Analysis of Male Protagonists in Edna O'Briens The Country Girls Trilogy

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Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Završni rad

Student/ica: Neven Kliček

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Zadar, 2018.



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Zadar, 19. svibnja 2018.

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Introduction

The aim of this final paper is to analyse male protagonists in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* (*The Country Girls, The Lonely Girl, Girls in Their Married Bliss* 1987). These books feature two female heroines who are meant to be in the centre of the reader's attention throughout the story, yet it may be argued that male characters deserve to be analysed just as much. This would provide a different point of view to an otherwise female-oriented one. The analyses of *The Trilogy* are usually female-oriented because the two protagonists are female and it is thus expected to be made through their point of view. However, not many space has been given to male characters. This paper will thus set out to analyse male characters and how they function in the trio of the selected novels. These characters will be viewed in the context of mid-twentieth century Ireland and in the light of Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses which played a crucial role in Irish society throughout the fifties and sixties when the narrative is set. Namely, Althusser considers Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses the main tools which make a capitalist society work. The difference is that the former uses physical violence to maintain control (police, army, etc.), while the latter uses ideological means (church, state, family, etc.).

> An Ideological State Apparatus is a system of defined institutions, organisations, and the corresponding practices. Realised in institutions, organisations, and practices of this system is all or part (generally speaking, a typical combination of certain elements) of the State Ideology. The ideology realised in an ISA ensures its systemic unity on the basis of an 'anchoring' in material functions specific to each ISA; these functions are not reducible to that ideology, but serve it as a 'support'. (Alhusser, 77).

This theory is quite important when analysing mid-century Irish society represented in *The Trilogy* because it explains why the characters behave in the way they do. Namely, they are

under pressure to conform to the Ideological State Apparatuses of Church, State and Family which means they are expected to attend mass, get married as soon as possible and even maintain an appropriate family structure. This often leaves people narrow-minded and ignorant of the aspects of life outside of this model.

In the first novel, we meet the two heroines, Caithleen and Baba and their families. Early in the book, they are sent to a convent to continue their education, but they get purposely expelled. Upon shamefully returning home, their parents send the girls to Dublin to work. Meanwhile, Caithleen enters a totally inappropriate relationship with an older, married man called Mr. Gentleman. The first novel ends with him abandoning her at the airport when they are supposed to go on a romantic trip to Austria. In the second novel, the girls start dating various men and they meet Eugene Gaillard, an older foreigner who has travelled the world due to his film-making business. Caithleen falls in love with him and they start living together in his house in the countryside. When her father hears that she is living with a non-Catholic foreigner outside of wedlock, he tries to take her back home in a few attempts, but does not succeed. Eugene even buys Caithleen a ring so that the townsfolk do not ask too many questions, but does not marry her. This novel ends with them having a fight and Baba convincing Caithleen to move with her to London. Lastly, in the third novel, narrated by Baba, we find that Caithleen is married to Eugene Gaillard, but their marriage is far from perfect. They are ill-matched and break up early in the novel due to Eugene finding out that Caithleen is cheating on him. He takes their son away from her and this drives Caithleen mad and she even sterilizes herself in the end. Meanwhile, Baba is married to a rich man named Frank, but regularly cheats on him. One of her flings results in her getting pregnant and she tries to induce an abortion in a tub with Caithleen's help. Having failed, she confesses to Frank who is angry at first, but then decides to raise the child as his own.

1. Ireland in the fifties and sixties and Irish Men

Before we begin to analyse the selected novels and their protagonists, it is important to understand the social and political context which informs the books. As already stated in the introductory chapter, *The Trilogy* is set in the fifties and early sixties. Namely, Irish society at the time was an extremely patriarchal one. This means that in its core, the family was seen as a unit within society and within this unit, the husband is always the head-figure. In fact, this system was embedded in Ireland's very constitution of the time. *Article 41 of the Constitution of Ireland, 1937* says: "The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law." (*Vol V: Field Day Anthology,* 330). This law was, interestingly, amended only in 1996. The family was therefore viewed as an independent entity within society and law, and each family member played a certain role. The role of the father was to protect the family and provide material goods, while the role of the mother was to keep the household adequate for the rest of the family. Of course, only when a man and a woman married was it preferable for them to start having children. Furthermore, they were not supposed to step outside the boundaries of their role in the family. Namely, the wife had no reason to try to find work outside the home, and conversely, the husband was not supposed to do any housework. If either of them did, in fact, step outside their boundaries, they were frowned upon by society. In fact, when Edna O'Brien was asked in an interview if she thought that the position of women in Ireland makes it that more difficult for the woman writer, she stated the following: "It does because she's not supposed to write. (*A*) she's supposed to keep her thoughts to herself. And (*B*) she's supposed to be doing maternal, domestic, useful things; not things that are the provenance of a man." (Carlson 75).

Another characteristic of mid-century Irish society was the influence of the Church. "The Catholic Church and its priests and bishops acted as a sort of 'moral police force' for a long time in Ireland, because that was the role the population expected from them. They inspired much love and devotion and these in turn led to power and domination" (Fuller 9). Basically, the Irish Catholic Church had the power to implement their (moral) norms into society and everyone was supposed to obey them. Yet, what really kept most of the citizens obedient to the Church's rules was not only the Church itself, but, more significantly, a societal pressure which emerged as a by-product of the their ability to exercise power. Namely, norms linked to some of the most controversial issues were to be followed most strictly. These were questions of abortion, contraception, homosexuality, sex out of wedlock and so on. And if an individual did not oblige to the Church's standpoint to these questions, he or she was shunned both by the State and the Church, but most importantly, by society. It is, therefore, not surprising that women in mid-twentieth-century Ireland felt devoid of much of their freedom.

Yet, although it is undeniable that women were in a worse position than men, men did not enjoy a great amount of freedom either. It might be said that both men and women were oppressed by the ideological apparatuses of Church, State and Family, but women were additionally oppressed by men. Men were, more often than not, uneducated, narrow-minded and under a large amount of societal pressure. This was evident in rural communities more than in cities and there might be a few reasons why. Firstly, rural communities are tight-knit and, therefore, people are under more pressure due to the lack of anonymity. In other words, people are more preoccupied with how they behave if they know that they are being judged mostly by people with whom they are close. Secondly, since the role of the man within the family is to provide, and in rural areas, that means doing some form of agriculture, they often do not have the need, or will, to get educated, as long as they provide for the family. The ones that do get educated, especially in something useful, like Mr. Brennan having mastered veterinary

medicine, return to their communities as prime members of society. Yet even in cities, where there is both anonymity and a variety of professions, many men do not concern themselves with matters outside their professional life. This may be seen in the character of Baba's husband, Frank: ""Don't you know about women?" I said. He just looked at me with his big, stupid, wide-open mouth. He didn't know. What sort of mother had he? He said to leave his mother out of it, that she was a good woman and baked the best bread in Ireland." (O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 409-410). Namely, as most Irish men, Frank is narrow-minded and oblivious to basic facts of life like rudimentary biology. Yet, due to his mid-century Irish upbringing, this is far from surprising as Frank is only one in the gallery of the male characters which I am going to analyse in the rest of this paper.

2. Edna O'Brien's male characters

In *The Trilogy,* Edna O'Brien generally portrays male characters as bigoted, narrow-minded, incompetent and lacking knowledge of basic facts of life. Characters portrayed in this way mostly include Irish men, while foreigners are seen as more open-minded, cultured, sophisticated and less prone to hatred. For example, being brought up in a society where sex and bodily functions were never talked about, but rather seen as taboo, Frank, Baba's husband in the third novel, has no idea how to have sex with his wife and he does not even know that women have periods, let alone what this is. Yet, despite his ignorance, Baba is happy with her husband as she believes that there are much worse men.

> It made him a lot nicer than most of the sharks I'd been out with, who expected you to pay for the pictures, raped you in the back seat, came home, ate your baked beans, and then wanted some new, experimental kind of sex and no worries from you might you have a baby, because they like it natural, without gear. (O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 384).

Essentially, in *The Trilogy,* O'Brien portrays male characters as behaving as if they are in charge of everything because they provide material goods and protect the family, but it is because of this mentality that men often do not feel the need to learn what they do not have to. Consequently, while men are heads of their families (which is even stated in Ireland's law, as mentioned above) and superior to women in the hierarchy of mid-century Irish society, it is women who are often more knowledgeable and clever, and can therefore manipulate men into getting what they want.

Yet, when analysing male characters in *The Country Girls,* the most appropriate course would be to do this through romance. Namely, Caithleen's interest in men is purely romantic and Baba's interest in them is purely commercial and they choose suitors appropriate to their interests. Caithleen is attracted to older, sophisticated foreigners because she believes that they would save her from her abusive father and repressive rural community. On the other hand, while one could say that Caithleen is naïve in her quest for romance, it could be said that Baba is too clever to be that naïve. Namely, Baba does not believe that romance could save her, but she does believe that wealth will, so she makes it her life goal to marry rich. It cannot be said that Baba does not crave romance, she does, but she does not see it as the most important part of her life. What is more, it is the girls' relationship with the main male characters which result in their coming of age. As Amanda Greenwood states "*The Country Girls* show Cait and Baba in the process of 'becoming' women in social and symbolic orders constructed according to the masculine" (25). Namely, after putting their life goals to the test, the girls find themselves living far from ideally. Both of Caithleen's romantic conquests fail miserably and while Baba does achieve her goal, her marriage lacks love.

Another way in which one could analyse male characters in *The Trilogy* is through patriarchy. Namely, it is clear that male characters in *The Trilogy* often patronise the two heroines and think themselves superior to them simply because of their sex. This is not only

evident in the nuclear family, but also in society and the Ideological State Apparatuses which control society. This could be observed through the fact that most (if not all) of the politicians in Irish government were male, but also, more notably, in the Church, where male priests were in charge. What is interesting is that, when she is young, Caithleen fantasizes about becoming a nun when she grows up in order to escape the world of male dominance. Yet after being educated at convent school, she realises that being a nun is far from a life full of freedom. She thus substitutes religion for love, even thinking of her lovers as gods and saints. On the other hand, Baba even realises that God is yet another male whom she is subservient to. "Baba's recognition of women's entrapment by a male construction of 'God' who 'does not exist' in their interest anticipates O'Brien's ongoing deconstructions of myths of femininity under Irish Catholicism" (Greenwood 29).

3. **Irish Fathers**

Although the reader never gets much information about Caithleen's father, what we do get through his actions is enough to get familiar with his character. Perhaps the fact that he is supposed to be portrayed as a monster leaves no reason to go into detail about his background or his inner thoughts. What Caithleen's narrating voice says about him and his habits at the outset of the first novel and the fact that she is anxious about her father returning home, give a sufficient amount of information for the reader to understand his role: "Would he come home in an ambulance, or a hackney car, hired in Balfast three days ago and not paid for? Would he stumble up the stone steps at the back door waving a bottle of whiskey? (E. O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 6). Namely, it is evident throughout the book that Mr. Brady is a violent, ideologically and religiously narrow-minded drunkard who is very bad at dealing with money. Although none of the more important characters display such an extreme worldview, this can still be observed as

the norm for rural Ireland. It is because of this behaviour that Caithleen always chooses a foreigner for romance. She is so appalled by the way in which her father treats her and her mother and by the way in which Irish society as a whole treat women, that she makes her life goal to get away from them. As Elieen Morgan puts it, "the one interesting twist that Kate adds to the traditional rescue fantasy is that she desires non-Irish men, precisely because she assumes that they will take care of her better than her own countrymen would" (*Landscape of Female Suffering* 463). Of course, Caithleen's father is against her having an 'outsider' boyfriend, which is best illustrated by what he says when he comes to Dublin to kidnap her and take her back home to keep her away from Eugene: "You'll meet a nice boy yet, one of your own kind." (*The Trilogy* 251).

What is more, Mr. Brady frequently takes out his frustrations onto his wife who, in turn, endures his physical and emotional violence as a martyr. This shows that Mr. Brady fits well into the construction of the Irish family – being subordinate to the oppressive ideological apparatuses, but above his wife in terms of power. Essentially, although he is a failed husband, father and provider for the family, he takes it as his right to abuse his wife. This torment is so severe that it produces significant anxiety in Caithleen. "In fear and trembling I set off for school. I might meet him or else he might come home and kill Mama" (O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 9). Moreover, as Mr. Brady represents the typical Irish oppressive man and husband, so does Mrs. Brady represent the typical Irish woman and wife. Basically, she is a victim of her husband, but more broadly, she is a victim of Irish society.

> She labors night and day to make ends meet and maintain some semblance of order over her household, yet she cannot forestall the family's financial ruin, nor can she protect herself and daughter from the more immediate threat posed by her reprobate husband – the threat of physical abuse. (Morgan, *Landscape of Female Suffering* 459)

Thus, it may be said that along with their other roles within the family, women in mid-century Ireland were often also obligated to endure their husbands' torture. In other words, they had to be martyrs, victims who sacrifice themselves for the good of the family.

Mr. Brennan, on the other hand, represents a different kind of father and an alternative to the Irish man that Mr. Brady represents. Of course, he still abides to the traditional roles that he is assigned, but it seems that he is able to find a balance between the way that he is expected to behave and the way that he truly wants to behave, without resorting to alcoholism and violence. In fact, he seems to fulfil the role of a reasonable man. He protects Caithleen from her father and he understands that the girls had a good reason to get expelled, but still he knows that he should punish them. As a veterinarian, he is a highly regarded member of the community, yet it could not be said that he feels fulfilled.

> And it seemed to me that life was a disappointment to him. The years of driving over bad roads at night, crossing fields with the light of a lantern to reach some sick beast in a drafty outhouse, had been a waste. Mr. Brennan had not found happiness, neither in his wife nor in his children. (*The Trilogy,* 110).

Interestingly, within the Brennan family, it is Martha who does most damage to the family. She represents herself as a martyr, resenting the fact that she married Mr. Brennan and abandoned her career as a ballet dancer. Yet, as Elieen Morgan points out: "Her husband is neither alcoholic nor violent, although she is both, and his veterinary business more than adequately provides for the family; in fact, it even allows for a live-in maid" (*Landscape of Female Suffering,* 460).

While both girls are influenced by their fathers, it is through their mothers' behaviours that they develop their own identity and behaviour. As Elieen Morgan says: "The differences between the two mother-daughter relationships go a long way toward explaining Caithleen's and Baba's contrasting personalities: Caithleen is tenderhearted and naïve, whereas Baba is precocious and jaded" (461). It may be said that it is because of the very fact that their parents'

roles are reversed - Martha being the damaging member in the Brennan family and Mr. Brady in the Brady family – that the girls have opposing personalities. Yet what is interesting is that the Brannan family is an unusual type of Irish family. Namely, not many women in rural Irish families would dare act the way in which Martha acts because their husbands would not let them. Martha, on the other hand, having a level-headed husband, can certainly afford to openly act as a martyr. This is why Baba is a unique girl as well. She is sharp-tongued and sassy because she sees her mother behaving like this. This is also why, when compared to Caithleen, Baba's narration is refreshing – one simply wouldn't expect an Irish girl from the countryside to swear, be so direct and insensitive, yet so true to herself and her goals.

4. Irish husbands

Another comparison which has to be made when discussing the male characters in *The Trilogy* is the one between two different kinds of husbands – Eugene and Frank. As mentioned before, in the last novel of *The Trilogy, Girls in Their Married Bliss,* we find that both girls are married. The title is ironic because, while both girls' ultimate goal is to get married, when they actually do it, they find that it is not all what they have hoped for. In fact, when O'Brien talks about why she uses two heroines, she states that "Kate was looking for love, Baba was looking for money." (*Why Irish Heroines).* Thus, both girls intend on getting those things from their marriage. Baba actually achieves her goal by marrying a rich builder called Frank. Yet this relationship is far from blissful since Frank cannot satisfy her and she sleeps around to compensate. On the other hand, Caithleen fails her goals. As a young girl, she idealised marriage, but now she experiences the harsh reality of it. She marries Eugene Gaillard, the man with whom she is romantically involved in the previous novel, but their marriage is not romantic at all and she resorts to having a lover. This breaks their marriage and Eugene divorces her and

even takes their son from her. After this, she is left in an even worse state than when they were together.

Eugene Gaillard is not the husband that Caithleen hopes for because he constantly acts as though he is annoyed by her. As mentioned before, he is at first delighted by her country-girl innocence and naivety, but soon starts resenting her behaviour. He sees himself as being superior to her, both intellectually and in regards to the amount of worldly-knowledge possessed. The fact that they marry only makes things worse because they have to live together and therefore spend most of their time together. For Caithleen, his treatment of her is something that destroys any romantic feeling for him. As Eileen Morgan states: "His domineering ways make their home a prison, causing her to search for extramarital gratification (as does every other frustrated wife in the Trilogy)" (463). After he breaks up with her, she still tries to make him take her back, but at the same time she hopes for a new man who will fulfil her needs. Eugene, meanwhile tries to avoid her and stay as distant from her as possible. When he cannot bare her anymore, he flees with their son and their housekeeper Maura (who is now his girlfriend) to Fiji. In the letter he writes to Caithleen after they had left, he sums up his feelings towards her in the most accurate way yet:

> He outlined her faults, did it so thoroughly, so intelligently, that half the time she found herself nodding, agreeing with him, the words scratched out with care, with cruelty, indisputable final words –"Vain, immoral, mean-minded, hardhearted, weak, self-destructive, unmaternal. (O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 504).

On the other hand, Frank Durack is a different kind of husband. He is a wealthy builder, which is why Baba marries him. His appearance is anything but attractive and he is impotent. This is what drives Baba to constantly pursue and get involved with other men. Unlike Eugene, who is always calm, passive and condescending, Frank is quick to violence and he often shouts and throws things at Baba. It might be said that their marriage works better than Eugene and

Caithleen's. There are two reasons for this: Baba is smarter than Frank and can therefore manipulate him, and she does not deny that she is only in it for the money. This may be observed through the episode where Frank finds out that she had an affair and that she is pregnant with someone else. At first he starts raging, shouting and throwing things at her, but ultimately does not end the marriage. Instead, he returns three days later and confesses to Baba that he had been to a brothel and that they are now even. Namely, this is exactly what Baba wants him to do: she is not concerned that he slept with another woman. Her only concern is that he does not leave her. She even manipulates him into feeling remorse: ""Isn't it a fact that I gave you everything you want?" "It's common knowledge," I said. That worked terrific. Instantaneous. Remorse. He began to cry harder, but it was collapse and not temper that invoked the tears" (O'Brien, *The Trilogy* 470). Therefore, it may be said that because she does not idealise marriage as a romantic bond, she has a more stable marriage. "How does Baba avoid the trap of romanticizing her own misery and relying on men to give her life meaning? She does so primarily through self-reliance and liberal exercise of her ironic wit, which since childhood had developed in reaction to Kate's tragic tendencies." (Morgan 465).

5. Irish lovers

In mid-century Ireland, sexual relationships outside of marriage were greatly frowned upon. These were, of course, stigmatised in Irish society through the Ideological State Apparatuses of Church and Family. Namely, from the Church's perspective, a sexual relationship outside of wedlock is considered a great sin. On the other hand, since the family (consisting of the husband and the wife) was considered to be the integral unit of Irish society, a relationship which did not conform to this ideal was viewed as harmful and therefore intolerable. Given the potential consequences which women faced if they were to get caught in

an extra-marital relationship, it is not surprising that such relationships were always kept as secret as possible. Namely, as Diedre McGowan states

> Women engaging in sexual activity outside marriage could find themselves committed to the institutional care of the Church. Where such liaisons resulted in pregnancy, women were often secreted in Irish mother and baby homes, or sent to England to give birth and have their babies adopted. (40)

Therefore, the secrecy with which Caithleen and her lovers treat their relationships is not at all surprising. When it comes to Baba, she is much more casual in such affairs, but this may be attributed to her overall casual personality.

In *The Trilogy*, Mr. Gentleman is having an obviously forbidden relationship with the still teenage Caithleen. He is an older Frenchman whose real name is de Maurier, but was given his nickname due to the locals' inability to pronounce his real name and also because of the fact that he looks and behaves like a 'real gentleman'. Although he is married, his wife is rarely mentioned in *The Trilogy*. Nevertheless, her existence provides an additional dramatic effect to the story. Although a foreigner, Mr. Gentleman is accepted into Irish society. This may be because he is always very polite and already well-integrated into it or because he is quite wealthy. As mentioned before, what attracts Caithleen to Mr. Gentleman is both the fact that he is not Irish, but another important factor is that he is much older than her. Namely, both of these reasons seem to stem from her father's abuse. After experiencing the way in which her father treats her mother and herself, Caithleen is determined to find someone who is entirely different from her father, which also means someone who is not Irish. As for the age difference, this may be explained by her searching for a better father-figure.

> O'Brien's writing revels in the young woman's fetishisation of the outward symbols of Mr. Gentleman's sophisticated otherness: his handsome car, his foreign accent, thin cool mouth, even temper and genteel aura of culture, all of which lie in diametric opposition

> to the emotional mayhem her early life has prepared her to expect from men. (McBride, *The Rebel Daughter*).

Of course, the relationship between Caithleen and Mr. Gentleman is always kept as secret as possible. Namely, it is not only because of the fact that they are involved in an illicit relationship, but, more significantly, because their age difference is an even more serious taboo. Consequently, it is when Mr. Gentleman's wife finds out about their relationship that he finally breaks up with Caithleen. In fact, when they meet again after a few years, Mr. Gentleman acts as though he regrets ever entering into a relationship with Caithleen.

After the totally inappropriate love affair with Mr. Gentleman ends, Caithleen finds yet another older, foreign and married man. Eugene Galliard is an English movie producer who lived in a variety of places all over the world. He is at first delighted by Caithleen's simple and rural behaviour. In fact, he sees Caithleen as an escape from his usual highly-educated, experienced and ultimately exhausting company. Yet he soon finds her traits to be annoying. She cannot participate in the conversations which he has with his friends and she does not stimulate his intelligence. This is one of the reasons why they eventually drift apart. In the last part of *The Trilogy*, we find that Eugene and Caithleen are married, but they soon break up. While their relationship never could have worked because they are far from a good match, what finally ended it was Eugene's realisation that Caithleen is cheating on him.

Although Eugene has got much in common with Mr. Gentleman and although they both fit perfectly into Caithleen's ideal of a man, there are still some significant ways in which they are different. Namely, what might be the most significant difference is that Eugene belongs to a more liberal generation and he has travelled much more than Mr. Gentleman. Consequently, although Mr. Gentleman is a foreigner, he can relate to the state of mind of the people in his society. On the other hand, because he has travelled around the world and worked with many different people, Eugene is able to distance himself from the traditionalist culture which

dominates Ireland. For example, he finds no need for religion and even mocks Caithleen for going to mass. “I could see Eugene’s bright eyes mocking me, “Only egomaniacs see Christ as God come especially to save them. Christ is the emanation of goodness from all men”” (O’Brien, *The Trilogy* 328). What is more, Eugene does not conform to the ideal of the family as an integral unit of society. This is evident by the fact that he is separated from his wife and child when he starts living with Caithleen. He is not in a hurry to marry Caithleen either, although he buys her a ring in order to delude the locals who find it scandalous that they are an unmarried couple living together.

Caithleen sees both of these characters as the embodiment of her ideals of love: “She also conceives of her partner as godlike, describing Eugene Gaillard as her new deity, recalling the power dynamics of her relationship to Mr. Gentleman” (Weston 96). It could be said that Caithleen is naïve when it comes to searching for love. She manages to find two men who are perfect for what she desires, but both relationships end miserably. On the other hand, Baba is much more open-minded and true to herself when it comes to having extra-marital affairs. In fact, she seems as though she has little concern for the stigma around the subject. When the girls come to Dublin, she regularly goes to dates with different men and often does so just for the food. In fact, before she gets married to Frank, she only dates men for material gains and out of vanity. “It was a blue, flashy car and the slogans were in silver. Baba heard him honk and she looked out to see what kind of car he had” (*The Trilogy* 180). When she finally does marry Frank and fulfils her material needs, she keeps having extra-marital affairs because her husband cannot satisfy her. Yet, when she gets pregnant from one of her affairs, she does what many Irish women would do in that situation – she tries to induce ~~a~~bortion. She does this because she knows that if her husband does not accept the child (and this rarely happens to illegitimate children in Irish society), she will have to put it up for adoption and not only be separated from her child for the rest of her life, but also be stigmatized by Irish society. Luckily

for her, though, Frank agrees to take the child as his own, although this is not expected of him at all considering his upbringing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although *The Trilogy* is centred around the two female heroines, an insight into the portrayal of the male characters is also something which is, at least, worth exploring. We learn that Ireland in the 1950s and 60s is a country filled with repression and that very few of its citizens are exempt of this. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the situation was much worse for women than for men, as they were at the bottom of this repressive hierarchy. Furthermore, we may observe that Mr. Brennan is the character which represents the worst in Irish society. He is a bigoted, alcoholic, intolerant and narrow-minded man and it is because of him, and therefore because she is surrounded by the worst that Ireland has to offer, that Caithleen decides to leave rural Ireland. Moreover, a comparison is made between the two types of male lovers which feature in this story and we learn that neither of them are as perfect as Caithleen first hopes they are. We also find out that both of them are much older than her and are foreigners, which is as if Caithleen is looking for a father figure. Moreover, we encounter two kinds of husbands portrayed in *The Trilogy*: Frank is wealthy, violent, but easy to control, which is the kind of man that Baba wants; and Eugene is calm, but quite passive-aggressive, which are more compatible traits to Caithleen's. Yet, neither of these husbands ultimately provide a solution all the girls' problems, as they initially hoped. Lastly, an analysis of the less important characters has been conducted. These characters are mainly used to show different kinds of relationships with the two heroines and to show different kinds of members of society.

To conclude, it may be argued that *The Country Girls Trilogy* is a brilliant piece of literary work. This is achieved by taking the reader through the lives of the two heroines, showing their inner thoughts, emotions and behaviour. For example, showing Caithleen's anxiety when she expects her drunken father to come home, or the way she thinks about the nuns in the convent. It also explores a naïve quest for romance which never seems to be fulfilled. What is most important, it displays Ireland's repressive force over its people, where the individual's freedom is neglected through the power of the Church, State and Family. It may even be even argued that this repressive force is the driving force behind this whole story. Namely, all the characters behave according to certain strict rules. For example, Mr. Brennan and Mrs. Brennan blindly obey social norms, the girls want more than anything to escape from such a society, and Eugene hates living in Ireland because he has gained some worldly wisdom while travelling around the world and finds Irish society backward. It may be thus said that *The Country Girls Trilogy* functions among other things, as a comment and an accurate description of the socio-political situation in Ireland in the 1950s and 60s which makes it a valuable part of the Irish literary corpus.

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Analysis of Male Protagonists in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy:*

Summary and key words:

This paper analyses male characters in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* in the light of Louis' Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses. It focuses on male protagonists, despite the fact that the two main characters are female, exactly because this kind of analysis is mostly absent from Edna O'Brien's scholarship. The first chapter provides the social and political context of mid-century Ireland and the second one provides a general insight into O'Brien's portrayal of male characters in the books. The main body of the text explores the main roles of male protagonists in *The Trilogy*: the father, the husband and the lover and how they interact with the female heroines.

Key words: Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls Trilogy,* male characters, Althusser, Ideological State Apparatus, patriarchy

Analiza muških likova u *The Country Girls Trilogy* Edne O'Brien

Zaključak i ključne riječi:

Ovaj rad analizira muške likove u *Country Girls Trilogy* spisateljice Edne O'Brien koristeći teoriju Louisa Althussera o ideološkim državnim aparatima. Usredotočen je na muške likove, bez obzira na činjenicu da su dvije glavne junakinje ženskog roda, upravo zato što takva analiza uglavnom nedostaje u opusu Edne O'Brien. Prvi ulomak daje socijalni i politički kontekst Irske iz sredine 20. stoljeća, a drugi ulomak pokazuje kako Edna O'Brien općenito tretira likove u *Trilogiji*. Preostali ulomci iz glavnog djela teksta bave se najbitnijim ulogama muških protagonista: očevima, muževima i ljubavnicima te njihovom interakcijom s ženskim junakinjama.

Ključne riječi: Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls Trilogy,* muški likovi, Althusser, ideološki državni aparati, patrijarhat