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**Learned Helplessness: Influence of Patriarchal
Violence in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy***

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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“The more we idealize the past, however, and refuse to acknowledge our childhood sufferings, the more we pass them on unconsciously to the next generation.”

– Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good*

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Abstract

Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* (1960) narrates Caithleen's family story with a violent and alcoholic father and an abused and depressed mother whose death leads her daughter's emotional damage to further. *The Lonely Girl* (1962) shows how Caithleen tries to heal this damage by engaging in various already doomed romantic relationships, the most important of them being her husband Eugene. In *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964) we see how Caithleen's persistent behaviour on trying to save this relationship heads her into a mental breakdown and, finally, in the *Epilogue* (1986) Caithleen's suicide is narrated through the voice of her friend Baba.

I offer, thus, a deeper psychoanalytic insight into Caithleen's character. I aim to argue that the violence caused in women's childhood conditions their adult lives. Parting from Caithleen's parental abuse and her mother's death, I explore the influence they play in Caithleen's decisions and romantic relationships together with the patriarchal socio-political, economic and religious environment of Ireland and how this leads her into suicide. With the psychoanalytic theories of John Bowlby and Donald W. Winnicott, I defend that Caithleen's emotional development gets interrupted due to her father's abuse and its consequences shape her attachment and romantic escapism. Secondly, I examine how the inability to recover from her mother's death and her recurrences consolidate her attachment and romantic delusion into adulthood and injure her psyche more. Lastly, I demonstrate the intrusive influence of Catholicism and patriarchy on women's lives to prove the depletion of Caithleen's selfhood and eventual suicide.

Keywords: Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls Trilogy*, Caithleen Brady, childhood trauma, psychoanalysis, feminism, gender roles, Catholicism, patriarchal abuse.

0. Introduction

0.1. Methodology

Abuse and power have usually gone hand-in-hand in history together with the conjunction of racial, economic, gender, sexual and religious privilege. Furthermore, this union gets stronger especially when its influence is exerted on minorities that do not conform to the established social norm of the time. Two of the most affected minorities throughout the history of modern Western society have been women and children. The combined impact that gender and sexual expectations, law, religion and economy pose converge in the patriarchal experience that has caused the legacy and autonomy of adult women to be compromised throughout centuries. As a result, being a female child in an abusive society that provides no resources gives rise to the creation of a traumatic cycle that future adult women, especially the Irish women represented in O'Brien's trilogy, will inherit.

Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* is no stranger to this issue and neither is the author. Born in 1930 in County Clare, Edna O'Brien soon faced the consequences and repercussions of publishing the first novel of her trilogy in 1960, *The Country Girls*, which was banned and burnt in her own birthplace. Following World War II, *The Country Girls Trilogy* is usually assumed to deal with the sexual awakening and exploration of two girls, Caithleen "Kate" Brady and Bridget "Baba" Brennan, who face the tests and adversities that come up against them in the rural Ireland of their time and later in Dublin and London.

The Country Girls (1960) narrates Caithleen's family's story with a violent and alcoholic father, whose abusive behaviour towards her daughter and wife leads not only Caithleen into an unhappy childhood but also Mrs Brady to her death, which will hinder

more Caithleen's development into a life-long, recurring and traumatic experience. *The Lonely Girl* (1962) shows how Caithleen tries to heal the damage done in her childhood by establishing a relationship with Eugene Gaillard, which will inevitably fail but she will desperately try to save. In *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964) we can observe how Caithleen's persistent behaviour on trying to save this (doomed) relationship leads her into a mental breakdown and, finally, in the *Epilogue* (1986) Caithleen's suicide is narrated through the voice of her friend Baba.

Several scholars have focused on the representation of Catholic Irish women's experience in these novels considering this trilogy a *Bildungsroman* or novel of maturation (Weston 2010: 87). Additionally, it has been said that the *Trilogy* criticises the well-known theme of the marriage plot by adapting the romantic plot to Caithleen's persona (Chase 2010: 99). Despite this, few seem to have discussed the influence of Caithleen's traumatic childhood experiences that resonate throughout the trilogy – her father's abuse and her mother's death –, which can be seen through the use of this romantic plot ingrained in her; as well as the constant remembrance of her childhood life which eventually results in her suicide, as stated in the *Epilogue* added in 1986. However, in spite of the few scholars who have commented on Caithleen's traumatic childhood and adulthood from a feminist perspective, not much has been researched in regards to how her psyche has been affected.

What my writing attempts to offer is a deeper psychoanalytic insight into Caithleen's character. I aim to argue, then, that the patriarchal violence caused in women's childhood conditions them later in their adult lives. To that end, I will analyse the influence of Irish culture on women, in aspects such as gender roles, the socio-political climate of the time together with the conservative policies of Catholicism. In addition, I will also analyse how this influence plays an important part in the psyche of

children and women. Thus, I aim to explore the influence of Caithleen's abuse from her father, her mother's death and the patriarchal socio-political, economic and conservative religious environment of Ireland on the decisions she makes and the relationships she establishes during *The Country Girls Trilogy*; additionally, I will explain why Caithleen's suicide was the only viable choice she could make. Therefore, a thorough reading of Caithleen Brady's life and trauma will be carried out by means of analysing her through a psychoanalytic and feminist perspective.

Firstly, the psychoanalytical theories of Donald W. Winnicott of the True and False Self and John Bowlby's attachment theory will be introduced so as to announce the psychoanalytical concepts that will be used during the analysis of Caithleen Brady's life. Secondly, the analysis of Caithleen's psyche and behaviour will start with the examination of her (traumatic) family origins in *The Country Girls*, followed by the consequences of these experiences that shape her attached and escapist behaviour towards romance with those around her (and especially with her husband) in *The Lonely Girl*, which "inculcates submission to a problematic, socially-constructed image of femininity" (Weston 2010: 83). Finally, with *Girls in Their Married Bliss* and the *Epilogue*, Caithleen's tragic demise will be analysed in order to show that rather than her being an isolated case she is part of a "collective cultural trauma" that "depletes [not only her but all women] of agency" (Weston 2010: 83).

0.2. John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's attachment theory, published in his trilogy *Attachment and Loss* (the revised 1982 edition, 1973, and 1980), is founded upon the concept that a new-born child is biologically and naturally drawn to seek physical and emotional closeness, comfort and love towards its caregivers and needs to develop an attachment with at least one of them in order to have a successful development. After World War II, Bowlby

described the behaviour of children he observed that had been separated from their parents. If the child was separated for too long, they would still crave the attention, love and interest of the parents, but feel that this may disappear at any moment. They would look for reassurance and get upset if it was not available at the time – this is the pattern of the ‘anxious attachment’. However, the child could feel so helpless that they would become detached, remote and cold in order to protect themselves and saw physical and emotional closeness dangerous and to be avoided – which describes the experience of the ‘avoidant attachment’. Lastly, the ‘disorganised or disoriented attachment’ describes the child exposing a mix of avoidant and resistant behaviours. Children with this type of attachment would be described as usually being disoriented or apprehensive in the presence of a caregiver.

With this, the focus of Bowlby’s thinking was about what happens to a child if there are too many difficulties in forming secure attachments. However, the consequences do not disappear once childhood has passed. They are life-long instead and, hence, each adult’s attachment that was present in their childhood gets written into their relationships once the developmental child stage passes.

0.3. Donald Winnicott’s True and False Selves

Donald Winnicott’s theory of the True Self and the False Self was introduced in ‘Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self’ (1960). Winnicott’s True Self is considered to be the original core of every human being unaltered by society’s demands and expectations; it is regarded as authenticity and liveliness, as having a real self. Generally, the child’s True Self is thought to be asocial and amoral, not socialised, so it is up to the child’s caregiver(s) to respond to its needs and socialise it so as to develop a sense of self during its next developmental phase.

At infancy, children do not view themselves as separate from their caregivers but when they start being socialised, repressing their desires and view themselves as separate from them, it is then when a False Self starts to develop. The False Self is the capacity that enables the child to behave according to the rules and demands of society. It is the part of us that has altered our behaviour, repressed feelings and pushed our needs aside to fit in with others. However negative this may sound Winnicott did not believe the False Self to have an unfavourable influence but quite the opposite, since he stated that the False Self's nature is that of a defensive one whose "function is to hide and protect the True Self" (1965: 142) from all the pernicious influences and attacks from society directed towards it.

Winnicott thought that to experience the privilege of a time when we do not have to bother with the feelings and opinions of our (childhood) caregivers and others is required in order to experience a healthy development. Unfortunately, when that cannot be the case children are then forced to comply at the expense of being and feeling themselves earlier than expected. Instead, an unhealthy False Self is created to help the child fulfil its unmet needs by using alternative means that seem fit to it. If such a case is given and persists into adulthood, depending on the upbringing and personality of the adult, independence can be relatively thwarted. The theory says that with the help of therapy one can be able to regress to the time when being one's True Self was necessary. Although the demand to be false never goes away, being true with the help of therapy would regularly make being false in adulthood more bearable.

1. The Beginning of the End

1.1. “Father – the crux of her dilemma”: Parental Abuse

According to Winnicott (1995: 21), the child’s view of the external world depends on its internal reality and how it is affected in a positive or negative manner by its most immediate environment. The child’s survival depends on it complying with its parents’ rules and it is believed that on its adolescence it usually begins to rebel. The child does so in order to break the tie that it firstly identified with, as an extension of its parents, by seeking its own values and moral beliefs, who it is and, eventually, the child becomes a fully independent individual.

Unfortunately, this case would only apply to a child whose development has progressed in a typical manner and such a situation could not be said to apply to Caithleen Brady. From the very first pages of *The Country Girls* one can observe how Caithleen’s mind and body is anxiously conditioned either by her father’s presence or absence, establishing with this fact that her attachment to him is certainly not a secure one:

I wakened quickly and sat up in bed abruptly. It is only when I am anxious that I waken easily and for a minute I did not know why my heart was beating faster than usual. Then I remembered. The old reason. He had not come home (O’Brien 1986: 3).

I ran down and stopped dead in the kitchen doorway, because there he was. There was my father, drunk, his hat pushed far back on his head and his white raincoat open. His face was red and fierce and angry. I knew that he would have to strike someone (O’Brien: 27).

Afterwards, we discover that the source of her anxiety has to do with the fact that her father abuses her and her mother. Because of this abuse in her childhood, Caithleen’s supposedly healthy development has been interrupted and, as a consequence, has been forced to create a False Self in order for her True Self to survive and for her unmet childhood needs to be somehow supplanted. This False Self previously mentioned,

though, may be considered to be an unhealthy False Self, since Caithleen is not a “creative and spontaneous being” (Winnicott 1965: 150). Moreover, Winnicott considered that a healthy individual has “the capacity of (...) liv[ing] in an area that is intermediate between the dream and the reality” (Winnicott: 150), an aspect that cannot certainly be observed in Caithleen since her False Self enables her romantic escapism:

Because her origins are in powerlessness and she knows no other way, Caithleen is especially vulnerable to the allure of the culturally constructed heterosexual romance script, which prescribes passivity for the woman and promises rescue and fulfilment in exchange for her autonomous self. Caithleen’s insistence on giving herself over to a man’s care, coupled with her tendency to choose men who hurt rather than protect her, ensures the reenactment of the dramas of childhood. What was paternal violence in the family romance becomes the hurtfulness of her partners (Weston 2010: 86).

This “hurtfulness of her partners” can be especially observed in her relationship with Eugene, who emotionally abuses Caithleen. Thus, Eugene and Caithleen’s relationship is not an example of a healthy relationship but a toxic (from Eugene’s side) and dependent one (from Caithleen’s side). Furthermore, their relationship seems to depict “a troubled parent-child bond, rather than a union between equals” (Nunes 2007: 42). This can be exemplified by the fact that “Eugene guard[s her] like a child, [teaches her] things, [gives her] books to read, and [later gives] pleasure to [her] body at night” (O’Brien 1986: 323). However as their relationship progresses, and contrary to Caithleen’s (or Kate’s¹) vision of romance, so does its inevitable end when she goes back to London after a fight with Eugene (O’Brien: 357-60). Despite this, Caithleen continues relying on this romantic script believing that every possible conflict she has ever had with Eugene will be solved by thinking that “once he saw [her] he would love [her] and want to protect [her] again” (O’Brien: 367).

¹ Eugene changes Caithleen’s name to ‘Kate’ in order to take her Irishness away (Barros-del Río 2018: 79) and as a way to metaphorically shape her identity.

Indeed, this “troubled parent-child bond” between Caithleen and Eugene could be the exemplification of what Carl Gustav Jung coined alongside Sigmund Freud as a ‘father complex’² on Caithleen’s part. According to Jung (1991: 4) “a positive father-complex (...) in women (...) induces the liveliest spiritual aspirations and interests”, which could be observed in Caithleen’s unquenchable romantic delusions. Because of her troubled relationship with her father, it could be said that she yearns for another (idyllic) father figure in other males, in Eugene in this case so as to solve all her problems and for him to love her unconditionally as she was not by her father. Nevertheless, despite Jung’s view being a plausible and applicable one to Caithleen’s character the theories of Bowlby and Winnicott used for the purpose of this work would come into conflict with it, since their theories focus more on the social aspect of an individual’s development – unlike Jung, who focuses more on the mystic side of an individual.

In addition to this, a look into Caithleen’s attachment towards her most immediate environment would have to be examined. According to Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al. 1978, cited in Molero et al. 2011: 514-5), one of the points she makes for an individual to have a healthy development is the quality of its attachment, together with the primary caretaker’s responses towards its child. Ainsworth establishes a set of characteristics that influence the quality of the attachment: parental, contextual, and the child’s characteristics. One of the characteristics that can be affirmed to have influenced the quality of Caithleen’s attachment is the contextual variable in which, as Ainsworth explains (Ainsworth et al.: 515), it consists on the quality of the marriage relationships,

² This concept refers to the mental disturbances of an individual due to its poor relationship with its father. Despite being coined by both Freud and Jung, the emphasis on Jung is made due to the fact that he believed that such complex could be observed in both males and females; unlike Freud, who focused on the male child as a part of his Oedipus complex.

conflicts in a romantic relationship, low family income and social support that exists in a family. In fact, this can be shown in her parents' abusive relationship, the patriarchal society she was born into, and her father's economic expenditure provoked by his laziness and alcoholism.

Another important variable is that of the parental characteristics, in which the upbringing conducts of the primary caretakers also have a significant importance. In Caithleen's case, her father's (abusive) upbringing behaviour negatively influences on the quality of her attachment on her childhood and later on her adulthood. According to Sedikides and Spencer (2007: 26), "when parents are unresponsive to their children's emotional needs, the children develop an insecure attachment style and come to believe that they are bad and unworthy of love". Hence, Caithleen not only feels "bad and unworthy of love" but exhibits the characteristics of someone apprehensive, insecure and who can be easily manipulated as well.

Because of this, it is the combination of her anxious attachment and the romantic script that enables her unhealthy False Self to gradually destroy her True Self. With the romantic script and the anxious attachment provoked by the traumatic experience of the abuse and later her mother's death, Caithleen uses this romantic escapism in a toxic manner in order to (unconsciously) destroy her True Self, even if her consciousness desires happiness. Still, she is not able to renounce this script as she thinks that running to Eugene (O'Brien 1986: 245-6) is running away from her father and all the pain he has caused her – when, actually, what she is doing is reliving that experience in her romantic relationship with Eugene.

1.2. "One sadness recalls another": Maternal Death

Regarding Caithleen's mother, the knowledge we have of her is narrated through the voice of her daughter. Through Caithleen's narration, we realise the problematic

situation her mother is in. Being subjected to an abusive husband and the patriarchal policies of Ireland together with the conservative and misogynistic institution of the Catholic Church, makes Mrs Brady's life an ongoing struggle that will continue until her death and live on her daughter as a generational problem.

This is intensified by the gender roles and expectations fostered by Catholicism. The fact that her mother's life is narrated through her daughter reinforces her lack of voice and submission both in the *Trilogy* and in society (Barros del Río 2003, cited in Salinas 2009: 716) and at the same time reinforces the roles that Irish women were supposed to represent as wives and mothers, as caregivers of the family and reproductive bodies. Mrs Brady not only takes care of the family and is beaten by her husband, but also works their only source of income, the farm, instead of him – whose drinking leads the Brady family into losing their income and home:

She was mashing a bucket of meal and potatoes; her head was lowered and she was crying into the hen food.
“Ah, that's life, some work and others spend,” she said as she went off toward the yard with the bucket. (...) Her right shoulder sloped more than her left from carrying buckets. She was dragged down from heavy work, working to keep the place going, and at nighttime making lampshades and fire screens to make the house prettier (O'Brien 1986: 8).

Furthermore, according to Ramírez (2009: 621) we can observe the gender role of the Virgin Mary in Mrs Brady. The Virgin Mary archetype in Irish Catholic culture focused on the idea that the internal organisation of the home revolved around the man, who took the lead like a sort of God. Accordingly, the function of the woman would be that of a mother, like a Virgin Mary whose role was to take care of the children, to suffer and do what was expected of her. Without a doubt, we can observe here a patriarchal hierarchy and how the image of women that Catholicism portrays is that of the suffering mother, which is not only demanded of Mrs Brady but of all women as well. Having suffered for her son's life, so does Mrs Brady for her daughter and herself because of

her husband's abuse towards them. She is described then by Caithleen as a sufferer: "Poor Mama, she was always a worrier" (O'Brien 1986: 6); likewise, Caithleen fears that one day she will come back home finding her mother dead: "In fear and trembling I set off to school. I might meet him on the way or else he might come and kill Mama. (...) I was always afraid that my mother would die while I was at school" (O'Brien: 9).

Caithleen's mother was to her "the best mama in the world" (O'Brien: 6) and the fact that how she died makes her unable to "have a grave for [Caithleen] to put flowers on" (O'Brien: 45) worsens Caithleen's psyche. For this reason it is not strange that, because of the close nature of her attachment with her mother, her death deeply affects her (O'Brien: 41), "exacerbate[s] preexisting problems and generate[s] maladaptive patterns that take on a life of their own" (Gaensbauer and Jordan 2009: 972):

As Tamsin Hargreaves argues, "O'Brien's early writing painfully articulates this fundamental problem of loss of self... Because this psychological umbilical cord between mother and child leaves Caithleen weak and dependent, she is, upon her mother's death, stranded at an infantile emotional level and condemned to carry a painful sense of loss and need throughout her life" (...). Hargreaves aptly describes O'Brien's novels as "finely written psychodramas in which the protagonists desperately attempt to replace the safety and wholeness, the sense of identity and meaning found with the mother" (Hargreaves 1988, cited in Cahalan 1995: 61).

Her mother will be a constant and paramount presence in her mind through the narration of her memories with her and on her relationships with men: "Mama had protested too agonizingly all through the windy years. But kisses were beautiful. [Mr Gentleman's] kisses. On the mouth, and on the eyelids, and on the neck when he lifted up the mane of hair" (O'Brien 1986: 145); also as a self-judging force: "'What'll drink?' I asked, and distantly somewhere in my head I heard my mother's voice accusing me, and I saw her shake her finger at me. There were tears in her eyes. Tears of reproach" (O'Brien: 147). Moreover, this tragic experience increases her unhealthy False Self's strength and slowly depletes her of any possibility of recovering from trauma even after four years and forgetting the day of her death:

“What date is it, Joanna?” [Gustav] asked.
(...) “May 15,” she said, and I felt myself go cold. (...) There on the very first page under the anniversaries was a memorium for my mother. Four years. Four short years and I had forgotten the date of her death; at least I had overlooked it! I felt that wherever she was she had stopped loving me, and I went out of the room crying. It was worse to think that he had remembered. I recalled it in my head, the short, simple insertion, signed with my father’s name (O’Brien: 170).

This tragic fact brings to light her inability to recover from the trauma of her mother’s death since, as Bowlby (1980: 61) states, “[t]he unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy” and as we have observed, in Caithleen’s case that is obviously not possible. Additionally, it poses a point of no return when it comes to her previous anxious attachment towards her mother in her childhood since this shows how it has consolidated itself as an anxious one in her adulthood as well.

2. Church, State and Selfhood

2.1. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”

The *Trilogy*, especially Caithleen Brady’s naiveté, is said to “dismantle the ideological pillars of the new Irish Republic” and “break with the well-worn cliché of marital bliss, which implies that both its form and content are uncomfortable” (Barros-del Río 2018: 83) – needless to say, O’Brien forced herself into exile in London due to the repercussions of her books. The combination of Church and State did not make it easier for any woman who was already affected by patriarchy itself. Like this, it consolidated its power with the help and creation of restrictive laws against women.

With the creation of the 1937 Irish Constitution³, laws as the prohibition of abortion and divorce were made possible, endangering even more the lives of millions

³ Also *Bunreacht na hÉireann* in Irish.

of Irish women who were already at risk. Moreover, other aspects regarding the role of women as mothers and wives were legally stated in the Constitution leaving women who were already affected by the backward laws of their society completely helpless since, if we add their economic dependence towards men, the complication on Irish women's rights was to be assured:

The division between commodity in the capitalist economy and reproduction of human beings and their ability to labor has long been identified by feminists as a fundamental process in women's subordination in capitalist societies. This organization of social life carries contradictory potentials: production is organized around goals of capital accumulation, not around meeting the reproductive and survival needs of people. Women have been subordinate in both domains, held responsible for unpaid reproductive labor and consigned to positions with less power and lower pay than men within the sphere of production. Men (...) built the factories and railroads, and managed the developing capitalist enterprises. Thus, the structural and ideological division between production and reproduction was shaped along lines of gender and contributed to continuing gendered inequalities (Acker 2004: 23-4).

Nevertheless, even if their roles as wives and mothers were to be fulfilled, their voices were to be completely silenced regarding their rights upon their offspring, such as Caithleen was when she tried to get her son back from Eugene when he took him to Fiji without consulting her: "She asked why she hadn't been consulted, and the clerk said that a mother's signature was not necessary for such a thing" (O'Brien 1986: 503). Furthermore, education is severely lacking as well, as seen in Caithleen according to Baba when it is discovered that Baba is pregnant:

"Get the preg data," I said, because she's brighter than me in educational matters. She began to read about Fallopian tubes and raised her head from the printed page to tell me she knew a woman who had two and having two meant you could have two children by two different men at the same time. (...) I took the book out of her hand and looked up under A for Abortion. They didn't even consider that word (O'Brien: 460-1).

Likewise, this also shows the medical oppression women were bound to like the type Baba feels when going to the gynaecologist: "'Relax,' he said, sort of bullying then. Relax! I was thinking of women and all they have to put up with, not just washing nappies or not being able to be high-court judges, but all this. All this poking and

probing and hurt (...). Baba's doctor, then, states that "God has fructified [her] womb." (O'Brien: 473), showing with this that the high influence of Catholicism is not only in the political sphere but even in the medical sphere as well.

The existence of all these circumstances enables the Irish society not to illustrate women and Caitheleen on how to face and oppose the trauma of their lives. In Caitheleen's case it shows on how she has to seek for the love and security she did not have as a child in other people as an adult woman:

[Caitheleen] also lacks the necessary social support to cope with trauma, and its action has constructed her engagement with the past as the repetition of pain, turning her life into one lived in fantasy and self-destruction. (...) [C]hallenges to her development happen within a cultural context that traumatized her in childhood and that does not support her as a young adult woman who is not an object but an emerging subject (Weston 2016: 94).

Meanwhile, in the case of every Irish woman it shows on how the intrusion of the State and the Church into women's private lives and bodies affects their public life and their female descendants, creating a cycle of generational violence. This lack of "social support" previously mentioned can also be observed when Caitheleen and Baba both go to a convent boarding school. From the very first moment they arrive at the convent they are received with specific expectations: "The new girls won't know this, but our convent has always been proud of its modesty. Our girls, above anything else, are good and wholesome and modest. One expression of modesty is the way a girl dresses and undresses. She should do with decorum and modesty" (O'Brien 1986: 68) – which exposes the moralistic and conservative rigidity of the convent that Caitheleen and Baba will have to face during their time there.

Caitheleen, though, seems to experience a sense of security, which shows her emotional dependency towards others and even the transference of her attachment onto an institution, towards a religious institution that, despite its repressive and conservative rules, provides her with a sense of communal unity and belonging. However, this sense

of security, communal unity and belonging is nothing but a mere illusion, as exemplified when Caithleen and Baba have their first lunch and they are served with spoiled food – showing with this the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church regarding their preachments and beliefs:

My meat was brutal-looking and it had a faint smell as if gone off. I sniffed it again and knew that I couldn't eat it.

(...) Sister Margaret had just come into the refectory and was standing at the head of the table surveying the plates. I was cutting my cabbage, and seeing something black in it, I lifted some out onto my bread plate.

“Caithleen Brady, why don't you eat your cabbage?” she asked.

“There's a fly in it, Sister,” I said. It was a slug really, but I didn't like to hurt her feelings.

“Eat your cabbage, please.” She stood there while I put forkfuls into my mouth and swallowed it whole. I thought I might be sick (O'Brien: 75-6).

2.2. Unity with Others

According to Nunes (2007: 44), “[d]espite her ostensible adulthood, Kate's dependence on others – first her mother, then Eugene, and now Cash – to complete her identity detains her in a perpetual child-like state of vulnerability”. It will be this desire “to complete her identity” through her relationships with others what will lead her into the beginning of a one-way trip into suicide and, thus, the destruction of her True Self.

On the passages following Mrs Brady's death, she is mentioned through Caithleen's memories. As stated before, Caithleen displays an anxious attachment in her childhood with her mother (and others) that settles into adulthood. Thus, the maintenance of this attachment into adulthood still exists after her mother's death due to the fact of Caithleen's desire for “unity with her dead mother” (Weston 2016: 89). This can be exemplified when Caithleen receives Eugene's letter response about her affair with another man:

His investment in her had been too much. She would never be free of the responsibility for the waste of his life. She read it twice and let it go into the Thames, where she was standing once again. Another evening. The tidemarks lost in the gloom. Too late. She knew the letter by heart, like a prayer. If only she had

the decency to kill herself. Water was the gentlest way to suicide (O'Brien 1986: 447).

If we take into consideration that Caithleen's mother drowned in a lake, this passage not only foreshadows Caithleen's eventual death in the *Epilogue*, but also discloses Caithleen's desire to unite with her mother as previously mentioned, to become her. Still, this unchanging bond that Caithleen had with her mother was not always this way, as it progressively moved from "the maternal idealisation of the child to the matrophobia⁴ of the adult daughter" (Mooney 2009, cited in D'hoker 2016: 148). An example of matrophobia can be seen when Caithleen thinks about her mother after going to the psychiatrist:

Hills brought a sudden thought of her mother, and she felt the first flash of dislike she had ever experienced for that dead, overworked woman. Her mother's kindness and her mother's accidental drowning had always given her a mantle of perfection. Kate's love had been unchanged and everlasting, like the wax flowers under domes which would have been on her grave if she'd had one. Now suddenly she saw that woman in a different light. A self-appointed martyr. A blackmailer. Stitching the cord back on. Smothering her one child in loathsome, sponge-soft, pamper love (O'Brien 1986: 476-7).

This thinking could be accounted as a common phase in a typical child's developmental stage: the identification of the child as one with its parents and the rebellion that upon the child's adulthood ceases to be and bonds with its parents again but from a place of found individuality and identity this time.

As a matter of fact, Caithleen's matrophobic feelings of rejection towards her mother leaves room for Jung's view of them being part of a negative 'mother-complex'⁵, in which Caithleen experiences an "overwhelming resistance to maternal supremacy, often to the exclusion of all else" (1991: 90) and "knows what she does not want, but is usually at sea as to what she would choose as her own fate" (1991: 91).

⁴ Matrophobia is the fear of becoming one's mother.

⁵ As in the 'father complex', the 'mother complex' refers as well to the mental disturbances of an individual, only due to its poor relationship with its mother.

Taking Jung's view into account, this could be accounted as the generational transference of gender roles and oppression from mother to daughter in the patriarchal Irish society and Caithleen's rejection of them, her refusal to end up in a situation nearly as similar as her mother's. Of course, as previously mentioned with the 'father complex', this concept's application to Caithleen's case seems eligible but only in a work purpose where both the theories of Bowlby, Winnicott and Jung would not differ.

Still, Caithleen's narration of these words are not stated as a child, which shows the damage done to her True Self as a child and the emotional regression she will subsequently experience by wanting to identify with her mother again as one, by desiring to become one with her in death. Certainly, this desire to become one with can be seen as a desire to obliterate herself, as a form of self-erasure that is also present in her relationship with Eugene. Instances of this can be observed through her tendency towards romantic escapism and during sex with Eugene, which "produces in Kate a sensation of fulfilled identity evoking the sufficiency she enjoyed under her mother's assiduous care, and pointing to Kate's security in the similarly unconditional quality of Eugene's allegiance to her" (Nunes 2007: 42). Nonetheless, she will later state that "[u]p to then [she] thought that being one with [Eugene] in bed meant being one with him in life, but [she] knew now that [she] was mistaken, and that lovers are strangers in between times" (O'Brien 1986: 356). In spite of this, though, she will still seek to unite herself with others, only this time by having an affair with another man. It is when it is discovered that Caithleen had an affair and the previously removal of her son that Caithleen's life takes a turning point regarding her already deteriorated mental health.

Winnicott (1995: 173) believes that a deprived child is a sick child that can heal and improve through a change of environment. When this change is done, the child is able to experiment anger and hatred because of its deprivation and it is only then when

the child can heal. However, if a change of a better environment is not available anger and hate are repressed (Winnicott 1995: 175) such as in Caithleen's case. Therefore, her repressed anger and hatred from her childhood are transferred into her adulthood and can be observed in her mental breakdown when she meets Eugene at a railway station (O'Brien 1986: 453-8):

[S]omething broke loose inside her and she started to scream and bang the glass that covered the numbered face. She hurled insults at it and poured into it all the thoughts that had been in her brain for months. She lashed out with words and with her fists and heard glass break and people run and say urgent things. She was held down (...) until the ambulance came, and she came to, back to reality (...) in the casualty department of a large hospital. At first she only stared at the bandages on her hands (...). Then she remembered, first one thing, and then another: how he had come, how he had gone; she threaded their conversation together, (...) then her heart beating madly before the outburst of violence. Every detail was crammed into a capsule, so small and tight and contained that she would carry it with her forever (O'Brien: 457).

This burst of repressed rage, though, is previously foreshadowed just after Eugene's response letter to Caithleen's admission of her affair: "Next day she said 'Shit' to a bus conductor who refused her change of a pound. She knew everything that was happening but could not help herself" (O'Brien: 449). With this in mind, this shows how her already wounded True Self is trying to emerge from the chains and constraints of societal pressures and her current private circumstances. Besides, the removal of her son contributes to the unfulfilled desire to unite with others and her decision to sterilise herself:

The sheer intensity of Kate's drive for integration ultimately results in tragedy. Eugene's sudden and unannounced removal of Cash to Fiji comprises for Kate "a big moment, the one when reality caught up with nightmare, the crest and the end" (503). Kate's decision to undergo a sterilization procedure shortly after being separated from her son comprises an effort to snuff out her own repeatedly disappointed desire, and points to the shattered condition of her aspirations toward fulfilled identity through union with another (...). Motherhood has failed Kate in that it has not furnished the sustained union with another by which she might determine herself" (Nunes 2007: 44).

All these experiences create a chain reaction that will make Caithleen take her own life and destroy her Self. Conversely, it will not be her True Self that will commit the act of

destruction but Caithleen's unhealthy False Self since the True Self's strength does not permit to do so due to its constant diminishment and mistreatment – preventing the True Self from taking any type of action against itself, thus paralysing it:

The False Self has as its main concern a search for conditions which will make it possible for the True Self to come to its own. If conditions cannot be found then there must be reorganized a new defence against exploitation of the True Self, and (...) then the (...) result is suicide. Suicide (...) is the destruction of the total self in avoidance of annihilation of the True Self. When suicide is the only defence left against betrayal of the True Self, then it becomes the lot of the False Self to organize the suicide. This, of course, involves its own destruction, but at the same time eliminates the need for its continued experience, since its function is the protection of the True Self from insult (Winnicott 1965: 143).

Therefore, having not been able to unite herself with others in life and the possibility of “annihilation of [her] True Self”, makes Caithleen's unhealthy False Self take action into not only destroying her True Self (and her False Self in the process) but also finally uniting Caithleen with her mother in death, to become her – offering like this “a reconciliation and a return to the original bond” (D'hoker 2016: 148) that was previously broken.

3. Conclusions and Further Research

The main purpose of this study has been to prove how women's adulthood is conditioned by the patriarchal violence caused in their childhood. O'Brien's portrayal of abuse within the home through the figure of Caithleen Brady has been analysed in order to show the epitome of patriarchal and misogynistic influence on women on the first stages of their development. Caithleen's creation of an unhealthy False Self due to the impediment of her Self's development in a healthy manner because of her father leads her to recreate the same behaviour patterns with her husband. Additionally, in this abusive childhood experience is where the foundations of her anxious attachment lay.

This research also reveals the great importance of Caithleen's mother in her life. Portrayed as the enduring Virgin Mary that suffers for her offspring and others, her tragic death and lack of grave worsen the conditions of Caithleen's True Self. Moreover, her mother's absence makes her unable to move on and heal by her being a recurrent presence and theme in the novels in the form of her brief matrophobic feelings towards her mother and the reconciliation of her bond with her.

In addition to this, the intrusion of the institution of the Catholic Church and the State in women's private and public lives has been demonstrated. Abortion and divorce prohibiting laws, economic dependence towards men due to women's expectations within the home and their lack of education makes it impossible for Caithleen and any woman to survive their trauma.

Furthermore, if we add onto the fact that Caithleen feels an intense desire to join her Self with others, it does not help to get over her trauma. However, in spite of consciously wanting to unite with others in order to be happy (as Caithleen believes), her True Self wishes to recover the original bond she had with her mother and free herself from the diminishment she suffers as appreciated in her mental breakdown. On failing to become one with others while being alive, she needs another bond so as to satisfy her desire to unite. To do so, her only option is to satisfy the desire to bond with her mother by committing suicide. In this way not only does she end up joining with and becoming her but, in order to avoid the weakened and battered True Self to be obliterated, so does her Self by being killed by the False Self in order for her True Self to stop suffering anymore. At the end, this shows the inevitability of Caithleen's suicide since she could not bear what was socially expected of her as a mother, wife and caregiver.

To conclude, it has not been within the scope of this work to further elaborate on not only Caithleen's but Irish women's public and private lives as well. As an instance, a topic of interest to examine could be other Irish gender role representations of women aside from the Virgin Mary in order to show an additional example of the intrusion of the Catholic Church onto the private and public spheres of women and how the influence of patriarchy, power and political commodification of bodies play an important role in these as well. Finally, it would also be interesting to comment on how the influence on these domains affects not only women's psyche and their relationships with other men but with other women, as the other main character in this trilogy, Baba, is affected by it and, thus, her relationship with Caithleen is affected as well. In the end, these societal issues show how power, abuse and privilege need to be subverted so as to achieve a fully egalitarian society in which every individual can live its truth without fear of being exposed to public shame and ending its life in return.

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