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The Representation of Women in Irish Short Stories

Reprezentace žen v irské povídce

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## Poděkování

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor thesis will be an analysis of the representation of Irish women in short stories. Both male and female Irish authors whose main protagonist is a woman are to be examined. Also included in the mix are Protestant and Catholic authors. The traditional role of women in Irish society as depicted in these stories (both in rural and metropolitan settings) will be scrutinized.

## **Anotace**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je rozbor prezentace irských žen v povídkách. Analyzováni budou irští autoři a autorky, jejichž hlavní postavou v povídce je žena. Do výběru budou také zahrnuty protestantští a katoličtí autoři. Zkoumána bude tradiční role žen v irské společnosti tak, jak je vylíčena v jednotlivých příbězích (a to jak na venkově, tak ve městě).

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	
1.1 Women in Ireland .....	1
1.2 Comparison with women in the Czech Republic .....	3
<b>2. Elizabeth Bowen: “Summer night”</b>	
2.1 Biography .....	4
2.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	4
2.3 Women in the story.....	5
2.4 Conclusion .....	7
<b>3. James Joyce: “Eveline”</b>	
3.1 Biography .....	8
3.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	8
3.3 Women in the story .....	9
3.4 Conclusion .....	10
<b>4. James Joyce: “The Boarding House”</b>	
4.1 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	12
4.2 Women in the story .....	13
4.3 Conclusion .....	15
<b>5. Edna O’Brien: “The Creature”</b>	
5.1 Biography .....	16
5.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	16
5.3 Women in the story .....	18
5.4 Conclusion .....	19
<b>6. Mary Lavin: “Happiness”</b>	
6.1 Biography .....	20
6.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	20
6.3 Women in the story .....	22
6.4 Conclusion .....	24
<b>7. William Trevor: “The Ballroom of Romance”</b>	
7.1 Biography .....	25
7.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes .....	25
7.3 Women in the story .....	27
7.4 Conclusion .....	29
<b>8. Conclusive Comparison</b> .....	30
<b>9. Czech Summary</b> .....	33
<b>10. Works Cited</b>	
10.1 Primary Sources	
10.2 Secondary Sources	
10.3 Internet Sources	

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Women in Ireland

The emancipation of women and their position in society was in Ireland a great unknown until recently. In Ireland the 94 % of the population belong to the Catholic faith but the Church is not an only one reason which affects the situation of women in the country. (Frank 2006: 130)

The famine in Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lasted for six years and the property had been divided to all children in the family though millions died and more emigrated. However it did not stop the tradition of marriage at a young age with lots of children. Religion was strengthened and sexuality was only for conception of a child. Otherwise, it was a sin. Saint Mary as the innocent virgin dedicated to her son was an example of the best woman.

The Constitution of 1937 described woman as a property of husband. As a wife she should care for her family and household: sewing, cooking, washing, and raising children. The famine caused a decrease of population and the assets were inherited only by the eldest child male. (Galligan 1998: 26-48)

Traditionally, Irish families were large and marriage was a significant social and religious ceremony. A strict adherence to the rules of the Roman Catholic Church, which forbade family planning, along with a public policy which made the provision of contraceptives illegal, resulted in families having six or more children. (Galligan 1998: 26)

In the 70ties came the beginning of the Ireland's economic growth. Some property rights for women as well as the possibility of partial education developed at this time. In 1971 women founded the first liberal group which showed women as full rights of human beings and not only as a mother or a wife. One of the most influential organizations for women's

rights is The National Council of Women of Ireland (NWC).

In 1979 the government partly allowed the import of contraception to Ireland. All types of contraceptives were banned before this time. Divorce has been a taboo in Ireland until 1998. In 1986 a referendum to permit a divorce was presented. The Catholic Church was strictly against this proposal and the influence of the Church prevented passage of the referendum. The conditions for separation had been really serious and strict. For example the women who were an object of domestic violence were allowed to get divorced.

One of the most controversial topics in Catholic's society is an abortion. The Church says humans do not have the right to terminate life. The journeys to foreign countries because of abortion were dealt.

On the one hand the campaign against abortions and divorce were organized but on the other hand the laws concerned to the availability of contraception were gradually liberalized...in 1992 the voters voted for the right to travel abroad with the aim of abortion. (Moody 1996: 289)

The big step at women's emancipation came in 1991 when Mary McAleese became the Irish president and six years after Mary Robinson has been elected as the next president of Ireland.

"The female voice" started to gain strength but the political parties continue to ignore this. The women are still in a smaller representation than men at some high positions. For example more women are more teachers than professors and more are lawyers than judges. (Moody 1996: 272-307) This is a problem all over the world. Women in Ireland have a subordinate position psychologically and it is not up to government to change it. The whole society has to change the view of position of women. Irish have a long way to the full emancipation but changes are happening and it is a good sign.

## 1.2 Comparison with women in the Czech Republic

About 25% of citizens from Czech Republic belong to the Roman Catholic Church which in comparison to Ireland is a very low number. It is important to determine what is the main determinant which causes the status of women. In Ireland the division of society comes from religion. The Czech Republic has transferred the rules about society before 1989. The communist system controlled Czech Republic.

The tasks of housewives are the same theme in both countries. Women have a major function in the family. The wives should take care of children, and women have to maintain the household. In the modern family where the partners are young the marriage is more equal. The husbands help their wives with some household chores. Child care is still the main task of every woman in the family. Elderly couples have old-fashioned habits and the man's task is earning the money.

The education of women in the Czech Republic has also increased but the topic of women having an abortion or using and contraception were consulted before 1989. The communist system limited the rights for abortion. There was a committee and a woman had to come in front of them and explain why she wanted to go for an abortion.

In the issue of employment of women the problem is similar to Ireland. Men get higher wages for the same position. Women as well as in Ireland rather represent a lower position and they are more represented in the humanities and arts. The employment of women in Ireland decreases in the Czech Republic the number of working women reduces. This is because of the rules by the Communist system. It was the duty that every citizen had to have an occupation.



## **2. Elizabeth Bowen: “Summer night”**

### 2.1 Biography

The life of Elizabeth Bowen is described on bookrags.com internet page. She was born in Ireland in 1899. Her Protestant family came from the Anglo-Irish gentry. They lived isolated in their manor houses and did not belong to English or Irish. Her father suffered from mental illnesses and Elizabeth reflected her painful childhood experiences in her fictional novels and stories. As a result of these problems she was eventually led to two powerful convictions.

### 2.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

A young woman, Emma, is driving alone on an Irish road going to her lover, Robinson. A man is waiting for Emma in a hotel with a deaf woman named Queenie and her brother, Justin Cavey. Justin is spending his vacation in the town because the World War would not permit him to travel abroad in Continental Europe.

Robinson invited them to his house nicknamed Bluebeard's Castle. Robinson ordinarily does not socialize with the townspeople. The ladies from town have discovered that he has a wife but is living apart from her. They are therefore gossiping about this mysterious and handsome man. Robinson and Justin talk about the war. Justin has asked Robinson what he thinks about love but laughing was his answer. Justin is angered and Robinson apologizes. Then he entrusts Queenie with the knowledge that his child died. The deaf woman is happy that he opened his heart to her.

Meanwhile, Emma calls home to her husband to tell him Good Night. Her house is supervised by Aunt Fran and her daughters are not sure about her homecoming.

The story goes back to Bluebeard's Castle where nervous Emma arrives. The woman becomes frightened by his experienced delicacy on the subject of love. Disappointed in Robinson's insensitivity and superficiality, Emma becomes desperate.

On his return to the hotel, Justin writes a lengthy, accusatory letter to Robinson and adds that he prefers they should not meet again. On his way back he still could hear the drunken woman sobbing, while Queenie goes happily to bed with thoughts of Robinson.

### 2.3 Women in the story

The main character in the story is the Anglo – Irish woman Emma. Love has bitterly disappointed her. A marriage without sexual and emotional satisfaction forced her to engage in on extra-marital love affair.

In the story her husband is called only a Major, man without name, without identity. Their alienation was caused by the war in which he had to serve for the British service. The desperate woman is seeking fulfillment in Robinson. Looking for passion, love, romance and escape from the everyday stereotype, she puts her family life at risk. Emma wants to live for herself. She needs somebody to take care of her, someone who can listen to her and understand her. Nevertheless everything that she has risked is useless because she finds that Robinson is an insensitive man. As Emma puts it:

Yes, here I am. She added: The night was lovely, speaking more sadly than she knew ... Her naivety as a lover. She could not have said, for instance, how much the authoritative male room put, at every moment when he did not touch her, a gulf between her and him. (Bowen 1999: 270)

She realizes only then that physical love-making did not fulfill her. The thoughts of home and family life are beginning to emerge in her mind.

Aunt Fran's so old, too old, it's not nice. And the Major keeps thinking about the war. And the children don't think I am good. I regret that. (Bowen 1999: 272)

Instead of an adequate response, the reaction comes in the form of cold male animal desires and lust. Robinson destroys her dream for fulfillment and on end to her life, in hopes of love.

When he had headed her off the cytherean cerrain she thought for a minute he had broken her heart, and she knew now he had broken her fairytale. (Bowen 1999: 272)

The next woman in the story is Justin's deaf sister Queenie. Her deafness moves her away from the outside real world. She keeps to her own world in her silence with no rules, no moral principles. She feels like a princess in a castle.

He had to share with Queenie, as he shared the doll's house meals cooked on the oil stove behind her sitting-room screen, the solitary and almost fairylike world created by her deafness. (Bowen 1999: 248)

She is a woman in her middle age, but only with a young girl's experience. The slight naivety may endanger her and destroyed her teen age mind. Her brother, Justin, tries to protect Queenie from disappointment.

Queenie is contrasted with Emma a satisfied woman. Thanks to her deafness she does not get influenced by the social system or by the war. Dreaming about the fantasy world means everything for her.

On other side of society, Aunt Fran, a strict and strongly religious woman, recognizes only morality and piety. This elderly woman suspects that Emma has gone to her lover and may spread some uncertainty to the life of Emma's daughter.

Never looking for love like Emma or dreaming about a handsome man like Queenie, Fran is portrayed as a distant spinster who tries to raise her two nieces to a life of obedience and the faith of God.

The older daughter Vivie is a young girl full of energy and naivety resembling a small bird. The similar nature to her mother appears to be a problem for her aunt. The upbringing trained girl to the world of grey. Vivie appears to defend herself and refuses to restrict her mind only to praying.

But Aunt Fran, as though the child were on fire, put into motion an extraordinary strength - she rolled, pressed, and pounded Vivie up [...] so like her mother's were left free to move wildly outside the great sausage. (Bowen 1999: 276)

## 2.4 Conclusion

The story ends with Queenie's innocent fantasies of love. It seems like a happy ending for the story full of different characters. We can wonder if Queenie will be Robinson's next victim.

Elizabeth Bowen called Robinson's residence Bluebeard Castle. Bluebeard was a man who murdered each of his wives. Robinson is in a metaphorical way like Bluebeard. Bluebeard murdered his physically and Robinson killed Emma psychologically. Robinson destroyed Emma's idea about romantic love because he wanted to spend with her only one night.

### 3. James Joyce: “Eveline”

#### 3.1 Biography

James Joyce was born in 1882 in Dublin. His father tried all kind of professions and his mother was a pianist. He studied at University College at Dublin. He moved to various cities in continental Europe, including Zurich during the First World War. He is really famous novelist for his experimental use of language. The collection of stories called *Dubliners* published in 1914 and the part of this collection is a short story “Eveline”. James Joyce died in 1941. (Petri Liukkonen: 2008)

#### 3.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

Eveline remembers the old days. She and her brothers and her sister used to play out in the country near to their homes. A crippled little boy was always warned them when her father came for them with a cane. Everything is gone. Her mother died and the oldest brother Ernest too. Children, with whom she played, became adult and somebody of them moved. The fields were replaced by new houses.

This nineteen year old girl works in a store to earn money for the family. The domineering father appropriates the whole salary of her. Eveline’s brother Harry is still traveling around Ireland for his church decorating business. She remains with their despotic father alone and must take care of him. The siblings from the neighbourhood are another company. Eveline repeatedly recalls time when her mother was alive and her father was not so bad and did not drink so much.

Eventually Eveline meets a sailor named Frank. A young man falls in love with her and offers to Eveline a better life in Buenos Aires where he moved to. He impresses Eveline with the adventure stories from his travels and promises that he takes her to Buenos Ayres as his wife. An

attention which she feels from him is unknown from her mother's death. The father finds out about the relationship between them and he is very angry. He does not agree with it and tells to Eveline that Frank will leave her just like other sailors. Frank and Eveline meet secretly after that and plane a departure to Buenos Aires.

Eveline is still sitting at the window and hears a song that her father played when her mother died. She keeps her a promise to her mother on her mother's deathbed. She promised to take care of her old father. The young woman realizes that this demand was unfair because everybody deserves to live and not just survive. Frank would help her to start a new life with marriage, children and a family of her own. An unhappy girl goes with Frank to the pier where boat departs but she cannot leave a Dublin with him. She is not able to break her promise to her mother and leave her father alone.

### 3.3 Women in the Story

Eveline as a typical young girl from Ireland who has dreams and ideas about her life is disappointed by reality. Eveline, as well as many women in the 20th century in Ireland, has disrespect position in the Irish society. Eveline's life's mission is taking care of her father and her two little siblings. She will never have a chance to study or go abroad. Instead of showing gratitude, her father treats with her like with an inferior human being. He acknowledges only his two sons. "When they were growing up he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl." (Joyce 1999: 48)

She works in the store with other women. Since Eveline is single, women from the town do not respect her either. It was not unusual in Ireland that she surrenders her salary to her father. Everything belongs to man in the family. Eveline mainly lives from the money earned by her brother

Harry. The vision for a better life has come with a sailor Frank. Frank is her chance for a new start. The USA, where Buenos Aires is located, has a completely different mentality and she feels a chance to have a full life in the company of people who will respect her.

But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married – she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. (Joyce 1999: 47- 48)

Eveline is influenced by Irish society regarding marriage and the duties a woman has towards her family. A dream of her is to get married and start again. Eveline is trapped in a vicious circle. She wishes to leave a country with Frank but on the other hand she is afraid of the gossiping Dubliners about her escape with a strange man. She knows that her father will not be self-sufficient without her help.

What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps, and her place would be filled up by advertisement. Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening. (Joyce 1999: 49)

At the end Eveline's courage is pulled back and she has decided to stay with her father. Eveline is not partly ready to leave home. The beautiful memories about her childhood and about her mother force her to stay there. Another possible reason why she decided to stay in Ireland could be the unclear relationship with Frank. She never talked about her feeling towards him. He was only the ticket to a different life.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

The story, which has been written in 1914, a few years before women gained the right to vote, solves the classic questions of the status of women in society in the rural areas. The fiction describes the transition from the girl's innocence to premature woman's responsibility. The duties of girls and women were relentlessly and the oppression of women by

men was noticeable.

Joyce describes a problematic relationship between the father and the daughter and between the woman and the man. The father and society make it impossible for a girl to decide about her life with heart and open mind. Girl's courage, which subsides at the end, means a loss of her own identity because she stays with her father without any aspiration to achieve a better life. "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition." (Joyce 1999:51)



## **4. James Joyce: “The Boarding House”**

### 4.1 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

Mrs. Mooney was a butcher's daughter from Dublin. Her husband had been her father's employee. They opened the butchery on their own in Dublin. However, Mrs. Mooney's husband became an alcoholic after the death of his father-in-law and he physically attacked her. The woman realized she could not stay with him. They started to live separately.

As the beginning of a new era of her life she bought the boarding house. The money from the sale of butcher shop helped her. The boarding house became a place of residence for clerics, musician artist or tourists. Mrs. Mooney led the hotel morally very strictly and responsibly.

Her daughter Polly and son Jack lived in a house with her. The daughter Polly worked in the city in the office for a short time. Her drunken father wanted to visit her often but Mrs. Mooney banned it. Polly could not continue working. She had to stay at the hotel in the company of men and a cleaning lady.

A lot of men arrived to the hotel. Mrs. Mooney allowed Polly to get closer with one of them. And because Polly was a flirtations girl she had no problem with it. Mr. Doran was an elderly and experienced man. Mrs. Mooney watched their relationship in calm to see how the affair evolves. She was waiting for the best moment for her intervention.

Mrs. Mooney was all well thought out that they had sex together. She knew that her daughter's affair could be ended with the money from Mr. Doran but it was not her goal. She wanted a good husband for her daughter. Mr. Doran was a respected man but also of a weak personality. He could not afford a bad reputation by the affair with young woman. He would be endangered in his social position and at

work too.

Mr. Doran thought that Polly was a beautiful girl who did not have a very good background but was really beautiful. The story ended with Mr. Doran thinking about his options. A decision of him was not indicated but we know that the marriage is the only way out with Mrs. Mooney putting on extreme pressure.

#### 4.3 Women in the Story

Mrs. Mooney is a woman who has undergone a difficult marriage. Even as a young woman who married a butcher she has to become independent. She helped her husband in the butchery. After she had lost her father, her husband became violent alcoholic. She stayed with Polly without her useless husband's support. Her daughter and her son went with their mother. Mrs. Mooney had to protect them and ensure them. She has become hard and materialistic woman.

As a single mother was trying to bring her daughter into higher society in Ireland her manipulative behavior is not fair. Manipulating a weak Mr. Doran, she waited for the right moment to intervene into a forbidden sexual relationship of her Catholic daughter. The unsuspecting man had no chance to get away from the affair. Mrs. Mooney knew that the innocence of her daughter was taken and that she had been seduced. This relationship was partly created by Mrs. Mooney who forbade her daughter to work in the office because of a drunken husband but it was not only one reason. She wanted to have a daughter under her supervision and the daughter started to work as a male companion in the hotel.

Mrs. Mooney had been called "Madame" satirically by her lodgers. It is a name for owner of the whorehouse. The prostitute in her whorehouse was her flirtations beautiful daughter and her mother brought her to this

occupation. We can see there is no interest in daughter's reputation by Mrs. Mooney but in money. She knew about their affair from the first moment and she did not stop it. This relationship was entirely under the command of Mrs. Mooney. The relationship was controlled by her.

Polly knew that she was being watched but still her mother's persistent silence could not be misunderstood. There had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. (Joyce 1999: 458)

Everything depended only on the marriage with man who could provide for the welfare of Polly. The marriage seemed just like an arrangement. The moment, when she struck to the relationship, made her calm and sure about her decision to get her daughter married with Mr. Doran. Mr. Doran as a honest man was trapped in her intrigues.

Mrs. Mooney sent her maid, Mary, for Mr. Donovan as a demonstration of her power and superiority. It showed complete confidence in the expected response of the desperate man. She was enjoying this moment almost. The plan succeeded.

Some mothers would be content to patch up such affair for a sum of money, she had known cases of it. But she would not do so. For her only one reparation could make up for the loss of her daughter's honor: marriage. (Joyce 1999: 460)

Polly Mooney is the second most significant character in the story. A young girl influenced by her mother, she is told by her mother that she could not meet her father and had to leave her work in the office so she did it. Polly began work as a hostess of men. She flirted with them and made them happy and let them feel the pleasure of the presence of a young and attractive woman around them.

She got closer with Mr. Doran but she feared that her mother's pressure might destroy the relationship. It seemed like she is fragile, innocent woman and Mr. Doran also saw her as innocent when she came to his room with crying. At the end of the story, marriage with Mr. Doran shows that intrigue of her mother did not mean that Polly meant anything wrong and that she became a materialistic and calculated person too.

Polly sat for a little time on the side of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking glass... She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm, her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future. Her hopes and visions were so intricate... (Joyce 1999: 463)

This story refers to marriage and the life in Dublin. The original concept of marriage as a pledge of love instead becomes a game full of intrigue. Marriage seems more like a business here where the social norms are important and love and respect to each other seems irrelevant.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The story in which a mother reveals her true face and becomes only a business woman takes notes on the strength of social status. Just because of fear of criticism from society Mr. Doran has decided to get marry with a girl who is not really the best for him.

The story comes from the city Dublin and the Boarding House is set in the urban culture respective to this city. The mixture of many social classes interact and interfere with each other. An adaptation to standards is the only way how to live correctly in the Boarding House, how to survive in Dublin and maybe how to live all over the world.

## 5. Edna O'Brien: "The Creature"

### 5.1 Biography

Edna O'Brien was born in 1930 in a small town Twamgraney. She grew up on countryside of Ireland. Her parents were very strict Catholics. Except the Bible and cook books she did not have a chance to read anything else. When O'Brien was studying in Dublin, her mother wanted to burn her book by Sean O'Casey. She decided to escape into exile like her big literary idol James Joyce, though while the polyglot Joyce moved to continental Europe, O'Brien chose London. (Liukkonen: 2008)

Her first novel *The Country Girl* was based on the writer's true life in a convent. The book was banned in Ireland. The next book discussed her childhood. O'Brien has written non-fiction about Ireland, books for children and some screenplays. She has been awarded the Kingsley Amis Award for fiction and the Yorkshire Post Novel Award for her literary achievements. Her novel about the marriage of James Joyce interesting is.

Many novels by O'Brien describe the problems between women and men in a relationship, including the violence of men and the weakness of women. For her other successful novels can be considered *The Lonely Girls*, *A Pagan Place*, *Down by the River*.

### 5.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

The teacher who has come to a small town in Ireland for a temporary job is the narrator of this short story. Every day she meets an old woman and the teacher does not understand why people from a village call the woman "The Creature". Her curiosity and attempts to make contact with the woman bring her into "The Creature's" old house. One

visit turns into a regular dialogue about the difficult issues in the old woman's life.

The Creature's destiny was not very gentle from the beginning of her short marriage:

Her husband had been killed two years after their marriage, shot in back of a lorry, in an incident that was later described by the British Forces as regrettable. (O'Brien 1999: 520)

The widow had two children, one daughter in Canada and a son who lives a few miles away. The son has not visited her for 17 years. The farm where she had lived was successful but the animals started to become sick and die. Despite all the misery, she saved the money to make it possible to send her son to school to the city. Her farm started to be prosperous. When her mother died and her daughter moved to another country, her occasional despair about being alone was substituted by trying to keep the farm prospering.

Eventually her son returned home with his fiancé. The joy of a newly acquired family, the joy of future grandchildren diminishes through the fact that the woman whom the son brought was very stingy and contentious. Money was the main topic of their fights. A few months later the presence of "The Creature" was undesirable. The son, with a slight duress, forced her to sign a contract in which the mother confers everything to them. "[...] she was packing her few belongings and walking away from the house where she had lived for fifty-eight of her sixty years." (O'Brien 1999: 523)

After many dialogues the teacher decides to go to the farm, meets the son and arranges for him to visit his mother. The man looks depressed and tired. In visiting his mother, the son reveals only his alienation. At the end he agreed with the teacher's offer.

The Creature was really happy to see him but the son behaved distantly.

[...] when she put her hand up to his grey hairs he backed away from her as if she'd given him an electric shock." "When she asked, " Will I see you?" he had said "Perhaps," and she told me that if there was one word in the English vocabulary that scalded her, it was the word "perhaps." (O'Brien 1999: 526)

The narrator finally realizes that she has actually removed the last little hope that the old woman had clung to. After the visit of her son, she has realized that he does not care for her and will never come back.

### 5.3 Women in the Story

The most important woman in the story is old women. People call her "The Creature" because she has never told her story to people from the village and because she is unattractive looking and unwanted. The villagers see only the woman who is alone and in Irish society it is not a fault of man. It can be inferred from the place where she lives. The small town in Ireland where the people are very religious, the people are thinking about being cursed by God. It is how they are able to understand why the woman had to go through so much pain. The old woman does not think that she is cursed. God is the only fixed point in her misery.

The woman is not bad person. She does not talk about her pain and feelings until the teacher asks about her destiny of life. People from the village are small-minded and they are affected by prejudices. Her neighbours never asked the old woman about her life.

Life had treated her rotten yet she never complained but always had a ready smile, so that her face with its round rosy cheeks was more like something you could eat or lick. (O'Brien 1999: 519)

The only one thing which stays by her was her religion. The loneliness of her is less painful when she remembers God and thought that she was a

grateful woman.

However, the final disappointment in the form of a rejection of her middle aged son has destroyed her last hope just as the teacher had been trying to help her. The world and God had no mercy.

A teacher is the next woman in the story. She seems like a modern woman without prejudices. She tries to help the old woman but the end is not happy. "I had come away to forget, and there was released in me, too, a gigantic useless sorrow." (O'Brien 1999: 526)

#### 5.4 Conclusion

The depiction by O'Brien of country life is certainly not idyllic, for without hesitation she hides nothing of the misery that the woman has known. In this way she provides a thorough witness to the gradual decline of that world. The feelings of woman lack dignity but in their spirit of sacrifice, only bitterness and disappointments is waiting for them.

O'Brien's memory from Ireland has a tendency to represent the social reality by focusing on its small triumphs and sorrows of everyday woman. It shows a sample of the typical couple in Ireland where Edna O'Brien grew up. No love, but only working on the farm and childbearing were the tasks of woman.



## 6. Mary Lavin: “Happiness”

### 6.1 Biography

Mary Lavin was born in 1912 in East Walpole in Massachusetts, USA. Her parents were Irish immigrants. When she was 10 years old her mother took her back to Ireland. The family lived together for several years in Dublin. In 1926 her father went to County Meath where he was a manager and they lived separately. (Donnelly 1997: 162)

She attended the University College Dublin and graduated with a degree in literature and pursued a doctorate in English too. She started writing at the university for many periodicals. For example: *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

In 1942 she got married her to old friend William Walsh but in 1954 her husband died. The novelist stayed with three daughters and a lot of work on their farm in County Meath which was bequeathed to her by her father.

Before her second marriage in 1969 she published two novels. The masterpieces were her short stories. *The Tales from Bective Bridge* won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. In 1961 Mary Lavin received the Katherine Mansfield Prize. She was a President of the Irish Academy of Letters for two years. The short story collection *Happiness* was written in 1969. Mary Lavin died as a “Saoi” of Irish artist (affiliation for major artist) in 1966 in Dublin.

### 6.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

The narrator, one of three sisters, living on a farm in County Meath, remembers her mother. The mother was very strong and an open personality. She grew up in a strictly Catholic family. Her mother

and the grandmother of girls behaved like the imperious and fretful old women who demanded, and received, much of her daughter's time. Vera was trying to avoid mistakes. She told the girls about her father who was a role model for her future life although she did not consider him lucky because of her mother.

The family lost their father due to an unexpected and short illness. Vera tried to be an optimistic example for their daughters but the period after her father's death had shown them what enormous pain their mother felt for losing a beloved man. They had worried about their mother's life while travelling throughout Europe with the aim of trying to think of other thoughts.

Vera, a widow and mother, still tried to put to the girl's heart to realize a feeling of happiness. She always defined this feeling with lot of ideas and situations. The girls did not understand why their mother asks about the happiness of people at their deathbed but happiness became really important on the way to death for Vera. Bea, one of the daughters, who accessed the mother's attitudes about happiness, became very skeptical. She even called happiness a kind of fraud.

At the time of mourning due to loss, a very close friend of the family came, father Hugh, from the local monastery. The priest, who was nice and sensible man, became a fixed point in the life of Vera. Daughters grew up and got married and she could stay alone on the farm without them but with him. During the girls' visits they suspected the love of the priest to their mother. He never admitted it and mother perhaps had not even realized this option.

On her deathbed, their mother began to panic that her life could not end on Earth if she still could not cope with the memory of the death of her husband. A comforting word from the priest does not help her but the assurance from the always hesitant daughter Bea about her end with

the world which let her go and die in peace.

### 6.3 Women in the Story

The main character in the story, Vera, is an autobiographical character of author herself. Just like Vera, Mary Lavin had lost her husband and stayed alone with her three daughters on a farm in County Meath. However, in contrast to Vera, Mary Lavin married with her long-time friend who had been the local priest.

If the author is considered as a character Vera, her attitudes can be seen in the story like an effort to explain her feelings after her husband's death and subsequent alignment with the local priest. "Father Hugh, ever since our father died, had been the closest of anyone to us as a family, without being close to any one of us in particular – even to Mother." (Lavin 1999: 401)

Vera is still trying to explain the essence of happiness to her daughters. She tries to instill this feeling from the examples and definitions with the aim of teaching them how to find happiness in difficult situations in their lives:

Her theme was happiness: what it was, what it was not, where we might find it, where not, and how, if found, it must be guarded. Never must we confound it with pleasure, nor think sorrow its exact opposite. (Lavin 1999: 519)

But misunderstood by her daughters, about what happiness should really mean can be seen as a gulf between Mary Lavin and her family after the death of her husband. The daughter Bea was even considered happiness as fraud.

Vera took her daughter after the loss travelling throughout Europe. In this period her girls felt a great fear. Despite her eternal optimism after their

father left, she lost her pleasure for life. Her daughters were even worried about her life and perhaps even more about her soul.

Locking our damp hands together, we started out again. "She wouldn't!" I whispered. "It wouldn't be a sin!" Secure in the deterring power of sin, we let out our breath. Then Bea's breath caught her again. "What if she went out so far she used up all her strength? She couldn't swim back! It wouldn't be a sin than!" (Lavin 1999: 408)

In this part the very strong power of religion can be seen. This stance includes Catholic families throughout Ireland.

In contrast to the strong religion is a memory of her dying husband. Spring flowers such as daffodils are a symbol of new life, effervescence. She felt in them a bigger breath of life than in prayers for the survival of her husband, as if she knew that even God will not help her in this situation. She tried to handle this difficult situation.

But when I came into the hall, that nun [...] Reached out and grabbed the flowers letting lots of them fall – I remember them getting stood on. "Where are you going with those foolish flowers, you foolish woman?" she said. "Don't you know your husband is dying? Your prayers are all you can give him now." (Lavin 1999: 410)

The relationship between father Hugh and Vera can also mean something religious. After the death of her husband, Vera spent a lot of time in the church and during these moments created a rapprochement with the priest. The connection between the priest and God caused hope to be closer to her deceased husband.

Vera told her girls about their grandmother. She was a woman who was not the maternal type. She was for Vera a woman who was thinking primarily of themselves and was wholly unable to appreciate anyone else.

### 6.3 Conclusion

If it is an autobiographical fiction, Lavin here describes the difficult relationship between mother and daughter and now as a mother herself trying to do things differently and instruct them to avoid the old mistakes.

Vera's daughter Bea appeared sceptical of her mother's attitudes and narrative in the first part of the story. Gradually, her sensitivity and a kind of sixth sense could be understood as her mother's vision of happiness. Sisters called her an oraculum which suggests her great emotional range. Only a young woman understood a mother's fear on her deathbed. She understood her cries.

“They ought to be put in water anyway,” she said, and, leaning over the edge of the bed, she pointed to the floor. ...”Don't let them nun take them, she'll only put them on the altar. And God doesn't want them! He made them for us – not for Himself!”  
(Lavin 1999: 418)

Bea realized the association between daffodils which her mother brought to their father before his death and their continuity with the present. The mother has associated daffodils with life and a nun in the hospital destroyed any thought of freedom and life. Bea was referring to the efforts of understanding essence of happiness, a link that every realization of the truth must pass through periods of doubt.

The narrator, as one of the Vera's daughters remained, anonymous, with no name or nickname. The description showed a love and respect to Vera but it was not clear if the narrator received the learning of her mother as Bea did. Contradiction and uncertainty was likely felt in the author's own attitudes and feelings.

## 7. William Trevor: “The Ballroom of Romance”

### 7.1 Biography

William Trevor was born in Mitchelstown in 1928. Trevor attended a number of the school because his father worked as a bank official and he had to move to other towns. He graduated from Trinity College with a degree in history. This story writer was employed for a number of years as a sculptor while supporting himself by teaching. In 1953 Trevor won first prize in the Irish section of the Unknown Political Prisoner sculpture competition. In 1954 Trevor emigrated to England.

Trevor worked in London as an advertising copywriter. His second novel *The old boys* (1964) won the Hawthornden Prize. In the early 1970s Trevor enjoyed success in both theatre and television. In 1976 William Trevor received the award of the Royal Society of Literature. The most famous novel is *Felicia's Journey* which was made into a famous film.

William Trevor is a Protestant. He is still alive and still publishing stories in his 80's. Now the novelist lives with his family in Devon. (McMillan 2003 – 2011)

### 7.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

The short story called “The Ballroom of Romance” narrates the life of a Country Irish woman, Bridie, who is almost cut off from the world by the small farm in the Irish countryside lives there with her one-legged father. After the death of Bridie's mother, she helped him with everything. The farm is located a few kilometres from the city and the only connection with civilization for Bridie has become a long journey on a bicycle. Bridie is almost trapped on the farm. Her father, old and ill, is not able to take care of himself and Bridie, his only relative, is required to remain with him. She is forced to give up her own life and earns

money and stays with him.

Bridie's only one joy is the dance hall proclaimed as The Ballroom of Romance. This is the only time when Bridie gets beautifully dressed up and go between other people from the hill farms and villages. The dance hall has been visiting by her for many years, since her childhood. The Ballroom of Romance is only place where she is not like a work-worn elderly woman from the farm but the same like every other woman with a beautiful dresses and dreams. Talking with one other woman about her daily problems of marriage and about children lets her realize that her life has become empty. The dancing dispels her thoughts about her handicapped father and the never-ending work.

Bridie remembers in those evenings for her young. She was in love with a boy named Patrick Grady. He should have been her future husband and they should have been together and lived happily in a town. However, the boy already had another girl, whom he married and lived somewhere else.

After many years when Bridie was still single she has started dreaming about the bachelor musician Dano Ryan. Everybody knows about her affection for him but people also knew about his active relationship with Griffin's widow. Mrs Griffin takes cares of her mentally handicapped son and Dano Ryan helps her. Bridie felt to be very close with this bachelor. He was another man with whom she could imagine her future life.

Old unmarried men have come to the hall every week strengthen by alcohol and the knowledge that single women are interested in them. Bridie dance with lot of those men. For example Bowser Egan - a typical bachelor who, according to other women, as well as other have married a whiskey and comfort. Bridie is aware, that this is her last evening in The Ballroom of Romance. She found it humiliating in her age to go with

single men dancing. Finally Bridie leaves the hall with Bowser and realizes that he is the only one with whom she has a chance to spend the rest of her life after her father's death.

### 7.3 Women in the Story

The main character is Bridie, a 36-year-old spinster, who sacrifices her life to care for her sick father in very loneliness place in the hills. Each week she goes into town to shop where she meets a woman from the city and inside she jealous of their family lives. On the other hand, Bridie realizes that the women are envious about her life. They have imaginations about independent and no obligation which come with the role of a wife.

“You're lucky to be peaceful in the hills,” they said to Bridie, “instead of stuck in a hole like this”. They had a tired look, most of them, from pregnancies and they pursue to organize and control their large families. (Trevor 1999: 497)

Every Saturday she attended a dance hall where rurals singles, people like her, visited. Cut off from civilization, locked in their farms, caught in a small village who, like she, just wanted a bit of fun and a little company after a week of never-ending work and loneliness.

People came on bicycles or in old motorcars, country people like Bridie from remote hill farms and villages. People who did not often see other people met there, girls and boys, men and women. (Trevor 1999: 499)

The dancing and closeness of people still gave to Bridie a feel that she does not have to stand in the world completely on her own. That feeling when other people go there to meet somebody who stays with them for the rest of their life too. A young boy asked her to dance and told her about working for his uncle for fourteen hours a day. This life does not make a sense for him. Bridie, like a woman, who honours the principles



she could not leave her father and start a life somewhere else. Tradition in Irish society banned it. It seems like a conflict between young and older generation. The new ones seem to be rioting against the old habits.

But the spinster met superficiality and judging. She realized that when she overheard a conversation among young girls.

Madge Dowding was the only one who was older than Bridie. She was thirty-nine, although often she said she was younger. The girls sniggered about that, saying that Madge Dowding should accept her condition - her age and her squint and her poor complexion - and not make herself ridiculous going out after men. (Trevor 1999: 501)

The woman remained alone because she had no other option. If an elderly man was a bachelor it was just about his own motivation and maybe because of the comfort. Nobody considered them embarrassing and old. People understand and take for granted their lifestyle. These are men who preferred to baffle woman's head, flirting every week and then again return to their comfortable and quiet lives under the care of them. All women were happy when those men came to dance with her. Every single woman, if she cannot have love, desires at least a decent man.

In the story the very strong economic distress of the people is known and many are trying to escape from it. For example, Dano Ryan, Bridie's love decided, instead of staying with the woman he loved, to choose a wealth and comfort with the widow. He gained her faith in him by taking care of her handicapped son. The Bridie's suiter Bowser Egan too. He talked about their future life after his mother's death when he inherited her money and property.

She would wait now and in time Bowser Egan would seek her out because his mother would have died. Her father would probably have died also by then. She would marry Bowser Egan because it would be lonesome being by herself in the farmhouse. (Trevor 1999: 518)

The reason for her acting is not property. It is a rational motive of the middle-aged woman who does not want to live alone in her old age in the farm. It is better to get a wealthy decent man like Bowser Egan if she cannot live with love.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

The women in Ireland had a clear position in society expected from them: service for men, parenting, keeping heart warm homes. The women were brought up to get married, have babies and taking care of their husbands. Building careers or studying in the 1950's of the 20th century in Ireland was completely impossible.

Bridie's father realized how much his daughter was held back by the fact that she was trapped between the hills on the farm but he knew that without her he would die. Understood still was that the old man's only relative should be obliged to take care of her sick father even if it means never being able to establish her own family. It was a habit of them and their traditional society. The farm where they are working is a family heritage and it would never be sold. The families in Ireland have valued very highly their assets and the thought of selling to or loss meant almost the same as the death of someone in the family.

## 8. Conclusive Comparison

All six authors describe the life of women in Ireland. They depict how they live and tried to engage the readers to think about their situationa, asking the questions: Is this the best way for Irish society to deal with women?

The first short story called “Summer Night” by Elizabeth Bowen describes the main character Emma as a woman who has the lost meaning of her life. As a wife and mother, her only role is to take care of the household. Her husband's lack of interest forces her into looking for love somewhere else. Her attempt to find romance ends unsuccessfully. Elizabeth Bowen came from Anglo-Irish aristocracy. Marriage in this society at this time was often made because of intellect rather than because of love and the women used to seek pleasure somewhere else. Their efforts often ended unhappily in the hands of the calculating young bachelors and with non-understanding neighbourhood. It almost seems that the author envies the blind girl, because her world is limited only by her imagination.

The other two stories come from the hands of one of the most famous Irish author, James Joyce. Both stories come from the *Dubliners* collection. Joyce almost naturalistically describes middle-class Dublin life in the early 20th century. In the first short story called “Eveline”, a young girl is trapped in the deep-rooted traditions of Irish society. She has to take care of her widowed father and brothers and is thereby she is condemned to not have a husband or a family. Even though she has a chance to leave and start a new life, she is too much devoted to the traditional patriarchal rules and remains unhappy in the stereotype of her life. James Joyce leaves her in misery even though the decision was purely her own. In the short story called “The Boarding House” he describes the strength of a women who is independent and able to manipulate her surroundings on the one hand and on the other the

vulnerability of young girl who is just learning the rules of life. In this story, the woman is the victim of her husband from the beginning but she can straighten herself up and be the architect of her life. Mrs. Money, unlike the previous story “Eveline” decides to change her fate no matter what the rules of the society say.

The following short story is by Edna O'Brien and its name is “The Creature”. Edna O'Brien grew up in the country in a strict Catholic family. The story describes the bias of this environment and its local people. The woman called “The Creature” a victim of society, was forced to live at the edge without people interested in her fate. They thought she was cursed. The story also points to the arrangement of Irish families. The son of this woman who was left alone took from his mother the right to own all her property and she was forced to leave her farm and leave everything to him. As a good Catholic, she did not have any regrets and she only wanted to live in peace.

The story by Mary Lavin, author who spent her childhood in America and then returned to Ireland is heavily autobiographical. The whole story is, as the name of the poem indicates, about “The Happiness” and the author is trying to answer the question what exactly the happiness is. It describes the relationship of mother and daughters, who were left behind after the death of a father and a husband. The author points out the obtuse of the society which frowned upon her close relationship with the local priest.

The last short story called “The Ballroom of Romance” by William Trevor brings us to the rural environment. This story partially reminded me of “Eveline” by James Joyce. Both women are forced to remain alone with their fathers, because as a woman in Irish society, it is her duty to do so. Unlike Eveline, the father of Bridie was good and understood how his daughter has to sacrifice for himself. The contrast is shown when bored women from bigger towns or cities envy Bridie’s “free” of a family with

so many children life. Just like in the tale called “Summer Night”, even here are older bachelors who look only for a pleasure with single women. Men, they have the right to be single, childless and muddle through life unlike women who have to fulfill their place in the society as mothers, women and nurses.

After a detailed dismantling of all the stories, I have found many common features of individual characters, who often try to escape but the rules and society pushes them back where they should be. They are tied up by their husbands, their neighbourhoods and other people's prejudices.

## 9. Czech Summary

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na literární soubor sedmi povídek pocházejících od irských autorů. Každý z autorů se snažil přiblížit osudy žen v irské společnosti v první polovině 20. století. Hlavním tématem všech vybraných povídek jsou situace, ve kterých je popsáno postavení ženy ve společnosti svázané tradicemi. Jejich nelehká role je zřejmá z mnoha aspektů, které se zobrazují v historických i kulturních skutečnostech, jež ovlivňují Irsko po celou dobu historie země.

Před samotným čtením a rozborem jednotlivých povídek jsem se pomocí odborných publikací obeznámila s historií Irska samotného. Blíže jsem se zaměřila na roli ženy ve společnosti, na vztah mezi mužem a ženou a na práva žen. Na základě prostudovaného materiálu byl vytvořen úvod k bakalářské práci. Úvod se na pozadí odborné literatury snaží osvětlit proces vnímání ženského pohlaví ve společnosti v historickém kontextu. Popisuje zvyšující se snahu o emancipaci a větší uznání jejich pohlaví v mužském světě. Poukazuje na těžkosti, na největší a nejdiskutovanější problémy, které musí žena v irské společnosti každodenně řešit. Konec úvodu se zaměřuje na porovnání vnímání žen v Irsku a v České republice.

Bakalářská práce je dále rozdělena do kapitol podle jednotlivých povídek. Každá kapitola obsahuje stručné seznámení s autorem. Životopis spisovatele je v tomto rozboru důležitý z důvodu časté autobiografičnosti povídek a také různého pohledu na ženu, jedná-li se o autora mužského či ženského pohlaví, katolíka či protestanta. Všechny kapitoly obsahují stručný děj jednotlivých povídek. Hlavní náplní bakalářské práce je analýza ženské hrdinky v těchto fikcích. Neanalyzuje pouze vztah ke společnosti, který je popsán v úvodu práce, ale i vnitřní pocity hrdinek. Aby se rozbor stal více autentickým, byl doplněn citacemi z textu primární literatury.

Závěr bakalářské práce shrnuje témata z každé povídky, týkající se žen, na něž se každý autor individuálně zaměřil. Na základě tohoto shrnutí je zřejmé, že ač autoři pocházejí z různých společenských skupin, jejich hlavní hrdinky mají často mnoho společného. Rozbor potvrzuje, že nelehká situace žen, přiblížena již v úvodu, se prolíná každou analyzovanou povídkou od autorů pocházejících z Irska.

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