

THE COUNTRY GIRLS - EDNA O'BRIEN - Introduced by Jackie

Next Meeting - Friday 11th April.

THE ISLAND by VICTORIA HISLOP to be introduced by Marina.

1. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josephine Edna O'Brien (15 Dec 1930 - 27 July 2024) was an Irish novelist, memoirist, playwright, poet and short story writer.

O'Brien's work often revolves around the inner feelings of women and their problems relating to men and society as a whole as we witnessed in *The Country Girls*.

Focus of Edna O'Brien's career: "to chart and get inside the mind, soul, heart and emotion of girls in some form of restriction, some form of life that isn't easy but who finds a way to literally plough their way through and come out as winners of sorts."

In 2015 she was elected as Aosdána by her fellow artists and honoured with the title Saoi. She was the recipient of many other awards and honours, winning the Irish PEN award in 2001 and the biennial David Cohen Prize in 2019. Her short story collections *Saints and Sinners* won the 2011 Frank O'Connor International short story award, the world's richest prize for that genre.

2. ABOUT THE BOOK

The Country Girls was written in 1960. It is often credited with breaking silence on sexual matters and social issues during a repressive period in Ireland following World War II and was adapted into a 1983 film.

It was banned by the Irish censorship board and faced significant public disdain in Ireland.

3. PLOT SYNOPSIS

Cathleen (Cait/Kate) Brady and Bridget (Baba) Brennan are two young Irish country girls who have spent their childhood together. As they leave the safety of their convent school in search of life and love in the big city, they struggle to maintain their somewhat tumultuous relationship. Cait, dreamy and romantic, yearns for true love, while Baba just wants to experience the life of a single girl. Although they set out to conquer the world together, as their lives take unexpected turns Cait and Baba must ultimately learn to find their own way.

4. DISCUSSION

- Enjoyed. Very well written, lovely descriptions in the narrative. Fascinating depiction of 1960's Ireland, which we all agreed seemed alien to our own experiences of that time.

- Relief to read after the last book choice. Thoroughly enjoyed. Having had experience of a Catholic Convent education themselves this club member could relate to some aspects talked about in the book

- Easy read, not demanding.

Lots of us found the majority of the characters frustrating.

- Interesting subject.

Shocked by the restrictive, deprived nature of Irish society - had no experience of anything like this growing up.

- Slow burner, not alot happens.

Growing up in a closeted environment. Restrictions of Catholic education.

Life was tough, sad existence.

Not a joyous read.

5. COMMON THREADS

BABA. - Needs slapping

Bully, Bitch

Knew what buttons to press

Insecure, manipulative

CAITLEEN. - Intelligent

Loved reading/poetry

May have carried on education if not for
influence .

Baba's bad

Deprived of love.

MR BRENNAN - Steady, hardworking, Stoic and Supportive.

HICKEY - Fond of each other. He gave her attention and friendship.

CAITLEEN'S MOTHER - What really happened to her? Did she really drown? Many thought there was evidence enough in the book to verify this.

MORALS OF MEN - Was Mr Gentleman really a gentleman? Or a paedophile?

Power of the male religious figures.

No respect for women who were left to do all the work, penniless and abused.

ALCOHOLISM - Loss of finances, home, broken relationships, abuse.

6. QUESTIONS

Could you relate to any of the characters?

A . No-one felt they could.

What was the supporting character and why?

A. Mr Brennan and Hickey (see discussion).

How did you feel about the ending?

A. Very sudden ending.

Some felt a rhythmic, gentle ending in tune with the story .

What was your favourite part of the book?

A. Caitleen's relationship with her mother.

The description of nature through Caitleen's eyes

Which scene struck with you the most?

A. The naked scene.

Cait allowing Baba to play with her mother's jewellery.

Baba giving Cait's mother's ring away.

In Joanna's house in Dublin.

Baba ruining the bedside table.

Baba turning Cait away the night of the party.

Baba pinching the bunch of lilac off Cait to give to the teacher.

Are there any characters to give advise to?

A. Both girls needed life advise. Caitleen should have realised the importance of her education.

How thought provoking did you find it?

A. We all agreed the book made for a very in depth discussion on numerous topics.

7. SCORES

7, 5, 8, 8, 7, 6, 6. OVERALL. 6