only 200 inhabitants living there, O'Brien herself described her village as "enclosed, fervid, and bigoted. She was brought up in a small religious family to parents, Lena and Michael Cleary- O'Brien. She was one of four children. Her father worked as a farmer but among other 'professions', he was a gambler and a drunkard. Her mother made her living by working as a maid. She attended local national school until the age of 12. Her Catholic education continued at The Convent of Mercy at Loughrea in County Galway, where she was sent away from home. After her studies there, she moved to the capital, Dublin, working in a pharmacy during the day and studying at the Pharmaceutical College at night. She fled to Dublin in 1946 and during her stay there she developed her strong interest in reading and writing. She was not supported by her family financially so she could not offer to study fulltime. Years passed and she got married to a much older man, a writer named Ernest Gebler, to whom she gave two sons. They divorced and she never remarried again, but had some long relationships.⁷

Now she lives and writes in London, to which she moved years ago. She is highly honoured for her lyrical style in prose, captivating the beauty of local hidden places mainly in the countryside or seaside, as well as a detailed psychological characteristic of her protagonists.⁸

Regardless of some controversial critics, O'Brien has long and correctly been recognized as among the greatest Irish writers of the 20th century. Philip Roth has described her as 'one of the most gifted women presently writing fiction in English'. She has been influenced by Greek ancient literature Shakespeare, Faulkner and Joyce. She thinks that a writer can receive a great

⁷ Kolektiv autorů.(1996).*Slovník spisovatelů*..Nakladatelství Libri, Praha, p. 515

⁸Ibidem, p. 516

education and become inspired just by re-reading those great stories as she did. She has described a novelist as ‘the psychic and moral historian of his or her society’⁹

After having moved to London, she published her first novel in the trilogy, *The Country Girls*. The second and third volumes followed, *The Lonely Girls* and *The Girls with Green Eyes* renamed to *The Girls in Their Married Bliss*.¹⁰

1.2.1. Positive and Negative Criticisms on her Work

Some of the literary critics and reviewers call her “cailin” (An Irish word for mythical beautiful women) or the nickname for Edna, “the Barbara Cartland of long-distance Republicanism”.¹¹ Unfortunately or luckily, being Celtic and extraordinarily good-looking were the limits O’ Brien had to overcome on the way to her career of either condemned or praised Irish woman writer. She came to relish the dismissals from the blockheaded critics who said, as she puts it, that her “talent resided in my knickers.” The author’s comments on that topic are: “*I’m a serious writer. Take more notice of the books than how I look.*”¹² Edna’s works reflected her attempts to put light on some contemporary social and political issues in Ireland at that time. O’Brien has been experimenting with the form, genre and the content for 30 years of her writing career. Her uniqueness lies in her “wilderness”.¹³

Being aware of her controversial position in public, Edna is a pioneer among current novelists writing about Irish women’s’ struggles without any pretence. She is being dismissed by her colleagues because of her interest in human sexuality and breaking the taboos. Regardless of her age she still sees herself as being ‘the first country girl to’ have the courage to write the truth about the Church, sexual oppression, alcoholism, and violence.

⁹ ROTH, P.(1984). *Edna O’Brien*. In: New York Times Book Review, New York: EBSCO Publishing. p. 39-40

¹⁰ Kolektiv autorů. (1996). *Slovník spisovatelů*: Nakladatelství Libri, Praha, p. 516

¹¹ GREENWOOD, A.(2003). *Edna O’Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd. p. 12

¹² Ibidem, p.3

¹³ Ibidem, p.16

2. Irish Literature

2.1. Introduction

Ireland produced many great literates and Nobel Prize winners, so it is not only famous for and proud of its enchanting wilderness and breath-taking natural beauty but literal personas and ‘gems’ their pens made with the paper and thoughts.

I am going to introduce in this chapter one of the many outstanding, gifted and talented writers, novelists, poets and dramatists, James Joyce. I will try to put into context how he influenced Edna O’Brien’s writing style or shifted her writing career.

The world of literature was primarily dominated by men. The majority of them took women as the main motives for their celebrating poems. Irish women were depicted as muses, goddess, queens and heroines otherwise rejected. Joyce associated women with seas, oceans and rivers. Water is ‘unstable fluid’ that flows in own way without any control (e.g. Anna Livia Plurabella- the personification of the river Liffey in Dublin). For Joyce, women, sea and the figure of mother were inseparable entities.¹⁴ Since the times of Irish literary fathers the image of feminine Ireland pictured like a muse or a mother is rooted in the literature.

2.1.1. Representation of Ireland in Literature

Countries are either mothers or fathers [...].”Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride [...].”She is thought to have known invasion from the time when the Ice Age ended and the improving climate allowed deer to throng her dense forest.” (O’Brien 1976:11).

The opening quotation from O’Brien’s *Mother Ireland* points out the tough status of the country since its beginnings, e.g. the invasions of different tribes and nations such as the Saxons, Vikings, the English). Ireland, the misfortune country, that was a million times discouraged and betrayed without fault. Wars, battles, sieges, famine and emigration left her destroyed and deserted but never totally broken down. This is a depiction of the country pictured by Irish poets and writers. She was ‘raped’ colonized, decimated and rebelled against.¹⁵ Hopelessness,

¹⁴ JAFFARES, N. A. (1997). *Pocket History of Irish Writers from Swift to Heaney*. Dublin: The O’Brien Press Ltd. p.97

¹⁵ O’BRIEN, E. (1976). *Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson: Penguin Books. p.17

loneliness, the lack of adventure, the Catholic Church, the family ties might be just some of the reasons why the country met such a catastrophic scenario. The romantic Ireland united the breath-taking beauty, heart-breaking sadness and pity and never ending suffering all in one. Except its physical beauty represented by women, Ireland has its natural beauty which also serves as an unlimited source of inspiration¹⁶ .

2.2. James Joyce (1882-1941)

Joyce once said about himself: “*I don’t want to be a literary Jesus Christ.*”¹⁷ He is certainly the most written about author in Irish history. He grew up in Ireland and studied at University College in Dublin. He got married to Nora Barnacle. Following the same example as many before him, he fled Ireland and settled down abroad. He lived in Trieste where he taught English and came back to Dublin only twice for a brief visit during his whole life. European countries and cities became his temporary home. Switzerland seemed to be the best option for seeking refuge and endure until the end of the First World War. Paris, was the place, where the Joyce family spent the first years of the Second World War. Moving out from Paris to Vichy and finally settling in Zurich. Switzerland welcomed Joyce warmly and also told him the last goodbyes as the writer found peace there and died in 1941. Joyce is celebrated and worldly known for his success in writing prose but he was also a poet. His home country honoured him also by opening James Joyce Museum in the centre of Dublin.¹⁸

Ireland was the setting of the many plots of Joyce’s novels. Joyce’s relationship to Ireland is far-distanced as is normally a relationship to a ‘stepmother’ instead of lyrical and emotional O’Brien’s mother - Ireland attitude. The plot of his collection of fifteen short stories, *Dubliners* (1914), took place in the city he knew the most, Dublin. The main protagonists in those stories should symbolise the stage of the personal live: childhood, puberty (adolescence), maturity and finally public life. Stories are linked together according to the thematic frame. The most problematic issues of an Irish life are covered which his followers also dealt with: alcoholism, the ‘too powerful’ role of the Catholic Church, poverty, urban versus rural Ireland, depression

¹⁶ Ibidem, p.25

¹⁷ GREENWOOD,A.(2003). *Edna O’Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd. p.97

¹⁸ JAFFARES, N. A. (1997). *Pocket History of Irish Writers from Swift to Heaney*. Dublin: The O’Brien Press Ltd. p.94

and frustration. O'Brien struggled with the same issues in her novels and short story collections also but in the addition to a search for true love.¹⁹

Ulysses (1922) is a novel written in an experimental language, working with the stream of consciousness reflected in the speeches of characters, either through monologues or dialogues. The structure of the novel follows the Greek original, Homer's *Odyssey*, which had been taken for inspiration. The whole novel is describing a consequence of events during one particular day in life time of the main protagonist, Leopold Bloom. It provides a critical point of view on urban society in Dublin during that time. "The technique gives the novel impersonal quality. Joyce has learned from Homer the need for variety, so the substance as well as the style varies, conveying the rich difference between various people and their outlooks."²⁰ The stream of consciousness is a literal method, when an author does not focus on the importance of a detailed description of plot but takes down notes about thoughts without any logical sequences. The plot itself has no importance.²¹

2.2.1. Edna O'Brien on James Joyce

O'Brien talks about James Joyce as the father of all Irish writers. His masterpiece, the autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1918, became the 'Bible' for all generations of future Irish writers. She was very fond of his books which were the only pleasure she had while growing- up. On the one hand she admits identifying with Joyce and on the other hand she addresses the problematic nature towards him as belonging to 'Irish literary fathers'. The name, James, is brought to life in her fiction and used for the figure of Caithleen's father, Mr. James Brady, in *the Country Girls*.

"I realized that there were already too many books on him and that the best thing you could read about Joyce was Joyce himself".²² As O'Brien mindfully pointed out there have been so many monographs, biographies, plays, and essays written on James Joyce she could hardly bring something new around. In spite of these statements, she was uncertain and quite hesitant about the publication of another biography concerning Joyce which eventually came out in 1999.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p.95

²⁰ Ibidem, p.96

²¹ Ibidem, p.97

²² GREENWOOD,A.(2003).*Edna O'Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd. p.93

On the one hand, she thought there would be no heroic contribution from her side but on the other, she wanted to encourage other contemporary authors to comment on a literal icon of such greatness.²³

” *I have not learned as much from anyone as I have from Joyce over the years.*”²⁴ The display of emotions, especially the gratitude, towards an honoured ‘teacher’ are also being expressed in her following words: “*I have served him. This is my hymn to him*”²⁵. The biography was finally published in 1999. Although it should be praising Joyce, its focus is significantly more on Joyce’s wife, Nora Barnacle than Joyce himself. Nora set an example for some of the fictional characters in his works and implicitly, O’Brien herself.²⁶ She analyses in the biography the gender and particularly the specific language Joyce had been using. “*Language is the hero and heroine of his works.*”²⁷ In O’Brien’s terminology, the language is a friend and words are secret weapons against the rest of the world. “*Language is part of our makeup. The language we use or abuse tells everything about us.*”²⁸ The wealth of Irish literature lays in a love of the language itself. They had to give up their own mother tongue, Irish Gaelic and mastered the new tongue, the language of their enemy, English. It is the ‘secret power’ that distinguishes them from the others.

2.3. O’Brien’s Women Novelist Predecessors

As every child needs its mother and father, Irish literature seemed to have forgotten the heritage left behind by their “mothers’ a century earlier. Its full attention was paid to writers dominating in the 20th century. It would suit to call Kate O’Brien, ‘Irish women novelist mother’ for her work, *The Land of Spices*, which was also banned in Ireland but by critics it was accepted and appreciated as the influential feminist work of mid-century and the valuable source for contemporary Irish women novelists. Except Kate O’Brien, other women predecessors were

²³ GREENWOOD, A. (2003). *Edna O’Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd. p.94

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.94

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p.94

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p.94

²⁷ ROTH, P. (1984). *Edna O’Brien*. In: New York Times Book Review, New York: EBSCO Publishing. p. 39

Anglo-Irish origin, namely Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, Lady Gregory and Elizabeth Bowen.²⁹

The Irish women writers in the first decades of the 19th century foreshadowed the era of immigration for free book's publication. Edna O'Brien had to leave Ireland and sought exile in London for publication of her first novels. O'Connor (2006:38) writes: "*Though all contemporary Irish poets have to face the Yeatsian legacy, women must confront issues not only of aesthetics but also gender.*"³⁰ She mentions the exclusion of the female writers, the lack of women editors and the struggle of getting their works published during the 1960's.

Tracing back the history of the 19th century, the literal world 'rediscovered' the novel of Sydney Owenson (later, Lady Morgan), *The Wild Irish Girl*, published in 1806. Unaware of consequences of such a 'courageous' entitling of her novel, Irish literature had to wait another century for its real 'Wild Irish Girl' in the arrival of Edna O'Brien persona. Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* was published in 1800. These novels gave an impulse of the further establishment of Irish National literature.³¹

²⁹ GREENWOOD, A. (2003). *Edna O'Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd. p.7

³⁰ O'CONNOR, M., LAING, K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press. p.37

³¹ Taylor, C.: *Missing Portraits: Irish Fiction's Forgotten Women*. [accessed on September 10, 2015] In: New Dublin Press. [online]. [Last accessed on August 2, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.newdublinpress.org/features/2014/9/7/irish-fiction-a-gentlemans-club>

3. Overview of Modern History of the Republic of Ireland

For a detailed and deeper understanding of the cultural and historical events mentioned or described in the novels, I find it essential to add this non- literal chapter.

3.1. The War of Independence

Among the most important events which cannot be omitted when writing about Irish history is the War of Independence. It started with an attack on a convoy carrying explosives heading to County Tipperary in 1919. The Irish Volunteers later on renamed the Irish Republican Army (IRA) started operating as a guerrilla force ambushing the British police and the military. Eamon De Valera, the founder and member of the political party Sinn Fein, sought help in the USA from American president Wilson. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of the UK, at that time refused to negotiate with the leader of the IRA, Michael Collins, and did not legally recognize the IRA status. Collins was seen in his eyes as a murderous gangster not a politician worth negotiating with. Eamon De Valera was much more respectable and acceptable for the British. The British government passed the Government of Ireland Act in December 1920. The new parliaments were set up in Dublin and Belfast. Northern Ireland consisting of six counties - Co. Derry, Antrim, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone stayed under the British rule. The rest of the 26 counties made up “Southern Ireland”, the Republic.³²

3.2. The British Response to the IRA- “The Black and Tans”

The period after the First World War is associated with the high rate of unemployment, economic depression and the arrival of the so called “The Black and Tans” in 1920. They were young, violent and aggressive English police recruits fighting in WWI. In normal circumstances they would not have been employed as police officers but their war experience and the taste for adventure was seen as an advantage for recruiting. They were also offered extra wages for beating the Irish. Due to the shortage of the dark police uniforms when the soldiers arrived on the island, clothing had to be substituted by the khaki uniforms. That is the reason why the locals nicknamed them “The Black and Tans”. Technically serving as policemen but in reality

³² MAC ANNAIDH,S.(2007).*Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd. p.260

acting as a military combat force. They found fighting the IRA much more difficult compared to the accurate Germans. The battles lacked rules and seemed unpredictable. The Irish knew the battle fields and terrain very well and tried to take advantage of it. They were not wearing any official uniforms, acting swiftly, making themselves invisible. Ordinary people supported the IRA as they felt they were being terrorized by British forces. Shooting innocent people and other savage deeds were on a day to day basis. The 1920s could be called blood shedding on both sides. The leading motto reinforced by British policy was, 'fight the terror with terror' and restore the law and order in the country. Llyod George and Eamon De Valera met for talks in an effort to end the situation peacefully.³³

3.3. Censorship and the New Constitution in Ireland

The Republic of Ireland came into existence as a free state not ruled anymore by the United Kingdom so that changes in all ways of life followed. The Censorship of Publication Act was passed in 1929 and as a reaction to the bill, the Irish Academy of Letters was set up. The aim of the bill was to exclude any unmoral content threatening the Catholic Church, dealing with sexuality and contraception issues. Ireland is one of the remaining Catholic countries where abortion is still banned according to the local law system. As a consequence of the crucial social and political changes, many writers fled to write and live abroad. There they found the freedom for creative work and their 'voice could be heard' publicly without censorship.³⁴

Irish Republic policy after 1922 set up strong nationalism and established gender norms for the good of the state. The myth of a pure but suffering woman and a heroic man was the norm³⁵. Article 41 of the Irish Constitution from 1937 defines the term 'family' and the appropriate female behavior to a husband. Irish men devoted their lives to their country throughout history, showing the courage and determination to fight. As a sigh of relief Irish women should position themselves in the roles of the Virgin Mary and embody the chastity and purity of the whole nation. It enforces the strategy that women should not be allowed

³³MAC ANNAIDH,S.(2007). *Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd. p.266

³⁴ JAFFARES, N. A. (1997). *Pocket History of Irish Writers from Swift to Heaney*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press Ltd. p.102-103

³⁵ O'CONNOR, M., Laing, K., Mooney, S. (2006). *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press. p.151

to engage in work. They could neglect the family duties because of that and rather stay at home and take care about the household and children.³⁶

Irish censorship seemed to ease up after the 1940's and the years of the 1960's marked the calling liberation and encouraged writers like O'Brien for publication. The banned books from previous years were allowed to be published. But this should not have lasted long, due to the content which did not correspond with the conservative and catholic conditions but rather questioned taboo issues. Her books were found immoral, banned from public access, libraries and study rooms and universities. On top of that, the first publication of the trilogy was burnt on a stake in front of a church in her native County Clare by a local priest from her community. O'Brien admitted that local people from her village were offended and even her own mother felt ashamed of her and crossed out the 'forbidden' words from her books. Not blindly keeping a traditional realistic line, she wrote more experimentally, using shifting of narrative point of views and irony in the novels.³⁷

3.4. Civil War in Ireland “a Brother against Brother”

The Treaty from 1921 was signed on the 6th of December. Ireland came out of it as a self-governing nation, with the same status as Canada. Treaty or no Treaty at all was a kind of Sophie's choice for the Irish. None of the solutions would bring peace or satisfaction into the devastated country. The Irish were made to choose nothing or let it pass. The Proclamation of the Irish Free State did not mean an independent nation, the country was still under British control. The first national constitution came into effect in 1922. The political party, Sinn Fein was split into Pro-Treaty supporters and Against-Treaty leaders. Politicians left the Dail (Irish parliament), during voting about the ratification of the Treaty rather than being the witnesses of its passing. This act and the following events escalated into the outbreak of the Civil War. Since that time the IRA was accepted as the legal army of the Irish government. De Valera and his supporters established a new republican party, Fianna Fail in June 1922. The Civil War (1922-1923) did not last more than a year but left many “scars” and bitterness

³⁶ OBERT, J. C. (2012). “*The Mothers and Others in Edna O'Brien's the Country Girls*”.In: Irish Studies Review. [online]. Vol. 20, No. 3. Wyoming: Routledge Taylor & Francis. pp. 283–297.[last accessed on September 18, 2015] Retrieved from: <http://www.tandfonline.com>

³⁷ CAHALAN, J. M. (1995). “*Female and Male Perspective on Growing up Irish in Edna O'Brien, John McGahern and Brian Moore*” In: Colby Quarterly [online]. Vol 31, No.1.[last accessed on October 2, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.tandfonline.com>

among the people. The saddest thing of all was the fact that the politicians divided the whole nation instead of drawing it together. The neighbors, families and brothers were fighting against each other. The Irish were experienced from the war with the British. They had mastered their war tactics and possessed a familiarity of each other's territory which they could call upon even blindfolded. This time they were well equipped with weapons and led the war with a greater brutality than the British could have ever thought of. While on a military tour around west Cork Michael Collins was shot dead. Anti-Treaty forces ambushed his convoy in the mountains among the small towns of Bandon and Macroom. West Cork saw his birth and death as he came from a small town, Clonakilty. The memorial in the mountains and the statue at his birthplace commemorate deeds of an 'Irish hero'. There are exhibitions dedicated to his personality displayed all around county Cork as well.³⁸

3.5. The Build up to WWII and a False Sense of Peace

The period until the beginning of the Second World War is marked with a few incidents trying to threaten the stability of the state. De Valera made the progressive step against his former colleagues. He declared the IRA an illegal organization in 1936, having been its supporter and shadow leader. The new Irish police, Garda, was established in the 1930s, staying in use as unarmed police until the current time. After the Civil War the country called for industrial and agricultural reconstructions. The government had to deal with tasks such as how to make education compulsory and revive an interest in studying Irish Gaelic in schools. The language makes up a part of the leaving certificate exam in Ireland, and is still spoken in some parts of the island, especially, the west and south-west coast (Dingle peninsula, the Aran Islands). Among other tasks that needed to be sorted out was a reduction in the number of soldiers, a creation of new laws and financial help for poor farmers who consisted of 70 % of the population.³⁹

Religious freedom for all citizens was declared and a new flag introduced. The precisely chosen colors of green, white and orange stripes of a new flag symbolize the peace between two religious

³⁸ MAC ANNAIDH, S.(2007). *Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd. p.284

³⁹ Ibidem, p.286

communities, The Catholics and Protestants. The new constitution from 1937 declared Ireland to be a sovereign, independent and democratic state. This one is still in use today just with several amendments added. Dr. Douglas Hyde was elected Ireland's first president in 1938. Ireland stayed neutral during WWII but many Irish soldiers fought against Germans under the British flag. Britain gave up three strategic ports back to Ireland, one of them Cobh (Queenstown). Cobh, is the harbor famous for being the Titanic's last stop at the Continent on the maiden voyage to America. For many poor Irish people who boarded the ship it was also the first and last journey.⁴⁰

Eamon de Valera's emotional reaction to Winston Churchill criticism of Ireland's neutrality in the war.

“Mr. Churchill is proud of Britain's stand alone, after France had fallen and before America entered the war. Could he not find in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there is a small nation that stood alone not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression, that has endured spoliations, famines, massacres in endless succession that was clubbed many times into insensibility, but that each time on returning to consciousness too up the fight anew, a small nation that could never be got to accept defeat and has surrendered her soul?” (MAC ANNAIDH, S. 2007: 29)

The 1950s-60s were years of flourishing and an era of an economic growth. No matter of that, agriculture still remained the main industry in the country. Emigration has been the biggest issue since this time until now. The government financially sponsored many projects pumping money into the economy. Following the example of Martin Luther King in America, Irish Catholics living in Northern Ireland formed the Association for Civil Rights in 1967.⁴¹

3.6 The Troubles and Turmoil in Ireland

The 1960s and 1970s are called as years of “the Troubles”. After the resignation of president, De Valera in 1959, his successor, Sean Lemass (1899-1971) took the office. Neither he nor his predecessors managed to stop or control the rising hatred in Northern Ireland. The minority of local Catholics had been discriminated since the beginning. They were not represented in the Ulster Assembly. Radical protests and pogroms were held to threaten their statehood and the demands for keeping civil rights. Even before the tragic ‘Bloody’ Sunday, rioting

⁴⁰ FRANK, J..(2006). *Stručná historie států: Irsko*. Praha: nakladatelství Libri, p.101

⁴¹ MAC ANNAIDH, S.(2007). *Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd. p.306

in Belfast were common procedures. The capital city of Northern Ireland, Belfast, is since that time associated with terrorism. The tensions of unrest between the two religious communities living together escalated in an outbreak of violence in the streets. A civil rights march was held on the 30th of January 1972 in Derry (Londonderry) through the Catholic ghetto areas. The IRA did not confront the British forces and stayed away. British soldiers claimed they had been attacked by cobble- stone throwing and some shooting. They were just making excuses of inappropriate acts of violence. This day in Derry ended up with 13 dead victims and is known as “Bloody” Sunday. As an act of revenge the British Embassy was burnt out. The so called Sunningdale’s Agreements from December 1979 should have guaranteed the establishment of the Council of Ireland in Ulster and the representation of the Catholic minority by presence of Irish ministers. Unfortunately, the demands written on paper did not come into practice and the vision of peace dissolved.⁴²

Several attempts for negotiations have been held by British Prime ministers e.g. Margaret Thatcher, John Major and finishing with Tony Blair. In 1985 Thatcher and Fitzgerald signed the Anglo- Irish Agreement at Hillsborough chateaux in Ulster. The contract in which the British obliged to regularly negotiate all Irish questions and the Irish legally recognized the right of the people of Northern Ireland to decide about their policy.⁴³

3.5.1. Northern Ireland- A Religious Division

Religion always played a crucial role in building up national identity. Scottish and English ascendants settled in Ulster at the beginning of the 17th century. They stayed separated from the Irish due to different political aims and religious belief. British Protestants came as invaders, behaved as a superior race and moreover confiscated almost all property. Hardly anybody would have welcomed them with open arms.

The British offered the self-autonomy status to both sides by the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. The South did not respect it but the North warmly accepted it. The new self- governing united consisted of 1 256 000 inhabitants. The minority refused to accept the separation of the island and boycotted the establishment of state institutions. On the 10th April 1998,

⁴² FRANK, J.(2006). *Stručná historie států: Irsko*. Praha: nakladatelství Libri, p. 112

⁴³ MAC ANNAIDH,S.(2007). *Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd. p. 298

the Irish president Bertie Ahern signed the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast. It certainly was viewed by all parties involved in the negotiations (the IRA, Sinn Fein and British) as a historical compromise.⁴⁴ .

3.6. The Celtic Tiger and a New Ireland

The year 1973 is a successful milestone for the country because of the entry into the European Economic Community. Ireland entered the British Commonwealth of Nations, United Nations Organization. The ‘Celtic Tiger’ is the nickname for the country during its most prosperous years of the 1990s, after the financial stimulations and the role in the international markets. The election of the first woman president in 1990, Mary Robinson meant the symbolic defeat of the rigid political and cultural traditions. In 1995 the Dail passed a law which allowed pregnant women to legally travel abroad to have an abortion and legalized divorce as well as homosexuality. On the 1st of January 1999 Ireland accepted the Euro currency. Cork and Dublin have become headquarters for many international companies and the sector of tourism has been noticing a significant increase in foreign visitors every year. Between the years 1993-2000 the Irish economy reached an unreal 80 % increase and the rate of unemployment decreased to 4 %. Nowadays, the main export revenues spring from the IT, chemical and technical industry.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ FRANK, J.(2006). *Stručná historie států: Irsko*. Praha: nakladatelství Libri, pp. 106- 109

⁴⁵ MAC ANNAIDH, S.(2007). *Irish History*. England: Parragon Books Ltd.p.309

4. Canadian Literature

4.1. A Brief History of Canada

From its beginning, the future development of Canada was divided between two „rivals“. The countries that had their colonies in Canada, France and England and therefore it became a bilingual country. Canada has always been influenced by the motherland, England. Those with a completely opposite attitude sought the ‘rioting country’ in Europe, Ireland.

Canada would have liked to stay under the British protection and control and never break away as the other colonies seeking freedom. After the Proclamation of the USA many pro- British patriots either decided to leave the country by their own will or were made to settle in Canada. They refused to accept the new policy and identify themselves with the ideals of the Revolution. These people were the inhabitants of thirteen founding colonies in the USA. People of the new country were struggling with the hard weather conditions. Taking into account the enormous area Canada covers, only a few picturesque but isolated British and French settlements were inhabited.⁴⁶

4.2. The Birth of National Canadian Literature

It’s important to distinguish the national Canadian literature from the one published abroad. The literature always served as a helper during the forming processes of creating a new society. We cannot speak about Canadian literature sooner than from the beginning of the twentieth century and even after that it was hardly recognizable.

„During this process, national literature often plays a crucial role, since the written form has traditionally been considered as the most authoritative means of dissemination of the basic cultural concepts.“⁴⁷

A lot of old literal works have been lost, almost none preserved or some still waiting for their rediscovering. At the beginning a historical novel was the most popular genre of prose. Writers took the inspiration from the Indian history of the French part of Canada. The poetry played an important role as well, especially from the didactic point of view. It served as the motivation

⁴⁶, KYLOUŠEK, P. a kol. (2009). *Us-them-me: the search for identity in Canadian literature and film*. Vyd. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, p. 46

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p.50

for social, political, moral and religious ideals. The topics that the authors wrote about most were local legends, traditions and the immigrants' issue.⁴⁸

4.3. The Development of Canadian Literature over Two Centuries

The leading genre of the 1860s and 1870s was an author's story, the most interesting and various literal genre of Canadian literature. The development of prose in the half of the 19th the century was not somehow spectacular. To break through to the British and American market, the authors wrote fiction for a widespread range of readers. Some books had a moral character. The appearance of romantic themes and the progressive popularity of the historical novel among Canadian readers started to increase. The literature started to flourish in quality and quantity. Authors broadened and enriched the themes of local traditions, documentary facts, personal or family histories, politics, and the fantasy genre the previous generations wrote about. One of the distinctive features of this literature is a motive of personal confession, the interest in national history and feministic questions.⁴⁹ Roughly two decades after WWI we can notice the development of modernism. French-speaking Montreal became the center for modern poetry at the end of the 1920s. There were a rapid increase in the amounts of magazines publishing poetry and prose. At the end of the 1950s and 1960s Canadian literature started to be taught as a university subject and established as an independent study branch.⁵⁰

Many authors publishing in the period of the 1960s- 70s left behind the traditional concept of writing a realistic fiction to less conventional, surrealistic and feministic prose. The narrative shifts from first person to third person narrative were used by many authors such as Edna O'Brien and Margaret Atwood. It gave a book a playful and experimental tone.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kolektiv autorů. (1996). *Slovník spisovatelů*. Nakladatelství Libri, Praha. p.63

⁴⁹ KYLOUŠEK, Petr a kol. (2009). *Us-them-me: the search for identity in Canadian literature and film*. Vyd. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, p. 180

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p.184

⁵¹ Ibidem, p.185

4.4. Seeking the National Identity

Canadian culture lacked the concept of national identity. To support the idea of building up pride in people for being Canadian and reading local writers, Atwood set the plots of her stories in Canadian cities, introduced local people and popularized the novel genre in general Canadian colonial mentality seemed to be the problem of many sharp discussions among Canadian intellectuals. The book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* written by Atwood and published in 1972. As the title suggests, it was an influential book giving an overview of Canadian literature, filling the place that literature lacked before. It also affected and boosted the national pride of being Canadian and at the same time offered an option for talented writers to produce the same valuable work as their European colleagues.⁵²

*"It wasn't the American national identity that was bothering us; nor was it our absence of one. We knew perfectly well we had one, we just didn't know what it was. We weren't even insulted that 'they' knew nothing about us; after all, we knew nothing about ourselves."*⁵³

'Survival' is depicted as a unifying symbol for Canadian identity. Remembering the physical survival of early explorers, the cultural one of French Canadians and later on when Canada itself had to fight for and faced the overwhelming power of the United States.⁵⁴

If authors had really insisted on publishing in Canada, they could have counted only with a small financial support from local newspapers and some magazines. It definitely was 'a long run' until the finish line as their budgets were very limited in those days.⁵⁵ Due to the lack of psychological and financial support from their own country, local writers had to get used to the fact that they could not afford to publish their works outside American or English markets.⁵⁶ According to Atwood the national literature always tells the people about the character of their country. Literature is "a map, a geography of the mind."⁵⁷ Canadian writers were concerned about their stable identity and the quality of work they produced. The competition was hard and keeping up with a powerful neighbor, the USA or even the UK was not an easy task. Having thought that

⁵²Kolektiv autorů. (1996). *Slovník spisovatelů*. Nakladatelství Libri, Praha, p.340

⁵³ Ibidem, p.190

⁵⁴ KYLOUŠEK, Petr a kol. (2009). *Us-them-me: the search for identity in Canadian literature and film*. Vyd.1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, p. 154

⁵⁵ CBC Learning [online]. [last accessed on October 28, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://newsinreview.cbclearning.ca>

⁵⁶ Ibidem

⁵⁷ KYLOUŠEK, Petr a kol. (2009). *Us-them-me: the search for identity in Canadian literature and film*. Vyd.1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, p. 156

the only valuable literature worth reading has to be produced somewhere else and at the same time believing the real history was made abroad without their involvement.⁵⁸

During the 1980s and 1990s, writers were breaking down the traditional views of the gender and class. Also many First Nations, Inuit and Asian writers emerged from the shadows and got publicity. They wrote about nation, land, myths and legends, society and furthermore about their feelings of isolation, the experience of immigrants and cultural and social struggles.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 78

⁵⁹ Canadian Literature. In: The Encyclopedia Britannica.[online].[last accessed on July 30,2015].Retrieved from : <http://www.britannica.com/art/Canadian-literature#toc59350>

5. Feminism

As stated above, my chosen novels will be analysed on socio- historical and cultural background with feminist theories included. The publication of works either predestined or just met the rise of Second Wave of Feminist Movement. Both novels are read and understood by critics and wide readership as proto-feminist works. We can trace some feministic ideas in the novels but neither of two authors is fully committed to accept feministic theory without some disagreements.

O'Brien's comments on feminism: *"A lot of things have been said by feminists about equality, about liberation, but not all of these things are gospel truth.... I am not the darling of the feminists. They think I am too preoccupied with old-fashioned themes like love and longing"* (CAHALAN, J. M. 1995:5).

5.1. The Brief History of Feminism

The political term 'feminism' came into existence in the 1960s, previously being associated only with medical terminology. Feminism is a cross-section ideology. There is no united philosophy but a mixture of a variety of opinions and political thoughts standing next to each other.⁶⁰

Feminists consider the relationships between genders politically and point out the supremacy of men and subordination of women as common 'practice' among most of developed societies. They characterize their relationships passed on power by a word, patriarchy. Patriarchy is derived from Latin word "pater"=father and means the supremacy of the father or husband over the subordinated family members, the wife and children. Feminists admitted that the amount of women being oppressed varied in different cultures and historical epochs.⁶¹

The women's movement tried to enforce various goals on the political field, some of them more or less successfully e.g. to have the right to vote, equal access to free education, to increase the number of women in public positions, to legalize abortion, to call off restrictions and other humiliating regulations concerning the type of clothing which could be worn.⁶²

⁶⁰ HEYWOOD, A.(2005). *Politické ideologie*. Praha: Eurolex Bohemia s.r.o. p.239

⁶¹ Ibidem, p.24

⁶² Ibidem, p. 237

Until the 1960s we could hardly speak about any differences between genders as politically significant and interesting. If any predecessors thought about any political, historical or social roles of men and women, those differences were taken as natural and therefore inevitable. The social division of their work was dictated by biological factors. Women and men should only fulfil their social roles assigned by nature. Women are predestined to subordination due to physical and anatomic “facilities”, suited to play the ‘second’ role. They run a household, give childbirth, menstruate and breastfeed. All these abilities mentioned belong among women’s “strengths or weakness” depends on the point of view. On the other hand, men due to their greater physical strength were predestined for work outside the house, hunting and building etc. This idea is very outdated in modern societies where up-to-date technology and machinery substituted the physical strength needed in agriculture and industry.⁶³

The period during which organized women movements concentrated their will to push through the topic of the right to vote in the 19th century is called The first-wave of feminism. Until the 19th century no women organizations had been set up. People thought that once women are given the ‘privilege’ to vote any other prejudices based on gender and forms of discriminations would disappear. The First Wave came to an end when the first women in New Zealand, the US and the UK and the rest of democratic countries were allowed to vote.⁶⁴

The Second Wave of Feminism marked the period of the second half of the 20th century. Many activists naively thought that by gaining the right to vote, they at the same time gained emancipation decades ago but it was not true. The second-wave proceeded from the understanding that even after having reached legal equality with men and gaining political rights, the women question has not been fully solved.⁶⁵

Liberal feminists disagree with the idea of the division of a life into the public and private one. They claim that such a division limits women access to public education, to work and political activities. The public sphere of life, involving politics, work, art and literature has always been

⁶³ Ibidem,243

⁶⁴ HEYWOOD, A.(2005). *Politické ideologie*. Praha: Eurolex Bohemia s.r.o. p.240

⁶⁵ Ibidem,p.241

a domain of men while women's existence was limited to the "private" sphere, which means taking care of children and family, running the household.⁶⁶

The Feminism of the 21st century is not compact but divided into many fractions. Prostitution, abortion, pornography, censorship, motherhood, race, nationality are topics causing disagreement among all of them.⁶⁷

5.2. Feminism in Canada

The expectations or options for young, educated women living in Canada in the 1960s were the following. They could have chosen a job without the perspective of promotion or enter into an unhappy marriage. Many things had changed by that time. Around the 1960s when Margaret Atwood attended college in Canada and the US, the Women's Liberation Movement, experienced a revival in Canada and Ireland as well. Books like *the Second Sex* were read in secret. They raised public awareness among women. Canadian women spontaneously organised themselves into liberation groups in the late 1960s. There were held women gatherings where social and economic problems were discussed. Women paid attention to what was missing in their lives, shared ideas and helped each other. Before this time, women had been accused of seducing and entrapping men into marriage⁶⁸.

5.3. Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*

When dealing with the topic of feminism, I can hardly leave out the name of Simone de Beauvoir (1905-1986), French romantic writer and social critic. She taught philosophy at Sorbona University. She was a partner of French writer and philosopher, Jean Paul Sarter. Her masterpiece the *Second Sex* had an incredible impact on the feminist movement. The book deals with the issue of gender roles. Simone de Beauvoir published her book eleven years after *the Country Girls*. Margaret Atwood admitted to reading *The Second Sex* in secret at college

⁶⁶ Ibidem,p.243

⁶⁷ Ibidem,p.253

⁶⁸ SHAMSODDIN, R.YAZDANI, Z.(2011). *Metaphor of the Body in Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman* In: *The Criterion: an International Journal in English*. [online]. Volume II. Issue III. [Last accessed on September 5,2015]. Retrieved from: www.the-criterion.com

under the threat of being expelled. Beauvoir writes in her book about “femininity” which is observed as a social and cultural construct. “*One is not born a woman, one becomes one.*”⁶⁹. The main issue being discussed is the definition of women in relation to men. “*One of her basic concepts is that men see women not as a being like them, a peer or collaborator, but rather that they see women in the same way that they see a stranger.*”⁷⁰. She pointed out that what creates a woman’s status are social not biological factors. There is clear proof in her work showing to what extent masculinity is presented positively or as a norm and why femininity is taken as “otherness”. That “otherness” limits female freedom in a radical way. Beauvoir believed that using rational thinking and being critical can make women responsible for their own lives. As Beauvoir suggested, women submissively accepted the ‘second’ role themselves. She sharply criticized Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, especially penis envy.⁷¹

Not only Beauvoir but also Edna O’Brien mentions the persona of Freud. In the interview with Philip Roth, O’Brien expresses her opinion on the source of female despair. “*If you want to know what I regard as the principal crux of female despair, it is this: in the Greek myth of Oedipus and in Freud's exploration of it, the son's desire for his mother is admitted; the infant daughter also desires its mother but it is unthinkable, either in myth, in fantasy or in fact, that that desire can be consummated.*” (Ingman 2002: 39)

5.4. Michel Foucault: The Relationship Based on Power

Michael Foucault (1926-1984) is a French philosopher, the first theoretic of postmodernism in philosophy. The main problem with his work is concentrated on power. Power is the basic principal of development e.g. in politics, in society etc. Generally all the work deals with the issue of a man and a woman focusing on discipline.

Feminists have the most interest in Foucault’s understanding of the relations based on power and his contribution to this area of study. They found only partial agreement in his theory about body and sexuality. Foucault claims that the body and sexuality are cultural constructs

⁶⁹ BEAUBOIR, Simone de.(1949). *The Second Sex*. London: Everyman,p.24

⁷⁰ CAHALAN, J. M. (1995). “*Female and Male Perspective on Growing up Irish in Edna O'Brien, John McGahern and Brian Moore*”. In: Colby Quarterly [online]. Vol 31, No.1, p.20. [Last accessed on October 2, 2015].Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

⁷¹ HEYWOOD, A.(2005). *Politické ideologie*. Praha: Eurolex Bohemia s.r.o. p.247

rather than natural phenomena and that the relationship of power and sexuality is misinterpreted. Sexuality should be viewed as a natural force that power simply opposes and represses and which is constructed through the power of relations. Foucault denies the possibility of an increased knowledge of patriarchal power which can lead to the liberation from oppression.

His works on power are used by some feminists as a source of inspiration for developing the concept of power and gender. Many types of feminist theories were based on the assumption that the oppression of women can be explained by patriarchal social structures, which secure the power of men over women.⁷²

5.5. Judith Butler and *Gender Troubles*

There are many points of view on how to see gender. One of them is explained as:

*"The state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones)."*⁷³

From a sociological point of view, the meaning of the gender is not derived from biological distinctions. It is a social concept that describes how societies determine sex categories. Cultural meanings attached to men and women's roles are included. Gender is also determined by what an individual feels and does,⁷⁴

Judith Butler in her *Preface to The Gender Trouble* wrote that her work might be seen by some as a provocative intervention into feminist theory but for many others as a founding text of feminism. Butler has lived for years in the community of gays and lesbians on the east coast of the USA prior to writing *The Gender Trouble* published in 1989. She has been influenced by French poststructuralism

⁷² ARMSTRONG A. (2010). *Michel Foucault and Feminism* In: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and its Authors. [online]. University of Queensland. [accessed on August 23, 2015]. Retrieved from: www.iep.utm.edu/foucferm

⁷³ World Health Organisation. Gender. [online]. [accessed on September 11, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/>

⁷⁴ The Other Sociologist. Sociology of Gender. [online]. [Last accessed on September 10, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://othersociologist.com/sociology-of-gender>

It seemed to her that feminism has the tendency to idealize gender and therefore produce some other form of hierarchy and exclusion in society. So there is a basic question that arises, who is a woman and who is a man?⁷⁵

[...] *one is a woman according the framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender*[...](BUTLER 1999:12)

This issue of gender is more accurate as there are various new forms of genders such as transsexuality, lesbians and gays. She definitely does not claim that any particular sexual practise produces certain forms of gender. Heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, gays or lesbians are just forms of sexual orientations.⁷⁶

She talks about different kinds of discrimination of sexual minorities because they do not fit into accepted.⁷⁷ It varies from society to society and can be changed. There is always the established gender order in a given society. People are born either male or female but they are taught to behave according to social norms as a man or a woman. Individuals acquire the patterns of communication. Once individuals or groups do not fit in the established norms they often have to face discrimination from the majority of the population or social exclusion. Differences between genders are most often imprinted by opposing stereotypes about masculinity and femininity.⁷⁸

Gender cannot be simply read as a self- invention. Butler makes the following distinction of gender into a normative and descriptive one. The normative notion tries to answer the question about which expressions of gender are acceptable and which are not. Taking the example of a man dressed as a woman and visa versa the clothes he or she wears. We think this is the way how the “real” gender is being displayed. This “reality” constitutes the illusionary appearance and effect. Wearing clothes is also based on cultural not natural interferences.⁷⁹

Butler's own work tries to explore the processes for forming identity and loosening the heterosexual restrictions. According to Butler, gender identity is simply '*a set of repeated acts*

⁷⁵ BUTLER, J.(1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge Press, p. 5

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p.7.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p.10

⁷⁸ The Other Sociologist. *Sociology of Gender*. [online]. [Last accessed on September10,2015]. Retrieved from: <http://othersociologist.com/sociology-of-gender>

⁷⁹ BUTLER, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge Press, p.9

within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990: 33).

The Irish representation of identity is locked between the land and the relationship with the mother. The only acceptable option given by society and the Church is the identification with roles and norms leading to women's subjectivity. O'Brien's remarks on this subject are following: *"I betrayed Irish womanhood [.....].I betrayed my own community by writing about their world."*⁸⁰

When the term "gender" was constructed, it had a significant influence on feminist theory. Earlier forms of feminism developed a theory of social construction based on the distinction between sex and gender. They are persuaded that gender is significant and the most important sign of division as well as class, race or religion one belongs to. The system of sexual inequality and oppression is the foundation of society.⁸¹

Sex here denotes the biological differences between men and women. These differences are natural and invariable. The most important ones are those connected to reproduction. The aim of feminist is to be judged regardless of sex. Women and men cannot be described according to sex but their individuality.⁸²

⁸⁰ O'BRIEN, E.(1976). *Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld &Nicolson: Penguin Books,p.32

⁸¹ ARMSTRONG A. (2010). *Michel Foucault and Feminism* In: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and its Authors. [online].University of Queensland. [last accessed on August 23, 2015]. Retrieved from:www.iep.utm. edu/foucsem

⁸² HEYWOOD, A.(2005). *Politické ideologie*. Praha: Eurolex Bohemia s.r.o.p.238

6. *Mother Ireland*

Mother Ireland (1976) is Edna O'Brien's autobiographical memoir introducing us into her childhood world, Irish upbringing and her youth's ups and downs. Her purposes for immigration and life in exile, her relationship with the motherland which might be seen from the emotionally expressive title that evokes the author's bound and roots to her Ireland.

Amanda Greenwood sees a literal shift and change in writing in her autobiography. O'Brien said about it that is written as a coffee-table book about Ireland compared to her experimental early novels. It is accessible to all but undemanding. O'Brien shone light on the issues of femininity and Irishness, the role of mother and motherland, pain of rejection and separation from both.⁸³ She recognised herself with them. The struggle of the Irish women writers in the shades of literary fathers. To make it more interesting for readers, there are added photographs of enchanting and wild Irish landscape and authentic shots of locals, events, sports matches etc.

The book is divided into chapters chronologically, noting the author's life stages. The chapters are titled as *The land itself*, *My home town*, *The classroom*, *The book we read*, *A Convent*, *Dublin's Fair City*, *Escape to England*. It is obvious that we cannot omit O'Brien's personal life when analysing the trilogy. The last three chapters of *Mother Ireland* show more similarities with the author's life and her prose. In the second chapter, O'Brien describes ordinary life and the local traditions, Easter, Christmas, praying, dying, and secret dating.

"Love was embrocation for everything, love would do miracles. Beauty was given extraordinary importance. It has the power to change and influence one's life, to turn it into a fairy tale or a nightmare instead, without it there was no Prince Charming, Mr. Right or Mr. Magnetic coming or even to pay one a first look. "A lady had simply to look perfect, remain speechless and she had her man." (O'Brien 1976: 56)

6.1. Freedom in Exile

As many Irish before and even after Edna O'Brien did, she followed the same example and left Ireland. Not driven away by famine or hunger or any other disaster but for the pursuit of a better life abroad and publication freedom. America or England was these promised lands for new beginnings. Edna O'Brien always worked in exile in London where she moved to in 1959,

⁸³ GREENWOOD, A. (2003). *Edna O'Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, p.49

before the first volume of the trilogy came out. Of course, her perspective of Ireland has been affected and could be seen as controversial.

O'Brien's statement given on exile of the Irish people:

"Those who resolved to leave it never hoped to see it again and those who made the unfortunate choice to continue therein, could at the same time have nothing in prospect but contempt and poverty, chains and imprisonment and in a word all the miseries that a conquered nation could rationally expect from power and malice."(O'Brien 1976:46)

Feelings of pity and half sadness but relief and victory at the same time marked O'Brien's escape to England:

"Leaving Ireland was no wrench at all. That was my victory. Pity arose too, pity for a land, pity for a people reluctant to admit that there is anything wrong. That is why we leave. Because we beg to differ. Because we dread the psychological choke. But time changes everything including our attitude to a place." (O'Brien 1976: 50)

"I live out of Ireland because something in me warns me that I might stop if I lived there, that I might cease to feel what it has meant to have such a heritage, might grow placid when in fact I want yet again and for indefinable reasons to trace the same route, the trenchant childhood route, in the hope of finding some clue that will, or would, or could, make the leap that would restore one to one's original place and state of consciousness, to the radical innocence of the moment just before birth."(O'Brien 1976: 89)

Before the big escape to England, O'Brien made one smaller escape through moving to Dublin City. Having no money but with the perspective of freedom and with the pursuit of love and job she left her village. *"Goodbye to the humble little mounds, the chicken run, the dozy hens, goodbye to the ineradicable past."*⁸⁴

6.2. The Charm and Love for Her Motherland

"Ireland for me is moments of its history, and its geography, a few people embody its strange quality, the whiff of night air, the line from a Synge play "Hour after hour I can think of Ireland, I can imagine without going far wrong what is happening in any one of the little town by day and night. I can almost tell what any one of my friends might be doing at any hour so steadfast in the rhythm of life there." (O'Brien 1976: 88)

⁸⁴ O'BRIEN, E.(1976).*Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson: Penguin Books,p.86

O'Brien has been criticized many times for not living in Ireland but writing stories about Ireland without having constant or up-to date- contact with the country. Compared to other Irish literates who went into exile but never came back, she did.

"When I wrote my first books, and considering the way I was treated, I was very wise to protect myself by not living there. In term of being a writer, my duty and my obsession is to my writing and it always has been and it always will be." (O'Brien 1976:88)

Frankly speaking, O'Brien admits that being Irish means you have a different philosophy about pleasure, life and death. The only thing you can blame for that is the country which made you think this way.

"There are many Irelands. There are as many Irelands as there are writers who could write. My territory is County Clare. When I'm around, I go into very quiet, isolated places. There's quite a lot of loneliness there [...]."(O'Brien 1976:95)

6.3. O'Brien's Clash with Religion: A Life in a Convent

An Irish national symbol, shamrock symbolizes the Holy Trinity, in O' Brien the trinity of Irishness, mother and mother country. For Irish children shamrock means the inheritance of three guilts, the guilts for Christ's passion and the crucifixion, g. for the plundered land, for the mother abusing by father.⁸⁵ O'Brien is describing her life in a convent, the daily routine, the drill, praying nuns and priests. She thought that being obedient, friendly and helpful can make her life in a convent much easier. Girls were cut off from their parents whose roles were reduced only to people who had given birth to a child. Parental authority had been replaced by the 'higher' one. O'Brien did not want to become a nun, to deny oneself to the Holy Bible and to keep her mind on the stories of saint martyrs.

"I looked at one of the many pictures of the Virgin along the wall and realized that she no longer spoke to me as she used to when I was child. The visions were waning. I knew that I would not be a nun, rather I would be a film star and get a perm in my hair and save up for an accordion pleated skirt, get high heels, perfume and fur-backed gloves"(O'Brien 1976: 73)

Her teenage dream came true later after moving to London and meeting celebrities at parties, building her career as a writer, having love affairs and enjoying her new life.

⁸⁵ O'BRIEN, Edna.(1976). *Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld &Nicolson: Penguin Books,p.53

At literature lessons girls were educated and warned by nuns about the sinful writers and the obscene scenes they wrote about. Not even reading banned books but eating a piece of chocolate or biscuit was taken as a commission of a sin. Girls were sad, lacked paternal love, felt isolated and lonely. As a consequence of the loneliness some girls fell in love with nuns. Nuns sometimes took advantage of this state of mind and made victims of girls.

“Oh to please her and win one’s way into her hard heart and be invited to do little favours for her, like carrying her book, or opening or closing a window, oh to be her slave!”(O’Brien 1976:68)

6.4. A Picture of Love and Sexuality according to The Church

Catholicism has taught O’Brien that sex for pleasure is sinful and dirty. *“I think love replaced religion for me in my sense of fervor. When I began to look-at earthly love (i.e., sex) I felt that I was cutting myself off from God [. . .].My daily life and my sexual life is not of a whole-they are separated .Part of my Irish heritage!”* (Miller 2013: 40).

Catholicism does not allow any sexual autonomy. In *The Country Girls Trilogy*, O’Brien conveys well the notion that sexuality is often problematic not only for Caithleen, but also for all Irish women. Her first sexual experience with a man she liked did not meet her expectations of pleasure in reality at all.

”Had one not been born, bred, and raised to believe that this was the ultimate crime, constituting a smear if the body, a possible pregnancy and adieu to the friendship of God.” (O’Brien 1999: 420)

According to O’Brien, women’s tragedy lies not only in what happens to them and the country’s reaction to their plight, but in their own inability to help themselves. The search for love and acceptance is not light-hearted but rather desperate.

“Love is longed for but, being linked with sex, is at the same time like a room into which no one steps for days [....] Love is both the hope for deliverance from this world, and the means by which, each time, the heroines ‘high ideals are laid low.’” (Bremner 2010: 9)

The religious faith is for many Irish people more important than being Irish. The religion led them through the history, from birth until death at the battlefields. (Kiberd 1995: 550) discusses the effect of the loss of the Irish language on the people. He claims that in about 1790 the people of Ireland were willing to learn English only if that meant they could hold on to their religion.

What followed was the Irish being wracked with guilt and therefore throwing themselves even deeper into their religion. More than 90 % of the inhabitants in Ireland are Catholics. Catholicism was taken most seriously by the Irish, especially in matters of sex, which, due to biology, has affected women far greater than men. The Irish used no contraception although legalized in 1983. Abortion was found illegal according to the Church and sex should have been only for making babies not pleasure. Ireland also has been and remains today a patriarchal country with a high percentage of domestic violence.⁸⁶

6.5. Magdalene's Laundries

Many Irish women were promised marriage but ended up alone and pregnant. It was a shame if the pregnant girl was not married or at least engaged. The families either sent the girls away or locked them at home to hide them from gossips. A good Catholic girl would never allow a man to have sex with her before their wedding and not dare enjoy it. One of the punishments for being disobedient and sinful was hard labour at Magdalen's laundries, 'prisons' for fallen women.⁸⁷

Magdalene laundries (asylums) were institutions or houses for so called "fallen women" in work from the 18th to the late 20th centuries. The term "fallen women" used to imply female sexual promiscuity or work in prostitution but in reality abandoned pregnant women were locked up there while working hard and praying. Their children were taken away from them and often sold in the US without any permission from their mothers. Their slavery work was punishment for breaking the rules set by the Catholic Church or Irish society. Asylums operated throughout Europe and North America for almost two centuries. The last Irish asylum closed in 1996 in Cork. The institutions were named after the Biblical figure Mary Magdalene, a reformed prostitute. An estimated 30,000 women were confined in Irish asylums. The first asylum in Ireland opened in Dublin in 1765.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ KIBERD, D. (1995). *Inventing Ireland*. London: Jonathan Cape.p.650

⁸⁷ Finnegan, F.(2001). *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalene Asylums in Ireland*. Piltown, Co. Kilkenny: Congrave Press. p.34

⁸⁸ Smith, J. M (2007). *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.p.200

A mass grave was discovered in 1993 at the grounds of a former convent in Dublin containing 155 corpses. The government made a state apology to victims and their survivors in 2013. Any financial compensations for the deeds made by nuns and the Church to victims of such abuse have been refused.⁸⁹

The film of the same name, *The Magdalene Sisters*, made by Peter Mullan in 2002 which is based on historical facts about four young women jailed in a Dublin Magdalene Laundry from 1964 to 1968. *Phelomena* (2013) is another film produced according to real life experience with the same theme.

⁸⁹ The Wikipedia. *Magdalen's Asylums*. [online]. [last accessed on October 17, 2015]. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalene_asylum

7. *The Country Girls Trilogy*

The *Country Girls Trilogy* consists of three volumes. Firstly, *The Country Girls* (1960), secondly *Girls with Green Eyes* renamed from the original *The Lonely Girls* (1962), thirdly, *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964). The author's intention and hidden message to readers is expressed in well-chosen titles. The third and last volume has ironic and negative connotations as the main heroines definitely are not living and will not live a 'blissed' life.

The trilogy is a piece of fictional work based on author's own life experience which she used for writing. O'Brien never denied the personal identification with the main female protagonist, Caithleen Brady. O'Brien's opinion on autobiographical reading is that whether a novel is autobiographical or not does not matter. "*What is important is the truth in it and the way that truth is expressed. I'd be a goner now if I did everything I wrote.*"⁹⁰

The deeper I proceed to my analysis of the trilogy, the more parallels of her life with the lives of main characters become significant. For instance, the author and her heroine both had abusive alcoholic fathers, who slipped into financial debt and dedicating, 'martyred' mothers. They both went to convent school and then moved to Dublin where they both met men with the initials E. G. whom they married and later divorced. The heroine's mum drowned herself. The author's mum was alive. A reader is not explicitly told what happened to Mrs. Brady, the act is rather described as an accident rather than suicide.

Amanda Green uses the term a "negative romance" instead of other literally used term 'failed romance' for describing the trilogy. "*It's the fiction which examines the condition of women under patriarchy by subverting "romance" while conforming superficially to the genre.*"⁹¹ Failed romance is intended romance fiction which disappoints its potential readers. Conventional romance fiction normally does not admit criticism of the men's power and other qualities which would be adored and desired e.g. age, power, the control of other people's welfare and detachment.

⁹⁰ GREENWOOD, A. (2003). *Edna O'Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, p.22

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p.23

The main protagonists of the novels are Caithleen⁹², her counterpart and at the same time best friend Baba. The beginning of the story is set in the environment of the rural west of Ireland (Co. Clare), later on Dublin and finally London. The plot follows their personal developments from school girls into grown-up women, their ups and downs, falling in love, breaking up, weddings, giving birth to children, unhappy marriages, love affairs and divorce. The process which they both undertook is constructed by a man's world. The relationships with the men stand in the centre of the reader's attention.

7.1. The Plot

The beginning of the story brings the reader into the rural county Clare in Ireland. The two young girls were chatting and walking on the path back home from school. They were teasing each other by pretending to confess to a priest about their secret desires and their attraction for boys. Cait's arrivals and departures to school were met with a loving embrace from Cait's mum and greetings from Hickey, their handyman.

"She straightened the cap on my head and kissed me three or four times. She stood on the flag to look after me. She was waving. In her brown dress she looked sad: the farther I went, the sadder she looked. Like a sparrow in the snow, brown and anxious and lonesome. It was hard to think that she got married one sunny morning in a lace dress and a floppy buttercup hat, and her eyes were moist with pleasure when now they were watery with tears." (O'Brien 1998:9)

It was getting dark and both women could not sleep because of a rising fear of the arrival of the drunkard, Mr. Brady. Cait was scared of him and felt that her mother was very unhappy in their marriage. Her devotion could be compared to martyrdom. Cait excelled at school and won a scholarship to ST. Joseph's Convent in Co. Clare. She was a very obedient, warm-hearted and naïve girl. Due to Baba's jealousy for Cait, their parents decide to pay the tuition for a convent education so the girls followed the same destiny.

⁹² To keep the original author's usage of Caithleen Brady's name in the novel. She refers to her as Cait, Caithleen or Kate on purpose. Her heroines underwent three stages of development in the story: a girl, a young lady and finally a married woman and mother. Baba decided to change her name to Barbara when she moved to Dublin because she wanted to hide the fact that she was a country girl and build up a new city identity. The name, Barbara, sounded posher and noble.

“I’m going there too in September. My father has it all fixed. I have my uniform got. Of course we’re paying. It’s nicer when you pay. You’re a right-looking eejit.” (O’Brien 1998:18)

One morning, setting off on her way to school, Cait waves back her last goodbyes to her waiting mum. The sad facial expression and distant absent minded look of Mrs. Brady evoked that she was determined for a change. Cait had no intention that it would be their last goodbye. Her mother could not bear the psychological and physical torture in the marriage anymore. Even at the cost of losing her life and leaving her only child alone. The responsibility of telling Cait about her mum’s unexpected departure laid as a burden on shoulders of Jack Holland. He was a family friend, running a local bar in the village. Mrs. Brady was supposed to be back in two or three days, just visiting her sick grandad on the island. The only way to reach his place was by using a paddling boat. Cait was not worried about her mum at this stage of the story. In the rush of getting her things and stuff ready for the convent she stayed at Brendan’s. Mr. Gentleman appears” on the stage” while meeting the girls on the street. He offered to drop Cait off in Limerick. He seemed to be very charming and charismatic older man. They try to keep their meetings secret. Cait put her make-up on, a cherry-red lipstick, trying to look mature. She kept her girly appearance and rather naïve thinking about the world and men.

During a theatre performance Cait was called out of her seat to join the Brennas, Jack and Mr. Gentleman in the salon for the actors and actresses. Intuitively, she was expecting some bad news when seeing their nervous faces. Everybody was hesitant to draw any conclusions and nobody wanted to tell her the bitter truth. The news about the Mrs. Brady’s accident was not still confirmed by the police and a rescue team. Cait was broken- hearted, and could not believe it. Baba was holding her hand and reassuring her about her true friendship. Everybody felt sorry for Cait as her childhood was already hard enough. Surprisingly, even Mr. Brady was mourning over the death of his beloved wife, begging Cait not to leave him at the farm alone. He did not have any inclination that he was the reason for such a desperate act. The farm had to be sold because of the deep debts never paid back by Mr. Brady. The last person who had to leave desperate Cait was their workman, Hickey, having no work there.

Cait and Baba arrived to a convent quite excited not knowing what was waiting for them. The life in the convent was harsh and tough. The rules were very strict and had to be obeyed by everyone without exceptions. The girls were not allowed to talk during meals and had to eat up everything

on their plates. The meals were very poor and not nutritious at all e.g. potatoes and cabbage very often served. They had to get up very early for praying. Keeping any personal belongings e.g. jewellery, family photos and letters was also strictly prohibited. The strict regime was being compared to the army also due to the physical training in the yards in all weather conditions. The time was passing on but the rain still stayed. At least the views from their windows showed them the change of the seasons. Baba could not stand this kind of life anymore and refuse to come back after the Christmas holidays back again.

When girls were chatting with senior students in the corridor about their boyfriends, Baba revealed Cait's secret about Mr. Gentleman. The couple promised each other to keep in touch via letters. She was allowed to send correspondence to his office in Limerick. Unfortunately, Cait was caught by a sister before managing to hand it to the collector of the weekly post. The punishment came in the form of informing her father. Mr. Brady arrived in a terrible state, 'drunk as a lord' to the convent. Hardly able to walk, stumbling on his feet, he started to fight and call the sisters bad names. The girls feared the strict Mother Superior most but in this case it was her who sent Cait's father away with the help of a cab driver.

While being observed and sitting in a back pew of the chapel, the girls were not paying the slightest attention to a priest. Baba made a plan how to get them both out of this unbearable "prison". After writing a dirty note on a holy picture about an alleged relationship between a nun and a priest, Cait and Baba were expelled and had to return back home as a punishment for being nasty, obscene, 'fallen girls' Eventually, it gave them the most desired freedom. Being constantly told that they lack value to the education and to the Church. In a small rural and conservative community, such a deed caused a rumour.

Mr. Brenan believed that the responsibility for such lies which were written on the picture rested on Baba's shoulders and Cait was only 'the tool in her hands'. She would have done anything for her without hesitation. Baba always tried to hide her dependency on Cait by pretending and lying. She is told about Mr. Gentleman's departure with his mentally sick wife back to France. He only sent a postcard with a picture of Cote'd Azure without any explanation.

Leaving their village behind, the girls moved to the capital. They arrived with their best clothes on, in a cheerful mood caused by drinking shots of sherry during the long way to Dublin. Baba's

parents paid her daughter for a secretarial course and Cait started to work in a grocery shop and attend evening classes. They found temporary accommodation in one of its guest houses.

As Baba wanted to hide her country origin, she decided to change her name to Barbara which might have sounded more posh. Full of excitement about what such a big city of that time could offer them, our country girls grew up into young country ladies.

When in Dublin, Baba initiated contact with men, dragging Kate to dances and arranging dates. Baba worked really hard to find them rich partners, vivid social and cultural life. As the first novel progressed, Baba became more bold frequenting bars where wealthy men drank searching for dates which she viewed as an exchange – she got dinner and a night out on the town, in return they received the pleasure of her company. Both young ladies had different ideas on how to spend their time in the city. Cait tried to resist letting Baba control her life all the time and be a girl of loose manners. Their different desires were made quite clear when Baba stated:

“We're eighteen and we're bored to' death [....]. We want to live. Drink gin. Squeeze into the front of big-cars and drive up outside big hotels. We want to go places. [...]. We're here at night, killing moths for Joanna, puffing DDT into crevices, listening to that lunatic next door playing the fiddle.” (O'Brien 1998:145)

Caithleen responded:

"But we want young men. Romance. Love and things," I-said despondently. I thought of standing under a streetlight in the rain with my hair falling crazily about, my lips poised for the miracle of a kiss. A kiss. Nothing more. My imagination did not go beyond that. It was afraid to. Mama has protested too agonizingly all through the windy years. But kisses were beautiful. His kisses. On the mouth, and on the eyelids, and on the neck where he lifted up the mane of hair”. (O'Brien 1998: 145)

Mr. Gentleman suddenly re-appeared on stage, having found Cait working in Dublin. The primary purpose of his visit to Dublin was business. Having arrived early in the morning back to the guest house, Cait found Mr. Gentleman waiting for her in front of the building. He took her for a trip in the countryside where they stayed until the morning. She must have promised him to keep everything secret. She started to use more cosmetics and dress up in fancy clothes just to improve her appearance and make herself more attractive for the man of her heart. Not realising that she was more beautiful when she stayed who she truly was without any decorations. Another of Mr. Gentleman's unfulfilled promises was a romantic weekend in Vienna. In full excitement, she did a lot of packing and preparations for a dream trip,

telling everybody and desperately waiting for him but everything ended in vain. He sent a telegraph stating that they cannot see each other anymore.

Baba had a brief scare that she might be pregnant and in response to Cait's naive comment that she could not be pregnant because she was 'not even living with anyone, Baba responded, "*Can't! It's the simplest bloody thing. I mean it's simpler than owning two coats or getting asked to a party*"⁹³ (Trilogy 347). Baba bought a medical book and searched for information about abortion, after some time she decided to try and treat the problem herself with a castor oil bath, which quickly became painful and dangerous. Baba feels for the first time ashamed to tell the truth to her parents. By posting a telegraph, she let them know about their departure to England Cait and Baba left their old lives in Dublin and boarded a ship heading to London. Unexpectedly, they met Hickey on board as well. Cait was looking into the distance at the panorama of Dublin Harbour and recalling all her memories of Mr. Gentleman and his promises, flashbacks of her mum, dad, the home and village. She felt miserable and sad.

*"I always knew, it was too beautiful to last.[...]"*⁹⁴

In the second volume, Cait met Eugene Galliard, her 'Prince Charming'. So the childish fantasies about Mr. Gentleman serving as a 'good father' with a mystical, sick wife disappeared. Eugene saw her as a child, a girl who needed to be educated, nurtured and raised intellectually and socially. He liked taking control of her. He always pointed out her premature and 'child bride' look yet later on proposed to her. Eugene's housekeeper, Anna, was still in favour of his American wife, Laura. Laura was described as a very unconventional woman playing tricks with Eugene and using their daughter as a tool. At this stage Eugene was still not divorced. Having found out the truth, Cait left Eugene as a gesture of teaching him a lesson but it backfired on herself instead. She wanted him to beg her to return but it did not happen even after the constant encouraging. The same scenario repeated and Cait stayed abandoned by her lover at the end of the second book as well as the first one with Mr. Gentleman.

In the third volume, Mr. Brady, accompanied with men from their village, forced Kate to come back home with him but she tried to hide from them in a house. She found a hiding place under a bed. Being kidnapped by her own father was something she did not expect at all.

⁹³ O'BRIEN, E.(1998). *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,p.347

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 349

Meanwhile, her aunt moved into the ruined farm to keep Brady's company and to take care of him. Kate was made to contact a local priest for advice. Having a relationship with a married man was seen as more sinful and a serious act against her Catholic upbringing than a murder or her father's alcohol addiction. Alcoholism was the reason for some of the climatic conditions in Ireland and therefore normally acceptable and easily forgiven. This conversation with the priest resulted in Kate's escape forever. Kate returned to Eugene's refuge as a desperate woman. She fled to live with him, rejecting her own family and the faith. Kate wedded Eugene, against the disapproval of all, and bore him a baby boy, Cash. Once deeply in love with her man, she was later on lacking and desperately looking for love, the love from her husband and family. Once she could not reach and experience her sexual fulfilment she started to feel to be cheated on and replaced romance with commercialism. She was judged by men by her appearance and body. Kate attempted to have a love affair. Unfortunately, her hidden love correspondence was found by Eugene who wanted to get divorced. They were not able to communicate to each other no matter how much Kate tried and wanted to. No matter how cruel or different Eugene was, Kate could not stop loving him so much. He took up with another woman when Kate made their maid move out. Kate found out that Eugene took their son out of the country without telling her, and was informed by the authorities that "a mother's signature was not necessary" on her son's passport. "*You call that just,' she said*"⁹⁵. Kate did express love for the child, but often used him as an emotional drain, pouring all her worries and anxiety down on him and trying to manipulate him to help her with her own life. She fought very hard to get Cash legally back home but after some time she gave up and let Eugene have full custody. This was the last straw for Kate's psyche and as a result of that, she was left totally heartbroken. Kate was seen through Baba's eyes as a child not able to take care of herself in this state. She experienced so much pain, too much had been cut away from her but she only wanted to love and be loved.

After Kate's marriage, Baba felt miserable and married Frank, a dim but nice builder with a lot of money. He was neither witty nor smart but Baba was mainly attracted by his bank account due to her own gold-digger mentality. Baba's isolation from love and tenderness let her survive, but staying in the unhappy marriage with her brutal husband Frank, was never her life goal. Sex is for her only something physical without any emotional side. "*I like his money and his slob*

⁹⁵ O'BRIEN, E.(1998). *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,p.504

ways: *I didn't mind holding hands at the pictures, but I had no urge to get into bed with him.*"⁹⁶

Martha Brennan advised her only daughter to 'grit her teeth and suffer it' as all women before did and after her will do. Baba complained about being a sacrificial lamb so she cheated on her husband with an exotic lover, Durack, and from that affair a baby was conceived. Baba did not abort it but gave birth to a baby girl, called Tracy. She did not want to be a mother to her child or a sick husband who was behaving as the second kid. Since being born the girl rejected her mother. Probably felling unloved even in her womb.

" Vomited the milk I gave her, rejected me, from day one, preferred cow's milk, solids, anything. She left home before she was thirteen, couldn't stand us[. . .]. I'm not a mother like Kate, drooling and holding out the old metaphorical breast, like a warm scone or griddle bread. She stood up to me, my little daughter, Tracy. At five years of age she walked into my bedroom and said, "You better love me or I'll be a mess." (O'Brien 1998: 515)

She had totally different emotions than mothers who are expecting babies. To wreak revenge, Frank went to a brothel to make Baba furious. Being impotent, he knew that the baby was not his. Frank disliked Kate and even after her death, blamed her for their unhappy and troubled marriage. After suffering from a stroke he was left in a very poor mental state, he stopped recognizing Baba and loved to watch children's cartoons. Baba played the most hated role of a caring nurse, loving mother and wife. *"I was full up to the gills with guilt and pity and frustration."*⁹⁷

7.2. The Epilogue

The first two volumes of the trilogy are written from Kate's point of view. Baba begins to gain a voice in the third novel and the final epilogue. It was added years later and is narrated in the first person when she takes over the dominant position in the story. The narration shifts, correspond to the events in the novels. Kate loses herself piece by piece throughout the trilogy, as well as her 'woman's voice' and strength. At first, her chance for academic education, then her innocence, beauty and finally even the remainders of her confidence. In a highly Catholic nation this is an unpardonable sin, and one is further associated with selfishness and low self-esteem. Kate is the antithesis of O'Brien's ideal illustration of femininity – a passive, weak,

⁹⁶ Ibidem.,p.378

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p.519

desperate woman who is unable to find any happiness. Just as Kate equates sex, motherhood and religion as inextricably and mysteriously linked together, so does O'Brien.⁹⁸

The epilogue came out twenty years after the publication of the trilogy in 1986. It is narrated by Baba in the first person. Its content is concentrated on Kate's suicide. She voluntarily took her life as her mother did years ago. Kate attempted to commit suicide by cutting her wrists at Waterloo station even before that fatal drowning. The death is stated by authorities as an accident but Baba comments on it with the following words knowing better than them: *Her drowning "Death is death, whether it's by accident or design."*⁹⁹ She knows Kate swam after dark on purpose. *It was all a "blind really, so that no one would know, so that her son wouldn't know, self-emulation to the fucking end."*¹⁰⁰ The bitter end of Kate's life is seen by Baba as irrational devotion to everything she loved but what betrayed her, especially motherhood.

Kate knew that Baba disliked weak people like her and could not understand her way of thinking. Kate experienced that Baba always denied being emotionally attached to someone. Her 'engine' was the desire for money not the desire for love as in Kate's case. On contrary, Baba was sure enough that Kate's first dilemma in life was her father and the second one, the burden of Irish womanhood passed on from her mother, to suffer and die. *"Her life was like a chapter of the inquisition."*¹⁰¹ Neither Kate nor Baba could help themselves to reject the effects of Irish maternity during their efforts and struggles through life. Baba felt for Kate that "she was so damn servile I could have killed her."¹⁰² Baba still could not believe what her best friend did to herself, waiting for a miracle to happen.

" I'm crazy, I'm even thinking of the Resurrection and the stone pushed away, I want to lift her up and see the life and the blood coming back into her cheeks, I want time to be put back, I want it to be yesterday, to undo the unwanted crime that has been done. " (O'Brien 1998: 531)

Kate struggled with her femininity and her role of being a mother. She expressed her resistance to femininity by the self- destruction of voluntary sterilization. Kate knew that her heart along with her female organs betrayed her, she wanted to "tear it out, stamp on it, squash it to death, her

⁹⁸READER, K. A. (2011). *The Unheard Voices of Irish Women in the Novels of Edna O'Brien*. New York. English Master's Theses. State University of New York:College at Blackport,p.32

⁹⁹ O'BRIEN, E..(1998). *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,p.523

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem,p.524

¹⁰¹ Ibidem,p.387

¹⁰² Ibidem, p. 421

heart being her undoing"¹⁰³. The surgery should have helped Kate to avoid any risk of pregnancy but left her physically empty like a shell. Baba felt like she would have needed 'a brain transfusion' to understand the talks Kate led after the surgery in the last days of her life. Kate was left unable to pray, the same situation happened to her in her childhood. She stopped believing in God as the pictures of saints did not talk to her anymore.

"[Cait's] son and I will have to take her ashes there [back to the West of Ireland] and scatter them between the bogs and the bog lakes and the murmuring waters and every other fucking bit of depression that oozes from every hectometer and every furlong of the place and that imbued her with the old Dido desperado predilections. I hope she rises up nightly like the banshee and does battle with her progenitors." (O'Brien 1998:523)

After Kate's death, our 'soldier' Baba was left powerless and empty; pleading that Cash will not question her about his mother's death in the future.

"I'm praying that her son won't interrogate me, because there are some things in this world you cannot ask, and oh Agnus Dei, there are some things in this world you cannot answer." (O'Brien 1998: 531)

Baba did not have the heart for blaming Kate for taking her own life. She tried to understand the way she had been feeling for a long time. Having known if she stood alive, nothing would have changed for her, she would rather have chosen this fatal option. Being overwhelmed by the emotions Baba became silent forever; her voice will not be heard anymore.

7.3. Male Protagonists in the trilogy

The first man who influenced and entered Cait's life was Mr. Gentleman. Mr. Gentleman is described through Cait's eyes as *"a beautiful man who lived in the white house on the hill with turret windows."* His face carved out of pale marble any eyes that made me sad for every woman.¹⁰⁴ Mr. Gentleman was introduced to the story as a romantic hero, his real name is Mr. de Maurier. He mainly embodied the characteristics of a loving father not a lover.

O'Brien put Cait's naive romantic ideals about man in contrast to Mr. Gentleman's real needs and expectations. Mr. Gentleman treated Cait as a young lady instead of a girl. Giving her gifts, boxes of chocolates, jewellery and drinking wine with her in a restaurant was not suitable

¹⁰³ Ibidem, p. 530

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. 67

for the girl of her age. Their trips into town served as temporary escape from her loneliness. He made her feel special in many ways but on the other hand isolated her from more appropriate relationships. Later in the second volume, she referred to him as a piece of clothing: *“I remembered him the way one remembers a nice dress that one has grown out of.”*¹⁰⁵

Jack Holland, the Brady’s neighbour and family friend, compared Cait’s appearance , especially her long auburn hair and an innocent young face to an Irish cailin- the highest representation of Irish femininity. He loved Cait’s mother and the quotation below shows how much he was enchanted by her beauty.

“You know many Irish people are royalty and unaware of it. They are the kings and queens walking the roads of Ireland, riding bicycles, imbibing tea, ploughing the humble earth, totally unaware of their great heredity. Your mother, now, has the way and the walk of the queen.” (O’Brien1998:17)

Hickey was Brady’s handyman on the farm. Cait loved him as the older brother she never had. As a second man on the farm, Cait and her mother were very grateful for his help and more over his presence. He represented ‘a safe harbour’, with the feelings of security and trust. After the death of Cait’s mother and her leaving to a convent there was no purpose for him to stay there. Besides, due to Mr. Brady’s heavy drinking, what once was a farm now was but a ruin. To repay all his debts to the pub he had to sell off the farm so he could not afford to have an extra pair of hands at home.

James Brady, Kate’s father as Baba stated in *The Epilogue*, was her main crucifix and the source of constant problems in her life. Neither O’Brien’s own father nor Cait’s father were the prototypes of loving and caring fathers. They were gamblers, drinkers and terribly abusive husbands totally unable of taking care of their families. He could not deny his bad manners whenever and wherever his presence was needed.

Mr. Brennan was Baba’s father who worked as a local vet. He seemed to prefer Cait to his own daughter and wife. Cait felt respect for him and was disappointed and deeply touched by his disapproval of her relationship with Eugene and the marriage. He was not a drunkard, abuser or gamblers as Frank but his marriage with Marta was also unhappy and dysfunctional.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, p.27

Eugene Galliard, Kate's husband, played a 'dictator' who was in need of a weak, agreeable and apologetic woman. Caithleen attempted to change herself to secure this new relationship. This change was problematic because she changed for him and not for herself. She offered herself up in exchange for love. At first, Eugene was not interested in marriage as he was not divorced. He was only interested in having sex and a relationship with her. Caithleen desperately wanted to be loved. Sex was not only frightening for her, but she would have preferred to stay in the good graces of her family and her religion. Interestingly, when family and friends from her village discovered her relationship, not only did she lose her family's approval, she also lost Dr. Brennan's approval. Losing him was more painful for her since she had little respect for her own father. In the end, her religious upbringing continued to isolate her from both her family and Eugene. Eugene was quite judgmental of her religion but also of her simple, rural, family. In the last volume it is revealed what Kate knew as love was 'fear and sexual necessity'. Kate feared of her sexuality after her first spent marriage night when Eugene took a role of 'invader' instead of loving husband. Calling her a fallen woman and teasing her with ironic comments full of showing dominance. "*She takes no physical pleasure in her sexual initiation, only a masochistic resignation that she has 'done what she was born to do.'*"¹⁰⁶

Eugene never revealed his true nationality. Due to his physical appearance and remarks about his crooked nose we can presume he was an Englishman with a Jewish origin. Proving Cait's "Irishness" as something diminished as well as her name which he anglicized to Kate. Baba described Eugene as a 'shadow man' looking like an advertisement for hemlock.¹⁰⁷

Kate did not understand why he behaved in a different way in daytime and during the night. Her experience with Eugene was so different far away from a normal life. "*It was such a shock to me to know that he could love me at night and yet seem to become a stranger in daytime[...]*"(O'Brien 1998:336)

"*Lucky you don't snore', he said. 'Or I'd send you back. 'Do you love me?' I asked again. 'Ask me that in ten years' time, when I know you better', he said as he linked me down to breakfast and told Anna that we got married.'*"(O'Brien 1998:319)

'Send you back' home means in reality that he wants to keep her only with her child-like naivety, young appearance, simplicity but she had already changed.

¹⁰⁶ GREENWOOD, A. (2003). *Edna O'Brien*. Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, p.120

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p.28

His cruelty and dominance is definitely confirmed by the act of taking their son away in the third volume.

7.3.1. Men's Entertainment - The Problem of Alcoholism

Discussing crops and the weather was a way of breaking the silence and a kind of men's entertainment. Another mostly men's problem is alcoholism. Drinking Irish whisky and Guinness or other stouts has been thought as a part of the nation's culture. It is so called 'tradition' passing through generations. The government tried to solve this problem by rising taxation on alcohol, rising public awareness about the influence of intoxication and made free psychological help available yet the asylums in the country remain overcrowded.

The quotation below describes a typical example of the poor Irishman drinking instead of earning money for a family, causing troubles- aggression, physical abuse, debts and depression. People in general try to cover up their mental problems and instead of seeking professional help, end up addicted to drinking alcohol. Alcohol helps them get rid of the stress and depressive thoughts but in a long term run, it has devastating consequences for the health and family, their social life.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, wheder dis hot or cowld,'tis all de same, one drinks to be cowld, and anoder drinks to be hot,an' 'tis mighty cowld it is in de end. I first drank my own clothes in de pwan, den I drank my wife's cloak off ov her back, den I drank her flannel petticoat, den I drank de cups and de saucers out ov de cupboard, den I drank de plates and dishes off ov de dresser, den I drank de pot an' de kittle off de fire, den I drank de bed-clothes mortal harport dat wasn't turned into gallons ov porter, an' glasses ov whisky an dandies ov punch!What brought me to my sinses at last was the cowld flure, and de poor children cryin' , "Daddy, daddy, we're hungry".'

Men took drinking as a national sport, among the real ones like hurling, gaelic football and greyhound racing. Women did not drink in public or at all and if occasionally they did, it was a glass of port." (O'Brien 1976:61)

7.4. Female Heroines

Edna O'Brien once explained in the article, *"Why Irish Heroines Don't Have to Be Good Anymore"*, the reasons which let her to create two counterparts, two main heroines of the story. She made them up in way to react to conventional Irish female characters. There are two, the first

who conform to her own and the Irish view on womanhood and the second one who rebels against everything. She comments on more in the quotation below:

*“Realizing that the earlier heroines were bawdy and the later ones lyrical. Their rather eager lives would be made bearable by the company of each other. The characters remained with me as ghosts, but without the catharsis of death. I had never finished their story, I had left them suspended, thinking perhaps that they could stay young indefinitely or that their mistakes might be cancelled out or they would achieve that much touted fallacy - a rebirth.”*¹⁰⁸

O'Brien's female characters dealt repeatedly with the theme of isolation, loneliness and loss. They underwent the repeated suffering on the way of seeking love. Her heroines did not meet a happy-end. She as a writer sent them to search for love and security but they remained unsuccessful.

Caithleen Brady serves as an established prototype for O'Brien's female heroines in other novels. Caithleen goes through three developmental stages. At first, she is isolated and lonely, secondly she searches for love, and finally, there is a return to the lonely self. A rural setting, the patriarchal society, the Catholic Church, and the lack of any positive female influence do not help to provide her with a best model to follow either. She embodies the typical negative aspects of an Irish female icon. She is weak, passive, young, naïve and emotional. No matter how much she desired to escape this oppressive environment, she is rooted and tied with the land.¹⁰⁹ She is a victim of the patriarchal world 'ruled' by her father, Mr. Gentleman, and her husband, Eugene. A quest for happiness and love is the aim of her life and her only hope left. At the end of the trilogy a parental or partner's blind love stands behind all the tragedies. Left emotionally abandoned by her cool and drunk father, she tries in all her unsuccessful relationships to substitute this primary lack of experience of love in the life of a child. Instead of being a loving support and trying to heal the wounded heart of a 'country girl' who lost her mother, all of them took an advantage from her naivety, simplicity, beauty and her religious faith.

Baba was inspired by the life of O'Brien's best friend. Having a lot of love affairs she ended up pregnant, lonely and finally lost her job and place to stay. Living in poor conditions, she went to visit her many times. She probably even did not know with whom she was expecting a baby.

¹⁰⁸ HAULE, J. M. (1987). "Tough Luck: The Unfortunate Birth of Edna O'Brien." In: Colby Library Quarterly[online]. Volume 23.No.4, pp.154-164. [Last accessed on July 5, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

¹⁰⁹ READER, K. A. (2011). *The Unheard Voices of Irish Women in the Novels of Edna O'Brien*. New York. English Master's Theses. State University of New York: College at Blackport, p. 12

O'Brien herself was advised not to start any relationships with soldiers. They are the category which should be avoided as they were after the tragic experiences from war crazy about any girls¹¹⁰

When Baba enters the novel, she steals lilacs from Caitheleen which were cut for their teacher. Caitheleen even admits, "*coy, pretty, malicious Baba was my friend and the person I feared most after my father*".¹¹¹ Baba never sought a "romantic hero", she always looked for financially supportive husband. "*An Irishman: good at battles, sieges, and massacres. Bad in bed.*"¹¹² By "being bad in bed" Baba referred to her impotent husband and men in general. Only time she found the marriage pleasing was when she was handing out Frank's money. During one of her fruitful love affair, Baba unexpectedly got pregnant. Baba's comments on women entrapment when she paid a visit to a gynaecologist:

"I was thinking of women and all they have to put up with...All this poking and probing and hurt. And not only when they go to the doctors but when they go to bed as brides with men that love them. Oh, God, who does not exist, you hate women. (O'Brien 1998: 329)

Caitheleen admires Baba for her independence, establishing own rules she wants to follow, controlling her own fate as much as the society allows her. She does not conform to rigid stereotypes and therefore she represents a realistic vision for a modern womanhood in Irish society.¹¹³ She is the soldier, not the victim. She is a lioness not a sacrificial lamb which does not let family and religion dictate her life. She is the rebel and a symbol for a change in departures from standard gender roles.

7.5. 'Martyred' Mothers

In this subchapter I would like to focus on the girls' mothers (Mrs. Brady and Marta Brennan) and the role of Joanna, the Austrian landlady, who acts as the girl's surrogate mother.

"Motherhood is proclaimed as the ideal role for women. Women were those who provided the model for behaviour and identity. Mothers are, therefore, more feared and hated than loved

¹¹⁰ O'BRIEN, E. (1976). *Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson: Penguin Books, p.81

¹¹¹ O'BRIEN, E. (1998). *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.14

¹¹² Ibidem, p.384

¹¹³ MILLER, L. G. (2013). *A Grand Tragedy: The Progression and Regression of Gender Roles in Edna O'Brien's the Country Girls Trilogy and House of Splendid Isolation*. Master's Thesis. Columbus: Ohio Dominican University, p.27

by their daughters.”¹¹⁴ The prospect of motherhood itself is so horrible to O'Brien's young women that it leads to emotional and physical deformity. Children having children' might suit the picture of many young women bringing new life into Ireland. Clearly, a woman's own birth and its replication in the birth of her daughter is, in Ireland, a tragedy of impossible proportions.

Maternal love is demonstrated also through the preparations of delicious meals for all family. O'Brien in *Mother Ireland* depicted Irish mothers as “saints” providers of food and meals. The only place they are ‘allowed to rule’ is a kitchen. Loving, caring, devoted mothers and wives. They pass on the same tradition in which they were born into. The Irishwoman could not escape the oppressive chains of family, society and state. Being left without any better future perspective, the Irish women had no hope for a better life than their mothers. O'Brien finds a possible solution to this never ending circle of suffering in exile. Being a child, an innocent human untainted and inexperienced with the world around. A child is dependant through the whole infancy and childhood on adults. It desires to be a replication of its mother but at the same time betray the only person in life who represents the beginning and the end of its life.

Mrs. Brady, Cait's mother means everything to her daughter. She is the centre of her universe. Cait carries a painful felling of her loss through her whole life.

*“Mothers were best. Mothers worked and worried and sacrificed and had the smallest amount on their plates when the family sat down to eat, mothers wore aprons and slaved [...].”*¹¹⁵

The Irish mothers were those who made sacrifices for the blissful life of the whole family. Cait's early fears are concentrated on losing her and Hickey every single time she leaves for school. Unfortunately, she lost both of them in the end. Everything she knew about life went wrong in her mother's case.

Mrs. Brady is described as a ‘maternal martyr’, loving, and patient, devoted and ‘sacrificial as a lamb’. With patience she cares about her only child and with the same fear and pretended calmness she awaits the return of her alcoholic husband in the early hours of the morning. He often shouts at her, slaps or hurts her. Mr. Brady physically abuses his wife and even his daughter. Her parents set a primary bad example of a dysfunctional marriage. Cait internalized the lesson of being a tool in male hands and repeated the same mistake in her relationships

¹¹⁴ O'BRIEN, E.(1976). *Mother Ireland*. Weidenfeld &Nicolson: Penguin Books,p.18

¹¹⁵Ibidem,p.50

with Mr. Gentleman and Eugene Gailliard. As a consequence of the family environment and the lack of comfort and familiarity, she tries to substitute it in her romantic relationships.¹¹⁶

Mrs. Brady made up a fictional story about her sick father being on an island. Taking one's life is an excuse for an escape from this oppressive and unbearable marriage. She drowned herself in the lake. This desperate act preceded the long term suffering and only stressed her martyrdom more.

O'Brien's Ireland is characterised by the oppression of women. Men's dominance is supported by the Catholic Church and State so the only choice left for women is to be good. No option for a divorce, contraception pills or abortion are not permitted. Finally, the misery of life is not associated with oppressive men but non-active, sacrificial women who gave up their fight for keeping their own opinions. So it is better to grin and bear it than fight it

Marta Brennan, Baba's mother, is set in contrast with Mrs. Brady. She embodies the characteristics of an extrovert, emotionally cold, dissatisfied and ambitious, middle-class women with an inclination to alcohol. She treats Cait as her second child. Her sudden changes of moods, the reluctance to spend her money for anything else than drink reveals her true character and tendencies to addiction. It is noticeable and obvious. Mrs. Brennan used to dream of a career as a ballet dancer. Leaving the dream career behind, she married an ordinary vet. Such disillusion and unhappiness was brought into her life by being wed to a man like her husband. She once revealed to Baba that thousands of men cried at her wedding. She is not satisfied in her marriage but due to different conditions, such as boredom and the lack of attention but not physical abuse. She can be bad-tempered and very fiery, often giving beatings to a family servant. She is interested in fashion and money, seeks other men's attention because her marriage is dysfunctional. Cait noticed once that they sleep in separate bedrooms and thought about Marta as 'being too beautiful and cold to be motherly'. At the end, Marta did not take her own life but died of cancer. As Baba once said about her:

"I hardly ever talked to my mother about anything, because when I was four I had scarlet fever and she sent me away to learn Irish. She really sent me away so that she wouldn't have to mind me as the maid was on two weeks' holiday." (O'CONNOR 2006: 156).

¹¹⁶ O'CONNOR, M., LAING K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press.p.157

Joanna is the girls' Austrian landlady in Dublin. Due to her foreign upbringing, cultural background and mentality she is seen as a liberator. She manages to run her own guesthouse, earns money and chooses tenants. Being financially independent of men and open-minded to changes is something she is appreciated for. Her relationship with Cait turned more into a bond between a caregiver than a formal one to a landlord. Except running her own business, keeping an eye on the girls, serving them healthy and nutritious food was one of her extended daily tasks. She always welcomed them back dearly or snuggled Cait when she was upset. She is described as a low-sized, corpulent woman and the width of a door. So her 'positive attitude' to food was more than visible. Joanna questions the girls' faith in God and their Catholic upbringing. Although she is a believer, she does not share the same attitude about practising the religion. *'Yes', but we on the Continent are not so rigid as you Irish and shrugs her shoulders to show a certain indifference.*"¹¹⁷

In the character of Joanna, O'Brien crossed the paths of an immigrant woman with a poor country girl in local conditions to point out to the issues of global feminism. Joanna stands for a model of an adult femininity and best fits in the position of a surrogate mother¹¹⁸. She helped the girls as much as she could and went to see them off on Dublin's docks before making their way to London. She spoke with a funny accent and before a planned trip to Vienna with Mr. Gentleman she wanted to lend Cait her old-fashioned and unfitting night gown. She had it on once on her honeymoon thirty years ago and thought it might suit her well. Vienna is, in her eyes, a perfect setting for a romantic date and a more emancipatory alternative to Ireland.

¹¹⁷ OBERT, J. C. (2012). *"The Mothers and Others in Edna O'Brien's The Country Girls"*. [online] In: Irish Studies Review. Vol. 20, No. 3, August 2012, Wyoming: Routledge Taylor & Francis. p.28 [Last accessed on July 14, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.tandfonline.com>

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 285

7.6. The Role of Food and Clothes as a means of Female Oppression

Whenever our heroines in the story had to face stressful situations, they recalled happy moments from their childhood associated with daily meals. Dating back to the era of a pre- modern Ireland when the food production was sufficient for everybody (grains, potatoes, dairy), by feasting and celebrating the dairy products people expressed gratitude and happiness.

Female self- starvation was read through the history by the Catholic Church as a sign of obedience, a proof of sanctity, occasionally as possession by a demon. Being sinful, having appetite and a perfect body stand in opposition to Catholic purity.¹¹⁹

O' Brien in her early fiction uses food in connection to female sexuality that is “purchasable, perishable, vulnerable, and potentially contaminable”¹²⁰. A female body and food are both taken as a commodity available on the market for all sorts of consumers. As a country is, even the female body can be invaded, disciplined, destroyed, decorated and pleased. Once youth and beauty is associated only with positive things, the society rejects old age as something unacceptable connected to poverty, sickness and hunger. The capitalistic society required women to stay healthy and keep their beauty. They should have enjoyed and maintained the delights of food and drinks by all senses but pretend abstinence before the outer world.¹²¹

Food and habits of consumption revealed a lot about the main protagonist's social and economic status. It determines also men's superior position. Kate's husband, Eugene is pictured as 'a hungry monster that has gobbled up and digested all sorts of human pleasures'.¹²² “*I could eat you, Eugene salivates, like an ice cream*”.¹²³ An ice cream serves here as a sweet commodity for purchasing. It has to be made fresh every day and does not last long until it is melted. Women's beauty undergoes these same processes. By getting older women's attractiveness fades away.

O'Brien describes “beauty” as a hard-won battle over appetite. Keeping beauty requires controlled starvation, sometimes suffering from pain and on top of that, a lot of money. Beauty

¹¹⁹ O'CONNOR, M., LAING K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, p.232

¹²⁰ Ibidem, p.196

¹²¹ Ibidem, p. 228

¹²² Ibidem, p. 154

¹²³ O'BRIEN, E. (1998). *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.315

conventions as well as religious observance are the burden taken on the shoulders by all Irish women.¹²⁴

The only advantage of living in the country was pure homemade things, people were used to eating and the city could not provide them. Dublin opened before them a new life and they found a quick attraction to the world of consumerism. The girls became tempted by various cafés and boutiques. Young men in Dublin were rather willing to pay for a meal or paying for drinks as substitution for money after having sex with the poor Irish girls. “*The vulnerability of being seen to eat is akin to being caught naked*”.¹²⁵

Dated back to history garments were also used in many ways for reinforcing women as sexual objects or a ‘commodity for consumption’. Clothes are a metaphor for identity. The chosen apparel provides a woman with the frame for her body and fills in gaps in her identity¹²⁶.

This scene in *the Country Girls* describes Caithleen’s first holidays from the convent. She was given a pair of high-heeled shoes and nylon stockings and gave the presents an exaggerated importance. “*I looked in the wardrobe mirror at myself and admired my legs a thousand times. [...] I was grown up.*” (O’Brien1998:86). The clothes changed her into a sexual object and made a prematurely young girl ‘into an adult’

“*It is the only time that I am thankful for being a woman, that time of evening when I draw the curtains, take off my old clothes, and prepare to go out.[...] I shadow my eyelids with black stuff and am astonished by the look of mystery it gives my eyes. I hate being a woman. Vain and shallow and superficial.*”(O’Brien1998:.271).

The quotation above shows Kate’s attitude to her body and her womanhood. “*All the perfume, and sighs, an purple brassieres, the curling –pins in bed, and gin-and-it, and neckless, had all been for this [...]*.”(O’Brien 1998: 349). After having spent her first night with Eugene and lost her virginity, Kate realises that women have to stimulate men to maintain them economically through using a range of ‘tools’.

¹²⁴ O’CONNOR, M., LAING K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O’Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press,p.232

¹²⁵ Ibidem, p.227

¹²⁶ Ibidem, p. 197

O' Brien tends to link masculinity with 'high culture' and femininity with low, popular, or vulgar. Angela Carter comments on the description of clothing in O'Brien's fiction as a symptom of false consciousness.¹²⁷

"Dress is typically both a personal and communal phenomenon, both distinguishing and de-individualizing the wearer." Clothing as one of the cultural aspect is crucial in creating masculinity and femininity. (O'CONNOR 2006: 200)

Clothes are used by heroines as a strategy of a rejection and resistance to 'mass-produced' passivity created by the Irish Catholic tradition. Clothing in early O'Brien fiction strongly suggests insecure feminine identity. Many items of clothes worn by Baba or Kate are either borrowed, lent, shared, inherited or second-hand ones. Their collections contain even some stolen pieces as they cannot afford always buying new ones (e.g. dancing gowns, party garments or casual night dresses). There is a significant change of style and fashion after girls moved out from the suffocating and controlling environment of a rural village to a buzzing modern city. They changed wearing casual clothes and uniforms for posh robes and sexy gowns suitable for parties. Clothing has a seductive function, the ability of completing the body, giving it the shape, filling the gaps and pulling the fragmented identity of women together.¹²⁸

Wearing uniforms was popular in 19th century. Girls wearing convent and school uniforms could be compared to criminals in prison. Being dressed into unified garments prevent them from establishing their own identity and individuality but made them accept the general Catholic doctrine. Uniformed nuns were often the target of laughter and gossip, judged due to their nonsexual frocks.¹²⁹

"Entering a convent is a potential escape route from hardships of an unhappy marriage, pregnancy, or sex that women 'had to pretend to like', but the price to be paid is that a nun must cease to be 'beautiful [...]" (O'Brien 1998: 56)

To please her boyfriend, Marian in *The Edible Woman*, dressed up into a sexy red cocktail outfit but instead of admiration her clothing provoked She was not treated as an ambitious or courageous attractive women but a prostitute with loose morals. If she had put on garments

¹²⁷ Ibidem, p. 198

¹²⁸ O'CONNOR, M., LAING K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, p.212

¹²⁹ Ibidem, p. 213

according to her own taste, she would have been satisfied and pleased with herself which is much more important.

8. Gothic fiction

Gothic fiction is a genre of literature that combines elements from fiction, romanticism and horror. The term 'gothic' refers to an architectonic style and types of buildings e.g. prisons, medieval castles, fortresses, ruins where the stories usually took place. Its origin is traced back into 18th century when the first 'gothic story', *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole was published. This form of literature was very popular in Germany and England. The masterpieces of the 19th century such as *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* brought more success. Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe with their works contributed to the Gothic as female writers. Radcliffe in her work, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* introduced a new type of character, a Gothic villain- a Byronic hero. The Gothic fictional novels were not accepted by well-educated readership as it was believed to be a cheap entertainment for lower class.

Further contributions to the Gothic literature were provided in the works of the Romantics. There are namely some of them Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott and later on Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson on a list of authors who had been influenced by Romanticism and Gothic.

The Brontës' Sisters fiction, especially the novel *Wuthering Heights* written by Emily, is seen by some feminist critics as an example of Female Gothic. She questioned the issues of woman's entrapment, the subjection to patriarchal authority embodied by demonic figure of Heathcliff.

The genre also influenced American writers including William Faulkner, Truman Capote and Flannery O'Connor. The settings of their stories were placed in the south and mixed with the original style and grotesque. Typical Gothic features of American Gothic are night journeys of the characters, the presence of evil protagonists, the element of fear and magical survival in the end.¹³⁰

8.1. Gothic elements

The following paragraph will introduce the main distinguishing elements found throughout the Gothic literature. The first come to mention the importance of a setting itself. The plot

¹³⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica.[online].[accessed on October 30, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel>

of a story is usually set in a 'haunted' castle, an old mansion, an abbey, a monastery, a dungeon and a ruin. Having its own secret to hide, the gloomy place sends the shivers to a reader's spine and evokes the horror atmosphere. The decay of once precious things and places is just a matter of time because nothing can last forever.¹³¹

The settings of my analysed novels are an urban city in Canada and a small village in rural Ireland. Setting in the *Country Girls* changed from a relative safety of a farm and a local school and village to cold, suffocating and depressive environment of a convent, which reminds us a prison. It definitely does not evoke any positive or pleasant atmosphere.

Other features can be traced on in the novels except 'virginal maidens, older foolish women or the presence of a tyrant and evil clergy. In our case, a virgin maiden is embodied by Cait in *the Country Girls*. She had met all the 'Gothic' requirements set on main heroines. Being young, beautiful, pure, innocent, kind and sensitive young lady. Older and maybe foolish woman might represent the closest relatives and the rigid society unable to accept any changes. The worst part represents the male world dominated fathers and life partners and the strict and evil clergy in a convent and village.

We cannot omit the elements of mystery and the never fully - explained past which is sometimes hidden or haunted. There will follow some particular moments in the stories which only confirm the theory stated above.

For instance, after many unsuccessful attempts to write a love letter for Mr. Gentleman, Cait has decided to copy the part from the romantic novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Literal critics seek similarities in the figures of Heathcliff and Eugene Galliard.

We can find through clothing in O'Brien novels the patterns of quasi Gothic literature. Cait's nightmares when she is being haunted by her dead mother body or the sound of creeping noises when she opens the wardrobe doors.

"I gave you everything-food, clothes-" He pointed to my clothes hanging in the wardrobe. Sometimes the wardrobe door opened quite suddenly as if there were a ghost in it. It had opened just then. "I try to educate you, teach you how to speak, how to deal with people, build up your own confidence, but that is not enough. You now want to own me."(O'Brien 1998: 358)

¹³¹ Ibidem,p.1

The most typical feature of female Gothic is a figure of lover who plays a father. One of many functions of Gothic novel is to legitimize male bad behaviour for a female reader. It is pleasing to think that male coldness, absence and boredom are not what they seem to be. She analyses Eugene Galliard in terms of Gothic and later feminist criticism as a “shadow male” usually kind, considerate, and gentle who turns out to be vicious, insane or murderous.¹³² The most dominant gothic feature in the *Edible Woman* is Marian’s disability to eat. She loses her appetite piece by piece under unexplainable reasons. The control over her body and mind is out of her hands and she cannot act according to her own will. Firstly, she is unable to eat a bloody steak in the restaurant following with dairy products and finishing with fruit and vegetable.

8.2. Grotesque

The term grotesque in literature is often linked with satire, tragicomedy and Gothic. Some not explicitly explained traces of grotesque are indicated in the trilogy. The events in stories are usually mysterious, evoking both fear and fun at the same time.¹³³

One of these examples of grotesque can be found when we talk about ‘an accident’ that happened to Caitheleen’s mother, Mrs. Brady, which later on turned out to be a well- planned suicide by drowning. Cait wore her wellingtons for social gatherings where everybody was wearing glittering evening gowns and high- heeled shoes. The next one happened when the drunkard, Mr. Brady, accompanied by Jock Holland and locals came to Eugene’s residence for Kate. Instead of facing them she acted very childishly and hid under a bed. Waiting for what the upcoming situation will bring.

Marian and Baba agreed on finding female physical processes in the body like menstruation, aging or pregnancy, disgusting and grotesque. Compared to Marian, Baba gave birth to her daughter eventually but at first wanted to get rid of the baby. She also blamed God for his hatred of all womanhood and therefore left them suffering.

¹³² O’CONNOR, M., LAING K., MOONEY, S. (2006). *Edna O’Brien: New Critical Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, pp.26-27

¹³³ The Wikipedia.[online]. [last accessed on November 3, 2015]. Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grotesque>

8.3. Intertextuality in *The Edible Woman* and Angela Carter

Both Atwood and Carter have the use of irony and black humour in common, and both are interested in the Gothic and grotesque genre. They are authors who challenge and cross boundaries, literary traditions and conventions. Angela Carter was fascinated by human sexuality and eroticism much more than Atwood and she implied this theme in her collection of 'adult fairy tales' called *The Bloody Chamber*. The inspiration for writing this piece of work came from the sadomasochistic marqués de Sade and the French translation of Charles Perrault's fairy tales. Later, to draw attention to the oppressed female characters both of them used the fairy tale genre. The female protagonists of their early novels never met the usual fairy tale, Gothic or mythical happy endings. Having undergone the transformation from passive and silent to heard and powerful, they refused to be dolls or puppets in men's hands. Atwood proved it in her other works as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye*.¹³⁴

The example set to illustrate the theory above is Duncan's roommate's, Fish Smythe's, comments on Marian to a fairy tale character, Alice in Wonderland and Duncan to a Mock Turtle.

¹³⁴ LABUDOVÁ, K. *Palimpsestous Selves: Transgressing the Boundaries of Genre in Angela Carter's and Margaret Atwood's Fiction*. Brno: 2011. Disertační práce. Masarykova univerzita v Brně, Fakulta filosofická, Ústav slávistiky. p.23

9. *The Edible Woman*

Atwood herself called the book 'proto-feminist' as it awaited the arrival of second-wave feminism in several years. Its publication met the years of a public interest in women's rights and the rise of the feminist movement in North America. There were some post-war feminist activities which tried to collapse the set patriarchy in the society. *The Edible Woman* was written in 1965 and published in 1969. Atwood acknowledged the negative critics and reactions when she tried to publish *The Edible Woman*. At first her manuscript was lost and secondly her publisher conceded to never read it before coming out.

The novel is divided into three parts. Each part represents the different stages in Marian's life. Part one explains the background setting of the story and the relationships. Part two describes Marina's split of the body and the mind. Part three reflects re-finding and re-gaining her identity. The author brilliantly uses the narration shifts between the third person 'she' narration and the first one 'I', when Marian returns to her identity, undergoing the change and regaining a positive attitude to herself and her body. Edna O'Brien used the same narration shifts in *the Country Girls*. When Marian had lost control over her body, the voice of narration changed. In the trilogy Cait's voice is silent and took over by Baba's narration in the third volume and the epilogue.¹³⁵

9.1. The Representation of Self through Appetite

Atwood as a feminist author draws attention to the complex issues of eating and non-eating. Angela Carter, Willa Carter, Toni Morrison are other authors dealing with food problems in their works. Atwood agreed with the feminist ideas and saw herself as a feminist but without any major contribution to the movement.

¹³⁵ SHAMSODDIN, R., YAZDANI, Z. (2011). *Metaphor of the Body in Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman* In: *The Criterion: an International Journal in English* [online]. Volume II. Issue III.p.25. [accessed on September 5,2015] Retrieved from: www.the-criterion.com

“ *Hunger, eating, and meals were used by feminist writers to speak of personal and social behaviours, psychological problems, art, sex, politics, poverty, nationalism, gender roles, power, and domesticity.*”¹³⁶ .

She considers herself being a political writer as well. The theme of food and appetite has many important functions in her prose [...] *eating and appetite in her fiction connect with how people order their societies, on the individual, interpersonal and cultural level.*”¹³⁷ (Nikandam 2013: 3) focuses his attention on the analysis of Atwood’s work, the linkage of power to subjectivity, gender, eating habits, cultural and social pressure.” *Eating is an important activity. It is in fact the basic source of happiness and depression and it is more or less the first action we perform a basic foundation of gladness and sadness [...].*”¹³⁸ Food makes a part of creating one’s self, the identity of a person. It is connected to gender, religion, class, nationality and ethnic origin.

We as well as animals need food for our survival. It is essential for us. We do not have to hunt compared to our ancestors but simply order or buy it at malls, shops, supermarkets. What we eat shows our social status. Our eating habits and the food we eat shape our attitude to our body. The ideal of the human body has been changed through the centuries. Fatness was a sign of health, beauty and fertility in the Baroque era. We can trace the steps of eating and non- eating habits in history from ancient Greek fasting or Christian non- eating through the period of lent which meant the purification of the body. Victorian aristocrats denied food on purpose to reach and keep the aesthetic ideal of beauty. ¹³⁹

9.2. Eating Disorders and a Changing Ideal of Human Body

One of the key issues for feminist theory has been how to formulate a body without reducing it to materiality and biological functions. A notion of the body is central to the feminist analysis of the women oppression because biological differences between the sexes are the foundation that served and led to gender inequality. Women's bodies are judged according to norms and ideals which were based upon them by men.

¹³⁶ NIKANDAM, R.(2013).”*Eating, Starving and the Body: The Presentation of Self*” In: Asian Culture and History; Vol. 5, No. 2, Kuala Lumpur: Canadian Center of Science and Education. p.3

¹³⁷ Ibidem, p.2

¹³⁸ Ibidem, p.1

¹³⁹ Ibidem, p.4

More comments on the issue of the female body are provided by feminists and sociologists. They examined the subjection of the female body to disciplinary practices such as dieting, exercise and beauty regimens that produce a form of embodiment, which confronts the norms of feminine beauty and attractiveness.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, women with eating disorders take these practises to the extreme to meet cultural norms set up by society and to reach the feminine ideal. Emphasising the fact that eating disorders serve as 'the mask' for hidden anger, sadness, frustration, a stressful job and chaotic life style and finally family and partnership's problems. Women are obsessed with hunger as well as with being slim. "*Thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body and a thin body is associated with "absolute" purity.*"¹⁴¹ Atwood herself said that for the anorexic, all the food is dirty food.

For her, disciplinary technologies are effective ways of social control. She argues that Foucault treated a woman's body as a source of power useful for social and sexual control in modern society and thus denied the possibility of freedom and resistance.¹⁴²

Eating disorders are very common in modern society nowadays. Bulimia and anorexia were brought and discussed publicly thanks to the two researchers in the 19th century, Ernest- Charles Lasçgue and William Withey Gull.¹⁴³ Medics and scientists of that time proved that eating disorders¹⁴⁴ were signs of an inner conflict within a person that resulted in the change of the body.

¹⁴⁰ ARMSTRONG A.(2010). *Michel Foucault and Feminism* In: Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy and its Authors. [online]. University of Queensland. [Last accessed on August 23, 2015]. Retrieved from: www.iep.utm.edu/foucfem

¹⁴¹ NIKANDAM, R.(2013). "*Eating, Starving and the Body: The Presentation of Self*" In: Asian Culture and History; Vol. 5, No. 2, Kuala Lumpur: Canadian Center of Science and Education. p.3

¹⁴² ARMSTRONG A.(2010). *Michel Foucault and Feminism* In: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and its Authors. [online]. University of Queensland. accessed on [August 23, 2015]. Retrieved from: www.iep.utm.edu/foucfem

¹⁴³ GALENS, D.(2002). *Novels for Students*. [online]. The United States: Gale and Design and Thomson Learning [last accessed on August 23, 2015]. Retrieved from: <http://www.gale.com> ISSN 1094-3552

¹⁴⁴ Anorexia: "Anorexia nervosa is a serious mental health condition. It is an eating disorder in which people keep their body weight as low as possible. People with anorexia usually do this by restricting the amount of food they eat, making themselves vomit and exercising excessively. The condition often develops out of an anxiety about body shape and weight that originates from a fear of being fat or a desire to be thin. Many people with anorexia have a distorted image of themselves, thinking that they are fat when they are not. Although anorexia mostly affects girls and women, the boys and men cases have increased in recent years.

Bulimia:" Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder and mental health condition. People suffer from bulimia try to control their weight by severely restricting the amount of food they eat, then binge eating and purging the food from their body by making themselves vomit or using laxatives. It can be associated with: low self-esteem, alcohol misuse, depression, self-harm."

9.3. Hunger and Eating as a Metaphor

What is it like to be a woman in the later part of the twentieth century in connection to food is the question Atwood's tries to answer. She examines the general and specific forms of victims such as the self-consumers, the over-eaters among her characters. Gender roles of the late 1950s and 1960s in urban Canada are examined with the direct link to food. "*She emphasises the predatory nature of appetite and perhaps more importantly, the protest signalled by its lack.*"¹⁴⁵ The theme of eating and hunger either for freedom, love, or companionship accompanied

by strong emotions is the most explicit in *the Edible Woman*. Cooked or served, consumed food is sometimes described in details. The symbolic 'hunger' for sex, marriage, pregnancy or intimate relationships is evident. The characters play the roles of "hunters and prey", chasing each other in purpose for getting something they lack themselves.

Atwood herself says that "*Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk.*"¹⁴⁶ Eating symbolizes getting and losing control over one's own body and mind in her novels. *They try to protect their selfhoods by physic distancing of their selves from their bodies and by physical loss or increase of weight.*¹⁴⁷. Last but not least food becomes a way of communication, a medium of experience and a female self-manifestation. The author uses food as a metaphor for breaking the chains of submission and rebellion. The denial of eating shows the rejection of the patriarchal model of rigid femininity or could be understood as a turn-away from the responsibilities of the adulthood.

9.4. Brief Overview of the Plot

In this subchapter I would like to briefly introduce a plot of the story and to set a framework for a description of the characters and further analysis.

¹⁴⁵ NIKANDAM,R.(2013). "*Eating, Starving and the Body: The Presentation of Self*" In: Asian Culture and History; Vol. 5, No. 2, Kuala Lumpur: Canadian Center of Science and Education

¹⁴⁶ SHAMSODDIN, R.,YAZDANI, Z.(2011). "*Metaphor of the Body in Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman*" In: The Criterion: an International Journal in English [online]. Volume II. Issue III. [Last accessed September 5,2015] Retrieved from: www.the-criterion.com

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem,p.12

Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Women*, is in short about a college-educated, young, intelligent, sensitive and submissive woman living in Canada. The main protagonist, Marian Mc Alpine tried to rebel against the conventions and traditions which were expected and laid upon her. Through the relationships with men, society, work environment, food and eating. To be able to survive in such a world at the end of the story she "restored" her new self-esteem. Marian worked in a company making questionnaires. Currently replacing her sick colleague she was in charge of making a survey about opinions on the taste of a new brand of beer. While she was walking house to house she found a rented apartment occupied by three young students. One of their roommates was an unconventional bohemian man named Duncan. He was trapped into a fictional world by the books' characters and meanwhile he forgot to live his own life. He needed something real to replace all his fantasies, Marian. They met accidentally in a laundromat when they briefly chatted and kissed each other. All the time, Duncan tried to persuade her to sleep with him but she managed to resist until certain point of time in the story.

Ainsley Tewce, Marian's flatmate, was a completely different person compared to Marian. They did not have much in common. She was determined, aggressive and independent. She liked to toy with men. Pretending her deep interest in them helped her to manipulate them and achieve her own goals. She did not want to be a "thing" or a play doll in a man's hands. Marian's roommate sought to reach her life aim though getting pregnant without staying in the stable relationship with a man. Neither pompous wedding nor a life in a boring marriage for the rest of her life was her dream. Marian was quite shocked by Ainsley's 'confession. The chosen right candidate should be seduced and caught unaware of the awaiting danger. She started to be interested in Marin's old friend, Len Shank. He has had a reputation of being a womaniser since their college days. Ainsley's attitude towards parenthood changed during the story. She realised that for the further healthy emotional development of a child it is not good to be brought up in a single- parent family. According to some psychological researches there was the higher chance that boys raised up just by a single mother might turn out to be gay in later years. At the end of the story, she got pregnant with Duncan's roommate not Len. The new-married couple left to spend their honeymoon at the Niagara Falls.

Marian decided to introduce Peter to Len for the first time. While all were dining Ainsley appeared without any invitation. She targeted Len as a potential father for her baby. Marian

ended up in tears and ran away from the restaurant. At this point, she could not reasonably explain what was wrong with her. After exchanging some formal phrases, Peter and Len led the vivid conversation. Before proceeding to the second part, the first part of the book is ended with Marian remembering her playing with dolls, leaving and preparing them food which was left untouched. Since her childhood she always wondered why her dolls never ate it up.

The first eating problems appeared during their romantic dinner with Peter. Marian was unable to finish her food. Peter ordered for both of them a rare steak. From this point on she stopped eating any meat. Instead of enjoying a good dinner, she imagined a live cow being slaughtered on the plate. The whole life of that poor animal was being displayed in front of her eyes. She started to starve from hunger piece by piece.

“It appeared that the food is too similar to herself, to her body: she is an edible like the foodstuffs she detests. She suddenly finds herself identifying with things being consumed. ”Steak was first to go. Then lamb, pork and the rest: next came her incapability to face an egg. Vegetables were the final straw.”(ATWOOD 1976: 267)

She lost the ability to eat when Peter proposed to her. *“Acceptance is what her body is crying out for, it refused to be dismissed.”¹⁴⁸* Through a progressive denial of the food she refused the male dominance over her. Only she had lost her appetite to consume food but also her sense of self. She felt like she was being eaten by Peter. The sudden reactions of her body corresponded to the pressure of the society and the events which were happening around her.

Peter worked as a lawyer. He held a party in his new apartment to which he invited a lot of people, e.g. his business partners, colleagues from work, friends. He loved to see Marian dressed up for him in something less “mousy” but sexy and eye-catching. For this occasion, Marian wore a red cocktail dress and let Ainsley do her make-up and hairdo. Duncan’s name is on the guest list as well. Seeing Marian dressed in such an outfit, he commented that he had not known it should have been a masquerade. She left the party in search for Duncan and that night they made love. Finally, they spent a night together in a shabby hotel where Marian due to her red provocative dress is ‘classified’ by the staff as a prostitute. Her play dolls reappeared on the stage again. Marian saw their flashlights in the mirror. Sitting in a room being submerged

¹⁴⁸ SHAMSODDIN, R., YAZDANI, Z.(2011). *“Metaphor of the Body in Margaret Atwood’s The Edible Woman”* In: *The Criterion: an International Journal in English* [online]. Volume II. Issue III. [Last accessed September 5,2015] Retrieved from: www.the-criterion.com

into sad feelings, her own dolls try to pull her apart. This vision was the sight of a divided self. A similar scene about splitting is described in a bath with the hot and cold water tap and the facet. Marian described in one of the novel scene feeling after making love with Peter in the bathtub in following words: "*Peter's medical glance is an invasive, and violent without any passion.*" (ATWOOD 1976:213). Her feelings could have been compared to a patient who was being examined by the doctor on a patient's table. She wanted to do whatever would please Peter even if it should have cost to give up her independence and accept the patriarchal femininity. Peter proposed to her, having a wife would fit better into his scheme of a luxurious lifestyle. Due to his money he could afford to buy luxurious goods, and due to his power and social status to take control over people.

We met some of Marian's friends and colleagues. Their lives were judged and compared to Marian's. She visited the busy home of her college friend, Clara Bates. She has given birth to her fourth child since her studies began. Still young at age, her body was already 'overused' by many pregnancies. Marian went to see her in the hospital. Clara wanted to share all the latest news and details about the childbirth with Marian. She had to unwillingly leave college because of the first pregnancy. She was pictured as a total contrast to Ainsley. She represented the traditional maternal role, a stay-at-home mum. By having given up her studies she sacrificed this part of herself to her children. Ainsley represented the modern approach to parenthood, Clara the old traditional one. Marian literally escaped from the hospital when visiting Clara as if "chased" by her age and gender to also have a baby. All the physical processes in female bodies were mentioned in the novel, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, aging. From Marian's point of view the mature woman's body is disgusting and grotesque. Compared to her, Ainsley and Clare know how to take advantage of the biology.

The last part started with Marian preparing something in the kitchen. The dessert which she baked was a cake iced as if wearing a red dress. He refused to eat it so did she instead of him and regained her ability to eat normally again. The shape of the cake was symbolic; it served as a duplication of a real woman who resisted being consumed and rather ate herself. *The edible woman can eat again.*" (ATWOOD 1976:355). Duncan is the one who finished it off and welcomed Marian back to reality.

Atwood considers the female body to be a tool which shows the female powerlessness on the one hand, on the other can also protect against set rules and conventions through using eating disorders. She depicted women as edible either by their partners or society as a whole but the only way out of it is eating themselves rather than being eaten which is associated with getting control of their lives. To sum it up, Atwood believes that there is a kind of inner strength present in every woman.

“The cake and Marian are delicious edibles, made for other people’s pleasures, not their own. The fate of the cake and a bride are decided upon and determined beforehand. They will be consumed and eaten.”(ATWOOD 1976: 342)

The action of eating shows the celebration of the victory over Peter and at the same time her return to reality.

“Gazing at the cake lady and thinking of her destiny she says, You look delicious.... And that’s what will happen to you, that’s what you get for being food. She addresses the cake as “edible woman.” (ATWOOD 1976: 340)

The feelings of frustration and depression overwhelmed the main protagonist when she realised that she was not able to meet the ideals which everybody expected from her. There were two possible solutions to the problem, either the acceptance or giving up herself as a sacrifice for others or for rebellion. Her only hope was breaking the set up. She was the only person she can rely on and trust. *“There is hope, however. She is, after, all eating again. Not only she is eating, she is consuming the image of femininity that she found, at last, so artificial.”* (ATWOOD 1976: 354)

The family, close friends and her fiancé tried to persuade Marian to accept her gender roles. They all shared the same old- fashioned way of thinking. Once Peter proposed to Marian and she reluctantly agreed she lost her ability for making her own decisions and was fully dependable on Peter’s. She became “the prey”, a victim of the male dominance. She behaved the way Peter wanted her to. She subconsciously felt his dominance and feared that his tough character could have ruined her tenderness. *“The powerful are characterised by their eating and the powerless by their non-eating.”*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ SHAMSODDIN, R., YAZDANI, Z.(2011). *“Metaphor of the Body in Margaret Atwood’s The Edible Woman”* In: The Criterion: an International Journal in English [online]. Volume II. Issue III. [Last accessed on September 5,2015] Retrieved from: www.the-criterion.com

9.5. Main Protagonists in the Novel

Typical protagonists of her works are women seeking their place in the society and the male dominated world. Her characters are strong, sometimes mysterious personas. In this subchapter, female and male protagonists are being discussed. I have focused more attention on the side-characters who I had not mentioned much in the plot of the story.

Marian Mc Alpine is a young woman working in market research. There are so many things in the story she must cope with, her roommate Ainsley, her fiancé Peter, a boring job, a strict landlady, her colleagues and the boss, her pregnant friend Clara and lover Duncan.

Clare Bates is Marian's friend from her college days as is Len. Due to her first unplanned pregnancy she never graduated. Her only occupation is being a full time mother. In the story she is pregnant again and gave birth to her next baby. Marian paid her a visit in the hospital.

I have described Marian's roommate Ainsley in details in the previous chapter so I am going to skip her at this place.

Joe Bates is Clara's husband. He is described as an overprotective husband and a caring, responsible father, the complete counterpart to Len. He works as a philosophy teacher and keeps his radical ideas even outside work. According to him no women should be allowed to study at college but rather they should stay at home and take care of the children and their husbands.

Peter Woolander is Marian's boyfriend and later on fiancé. Due to his posh job he is thought to be a good catch. Wedding Marian might help him to have a better social position in a law practise. He is a confident, attractive and young man. He tries to change Marian to meet his ideals of a perfect woman.

Duncan is a graduate student of English literature and Marian's lover. On one hand, he is very moody and egoistic, sometimes manipulative and emotionally cold. On the other hand, he is spontaneous and unconventional, seeking an adventure with Marian. Living in his own fantasy world, he "keeps Marian alive" and helps her to 'survive'. She is truly something real in imagery

world of his books' characters. *"God knows you're unreal enough now, all I can think of is those layers and layers of woolly clothes you wear."*¹⁵⁰

Mrs. Bogue is Marian's boss at Seymour Surveys and the "Three Office Virgins"- Lucy, Millie and Emmy are Marian's colleagues there. They are single and keep traditional values. Their attitude to sexuality and virginity represents the general values of the society in 1960s. Having a relationship or a love affair might cost them their good reputation. They rather desperately wait for Mr. Right who might happen to never appear. They are too afraid of being real women. At the party in Peter's apartment Lucy is caught flirting with Peter.

Len Shank is an old bachelor and college friend of Marian and Clara. Marian always talked about him as a "skirt-chaser", a womaniser. At first, Ainsley has chosen him as her "victim" for being a father of her child.

Fish Smythe is another of Duncan's roommates. He is also a student. At the end of the novel, Ainsley got married to him and they are expecting a baby. He compared Marian to the fairy tale character, Alice in Wonderland and Duncan to a Mock Turtle.

'Woman Down Below' is a nickname for Marian's strict landlady. She treats her lodgers as teenagers and keeps checking them all the time. Male visitors are not allowed. Parties or drinking alcohol is also strictly permitted. She is overprotective because Marian and Ainsley could ruin the good manners and the innocence of her child, her daughter in puberty.

In the process of breaking away from established rules in the society, her characters are first victims of their own lives but by regaining the strength and creating own values they manage to survive. Undergoing the change of their former identity which is destroyed and the new one created.

¹⁵⁰ ATWOOD, M.(1976). *The Edible Woman*. London: Hachette Digital.p.135

Summary

People are becoming generally frustrated or depressed by so many things nowadays. It is normal to feel unsatisfied, lonely and unhappy sometimes. First comes the satisfaction of primary physical needs (e.g. sleep, food, sex) which is essential for the establishment of secondary ones (e.g. love, security, appreciation). Depending on the duration and the intensity of those feelings which might be even life-threatening and end up in death. From the psychological point of view, frustration is a mental state of mind while we are being upset and annoyed because of our disability to change something from our own will, achieve our set life goals, our secret dreams and wishes come true. Depression is a more severe mental illness accompanied by guilt, one's own underestimation and the lack of sleep and energy can lead into a situation where people prefer to take own lives.

Edna O'Brien made her personal confession in the autobiography *Mother Ireland*. Not only did she describe in it her childhood, the life at home, in a convent on the background of Irish traditions and customs. Her early frustration originated from her parents unhappy marriage due to her father's alcohol addiction. The rejection of her mother, the whole community and society after the publication of the trilogy tasted bitterly. Most of the critics placed her in a role of an Irish sex symbol instead of a serious writer. She has been criticized, abandoned, praised, admired, loved and hated. A controversial figure of a female author who had the courage to write about the taboo things of that time and even more, to show her true self to the reader without any shadowing.

The author's childhood years draw the parallels with Kate's ones. O'Brien believed in God until the moment she realised that being a popstar or model could be much better than a nun. Such a frame would have not fitted into rigid religious Irish society at all. When she moved from County Clare she regained more freedom. If O'Brien had stayed in her homeland, her books would never have been published. She might have accepted the role of a martyred Irish mother and a deeply unsatisfied woman. O'Brien has a very tight bond with her motherland which we have seen in her memoir, *Mother Ireland*. With leaving Ireland or rather fleeing to London, she 'buried' and let a part of herself go, the part of a country girl's identity which had never been fully accepted or developed under a restrictive and controlling family and the Church environment. A romantic, naïve, kind and loving but weak young lady could not have had

the courage to stand against the world which needed to be changed. O'Brien, almost a refugee in London could have fitted herself into the role of Baba. The 'old' Edna left Ireland but the 'new' one was waiting to be born in England. She enjoyed her life, the popularity, the company of men. She kept coming back for visits to Ireland. The main purpose of these visits was in no means to blame others for something but for revealing the truth, for helping the Irish women to open their blind eyes and realise that the current situation can turn out to be better for them. They might be able to vote, educate themselves, and even be an equal to men.

Society, partners, friends and family serve as a 'social mirror' giving us feedback on our behaviour, provide positive comments, critics through which we can develop who we are and form our identity. Neither we are born with one nor it is not given to us, we must build it and learn it. The clothes we wear, food we eat, the books we read all these matter. Women try to please, devote themselves, reach the ideal which can turn into their destruction. One of the processes how to fulfil somebody's else's wishes and desires and become that adored ideal of women's beauty is rejecting food, dieting which can slip unwillingly into mental eating disorders. Marian underwent the change of identity in *the Edible Woman* and saved herself. Caitheleen and Baba did not skip this stage either. They wanted to hide their country background by establishing new city identities when moving to Dublin.

One of the main characters in *the Country Girls* trilogy, Cathleen Brady suffered from unbearable loss of her beloved mum in the first volume of the novel. Her mother meant the universe for her, Losing the support and maternal love at the same time left her heartbroken. Instead of offering his only daughter soothing and protective home and loving arms, Caitheleen's abusive father preferred to relieve his pain from the loss in a bottle of whiskey. Throughout the plot of in the trilogy Cait tried hard to substitute her loss by love. She is well-behaved and obedient in a convent at first seeking sister's attention and kind words which would please her hearth. Firstly, her father- daughter relationship with much older man called Mr. Getleman was revealed. Growing up from a child into a teenage young lady her ideas of world around her had changed. Having met Eugene Gauliard, who was obviously been captivated by her 'unspoiled and untouched' physical beauty, youth and naivety. Being many years older as Mr. Getleman, he was having Cait as his play doll, teaching a poor country girl good manners and educate her. She did love him but feared him as well. His figure reveals

the signs of jealousy, the likeness of being in charge and control everybody's lives. Neither having a baby boy nor a fairy tale wedding rescued the relationship. Feeling shell-empty, lonely and unloved Kate rather sought the temporary satisfaction in her love affair and enjoyable sex than being locked in a golden gate at their home. Their son Cash grew up a bit and they s parents drifted apart being unable to solve problems together and find a possible solution out of their miserable situation. Kate stayed alone imprisoned in her blues after the break- up. She had lost too much in her life, her faith to God, her mother, all her partners and on top of that her little boy who meant the world for her had been taken away. Seeing no hope and a reason to live her life against all the misfortune which had happened to her, she committed a suicide. Kate questions her faith twice through the trilogy, at the beginning of the story and at the end. Eugene always made fun of her faith. The first milestone when she did not feel to be fully devoted to God is in a convent and secondly after her sterilization. She thought if God had existed HE would have never let her gone through such hell. So the Cait's personal life was like the one taken straight out from a psychological course books. (Kiberd1995: 345) claims that the lack of functional family ties and the lost maternity bounds is the source for O'Brien's expressed frustration in the novels.

Marian's in *The Edible novel* and Cait's personalities seemed to be alike. Having no supportive environment around from family or friends, she finally found more personal strength inside to fight over her and win the battle to set free and begin a new life. Her genuine disagreement with the set rules and traditions is demonstrated through her loss of appetite. Finally, realising that she is the top item on her non - edible banned list of food. Starving or overeating are the sings of indicating emotionally unstable personality. Cait is not acting independently on her partners. Being innerly unsatisfied with her relationship with boyfriend later on fiancé, Peter. She fled to seek satisfaction in a love affair the same way as Cait did. Marian did not loss any beloved ones expect her own identity. Surprisingly, it's the figure of an absent- minded, care-free student of English literature who is responsible for brightening up Marian's life, pulling

her back into reality and showing her the importance of having own even different values to be able to survive in such a world. In contract to Cait, Marian did not have to question her religious faith and the loss of a child. Being brought up in a city makes a difference to rural Irish

countryside as well. Despite the failures and struggles, Marian did not give up as Cait did. She kept strong and more positive and hopeful.

Baba and Ainsley are absolute counterparts to Marian and Cait. Regardless Baba's mother Marta was present during her growing up, she lacked her maternal love which left bittersweet scars on their relationship, the attention was substituted by maids at the Brennans. Baba used to behave as a brat. As the years passed, her interest in men and their money aroused but finding the true love was never her life goal. Her bad-tempered, stubborn, jealous and tough nature helped her overcome even the mourning over the death of her best friend. Instead of letting men override her she decided to take the best advantage of them. She refused to be a commodity for purchase or a decoration in a bed and if such a scenario was inevitable she made a profit out of it. Baba was breaking boundaries of old and rigid Ireland and fought for a new better and modern one. Baba was always a 'warrior' on 'battlefields' called a life. She was setting an example of modern, independent woman, ready for all changes to which Ireland had not been prepared yet

Even though Ainsley is not Marian's 'alter ego' like Baba is to Cait, she is only her roommate. Marian has nothing in common with her except sharing an apartment. Anyway, Ainsley stands for a modern type of woman in Canada, due to her 'alternative' approach to motherhood. Baba represents the same open-minded person in Ireland. Having a baby with a properly chosen man without any previous stable and long-term relationships and seeing herself equally able to support family as would men do is definitely a challenge. Such an attitude is for society in 1960s shocking and unacceptable.

The Irish led bloody wars and battles to have the right to secure their religion, The Catholicism against the forced Protestantism of the British. They were proud of their faith, yet this was a faith which swept the cruel deeds of its clergyman under the carpet. The people put the responsibility and trust for their destiny into God's hands. The local churches and cathedrals were crammed with believers on Sunday's masses. The situation has changed remarkably since the late 1930s, - 1960s. What was once a foundation stone of a nation is now fading away more and more as the new young generation sees the Catholic Church in a new light.

Where there is a will there is a way. Where there was once a way some hope must be left. Atwood's characters never totally lost hope but definitely found one at the end. O'Brien's

mysterious dark setting, the complicated plot and psychologically deeply pictured characters do not leave any positive suggestion or vision for hope. Even though the author's decision to kill off the better one of the two, was it to bring some hope for a change or for new beginnings.

Resumé

Tématem mé diplomové práce, Frustrace, deprese a naděje v dílech Edny O'Brien a Margaret Atwood je analyzování důvodů, jež hlavní hrdinky vedly k pocitům zklamání a zmaru a v čem naopak vidí a hledají nepatrnou kapičku naděje, světla na konci tunelu.

Srovnání irského a kanadského pohledu na období 50. a 60. let 20. století jsem si vybrala záměrně. Irsko a Kanada během desítek let prošly odlišným historickým, kulturním ale i společenským vývojem, který se odráží v literární tvorbě spisovatelek. Edna O'Brien prošla na cestě k uznání jako vážená irská spisovatelka trnitou cestou odmítání. V tomto ohledu Margaret Atwood měla počátky své kariéry mnohem snazší. Jako ženská ikona národní kanadské literatury nemusela čelit ostré kritice a její knihy dosáhly celosvětového uznání.

První kapitola zahrnuje biografii obou autorek, kde jsou zmíněny důležité životní mezníky, jejichž povědomí je důležité pro následující praktickou analýzu a vyhledávání autobiografických prvků. Následující kapitola nám představuje otce irské literatury, osobnost Jamese Joyce. Jeho přínos a vliv na další pokračovatele, kterou byla například O'Brien, je nezpochybnitelný. Podobně jako spousta jeho předchůdců a následovníků strávil život v exilu a návraty do rodné domoviny prožíval prostřednictvím svých literárních hrdinů.

Třetí kapitola je věnovaná klíčovým historickým milníkům, které utvářely nejen charakter Irska ve 20. století, především v období 50. a 60. let., ale také současnou podobu této země. Jedná se zejména o propuknutí války s Británií, utrpení způsobená občanskou válkou a silící konflikty mezi katolickou a protestantskou náboženskou komunitou, jež vyústila ve zbytečné krveprolití

v severoirském městě Derry. Irská národní identita, neustále utlačována cizími dobyvateli, se rodila z prachu a potu jejich hrdinů.

Čtvrtá kapitola práce se zaměřuje na historii a utváření svébytné národní kanadské literatury, v níž Margaret Atwood hrála jednu z klíčových rolí. Dále jsou zmíněni předchůdci a hlavní témata, jimiž se kanadští spisovatelé zabývali.

Pátá kapitola osvětluje vzestup feministického hnutí, jeho historii a nejdůležitější myšlenky. Skrze tři osobnosti, Simone de Beauvoir, Michela Foucalta a Judith Butler, se snažím přiblížit jejich filozofické pohledy na feminismus a názory, které se v některých směrech rozcházel,

ale jindy naopak nalézaly soulad. Kapitola taktéž vysvětluje termíny jako gender, pohlaví a identita.

Šestá kapitola se zaměřuje na osobní život Edny O'Brien, který je podrobně zachycen v autorčině memoáru *Mother Ireland*. Zde popisuje špatné vzpomínky a zážitky ze školy, kruté výchovy a hrubého zacházení v klášteře, osvobozujícího útěku do Dublinu a následného exilu do Londýna. Tato kniha byla pro mou diplomovou práci velmi přínosná, neboť s její pomocí lze sledovat realitu a fikci obsaženou v trilogii spisovatelky.

V sedmé kapitole se zabývám samotnou analýzou *The Country Girls*. K pochopení propletených dějových linií jsem zařadila i stručný obsah děje, který podává alespoň obecný přehled o tom, jaká úskalí a trápení musely tyto ženské hrdinky podstoupit. V této kapitole dále zahrnuji popis hlavních ženských a mužských postav, hrající v příběhu klíčovou roli. Svoji pozornost zaměřuji i na charakteristiku irských matek a otců, neboť právě rodiče jsou těmi, kteří nás přivádí na svět a směřují/ovlivňují naši budoucí cestu.

Vzhledem k tomu, že autorky pracovaly i s gotickými a pseudogotickými prvky, známými v literatuře od 18. století, rozhodla jsem se tuto kapitolu také zařadit do své práce. V podkapitole pak uvádím příklad groteskních prvků, objevující se v analyzovaných dílech.

Poslední kapitola je zasvěcena románové prvotině M. Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (Ženě k nakousnutí). I zde jsem zařadila stručný popis děje a zaměřila se na charakteristiku hlavních mužských a ženských postav. Pohled na ideál ženské krásy a především těla prošel skrze staletí proměnou. Při vytváření identity a sebevědomí, o kterých jsem se již zmínila v teoretické části, nelze opomenout ani vliv módy a role jídla. S tímto trendem přišla však i odvrácená strana mentálních poruch, jako je například anorexie a bulimie.

Závěr práce postihuje komplexní shrnutí shod a rozdílů ve zpracování a pojetí hlavních hrdinek a jejich fiktivních světů, jež vznikly na pozadí životů autorek samotných. Tato společnost se svými nastavenými rigidními pravidly v rodinné politice a v partnerských vztazích, způsobuje našim hrdinkám nesnáze a trápení. Hlavní postavy hledaly lásku, bezpečí a pochopení na oplátku dostávaly samé zklamání a kritiku. Především v trilogii jsme měli možnost sledovat tyto literární hrdinky v delším časovém úseku, a to od dětství až po dospělost a pozorovat změny v jejich

naivním vnímání světa, rodinných tragédií a nešťastných lásek, nefungujících vztazích, svateb z rozumu, narození dětí a smrti.

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