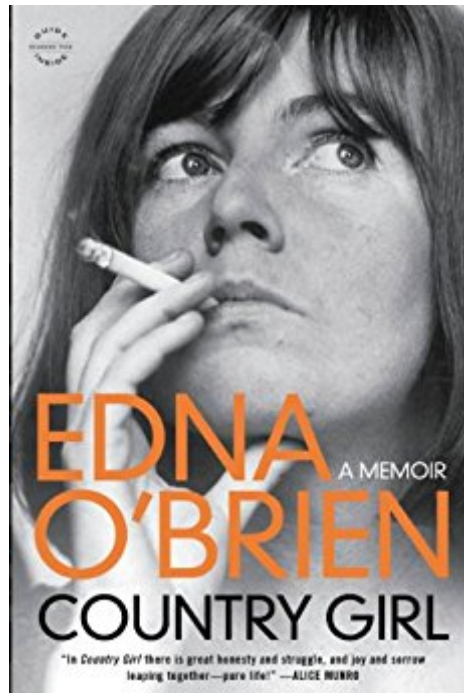




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Country Girl: A Memoir



Synopsis

"Country Girl is Edna O'Brien's exquisite account of her dashing, barrier-busting, up-and-down life."--National Public Radio

When Edna O'Brien's first novel, *The Country Girls*, was published in 1960, it so scandalized the O'Briens' local parish that the book was burned by its priest. O'Brien was undeterred and has since created a body of work that bears comparison with the best writing of the twentieth century. *Country Girl* brings us face-to-face with a life of high drama and contemplation. Starting with O'Brien's birth in a grand but deteriorating house in Ireland, her story moves through convent school to elopement, divorce, single-motherhood, the wild parties of the '60s in London, and encounters with Hollywood giants, pop stars, and literary titans. There is love and unrequited love, and the glamour of trips to America as a celebrated writer and the guest of Jackie Onassis and Hillary Clinton. *Country Girl* is a rich and heady accounting of the events, people, emotions, and landscape that have imprinted upon and enhanced one lifetime.

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Customer Reviews

This memoir seethes with life, an abundant life lived by a still vibrant Edna O'Brien. I really can't fault this memoir. Truly, it's wonderful; her sumptuous way with words (She has a tremendous vocabulary.) magnifies a sumptuous life filled with memories from Ireland to Singapore. By the way, O'Brien never complains or seems testy as we follow her glories and her travails-- from being a "country girl" to becoming a sophisticated author and a globally known personality. We read about her family, her schooling in Ireland, her first romance (a same sex crush), her escape from convent life (and a pharmacist's shop life) into the arms of her husband, who turns out to offer a tyranny of sorts (He's treated rather generously, I think, in this telling). We get fantastic descriptions of her homes (temporary and not) and their environs. We hear her guilt about being separated from her young boys. We suffer- a bit- with her when she has writer's block. We share her multitudinous friends and acquaintances (many of them authors) with her. Many lovers, too; this is an important part of who she is. (Some reviewers say that O'Brien name-drops a lot. I don't feel that this is the case. She describes these people, of course, as part of her life, which is full, but not in a way that appears to be bragging. Not pompously at all. Just part of who she is.) The author is a product of her (our) times but more than that. The times as seen through her eyes are lush and sparkle with the life she's lived and is living . One of the best memoirs I've read recently.

Bottom Line: The first time I read Edna O'Brien's *Country Girl, A Memoir* was several decades ago. I read it again more recently along with another of her novels and some short stories. I wanted to be refreshed on the work of a woman who had given me entre into the world of Ireland and women and left me feeling like I had experienced a time and place unknown to me. I find her memoirs lend the suspicion that her fiction was mostly her autobiography only better organized and written. *Country Girl, A Memoir* is a definite read for her fans, but I am not sure who else will like it. Ms O'Brien's lack of interest in writing this book is clear. Being a memoir it need not be any of the things a biography should be. Sequential, based on fact, complete all not here or not consistently. We do get what seems like her honest point of view about herself and her first husband, but the rest of her people who matter come in and out of focus or have their names obscured. For example there is a second husband, I think or maybe three, she is not as exacting in tell about her loves as the failed love that produced her children. That we only get her side of that first marriage is understandable. I am not certain that she intended for his every negative prediction about how Ms O'Brien would live and raise her kids would

prove true. Not to give away too much, she admits to a hedonistic lifestyle, it was the 1960s after all, and the kids are sent away to British Boarding schools. Her version of herself is better than these two facts suggest but for years at a time we read little of substance about her kids, and almost nothing about who they became as adults. The writing itself is in the school of assemble pieces as they emerge from a fog. Detailed set ups that trail into incomplete finishes. Too many famous names with too many of them passing by rather than listed for a reason. She will form friendships with many unlikely people including at least one I will not mention hoping to surprise you as it did me. Having finished *Country Girls*, I can say that the person rather than the events are informative about Edna O'Brien's inner self. I tend to believe she is telling us her truth, warts and all. I am not sure but that you would know her better from her fiction.

Edna O'Brien has led an interesting, if sometimes chaotic, life. For those who lived through the 50s, 60s and 70s, especially if you have lived in Ireland during the struggles of the IRA, this book is an added piece of that history. She is a great writer and keeps your interest in her personal tales by not going on too long about any one subject. Her memoir also illustrates how far women have come in their journey to be treated equal to men and to be allowed a say in their own fates, whatever they may be.

Having read O'Brien's "The Little Red Shoes" as our book club read for Feb '17 and following with several online reviews and links to some of her recent articles, I decided to read her autobiography. Both were similar with interesting, engaging beginnings but ending with many seemingly unrelated divergent stories. I had hoped to find a linear description of her development as a writer, but her story jumped around with little focus on writing but lots of name dropping - too often without any context as to why they were relevant to her life story. But no doubt she was popular as an intelligent, attractive single woman. Her recollection that the first books flowed easily from her experience affirms this reader's belief that nearly everyone has a compelling story to share. Her long career as a writer with lots of ups and downs colored by celebrity and travels while never quite finding Mr. Right reflects the reality that the interesting life is not always one that is safe, secure, and without emotional or financial turmoil. On this St. Patrick's Day, I toast Edna O'Brien as a fine example of female independence! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

I read this memoir after reading several of O'Brien's short stories which are quite autobiographical in

nature. I much preferred the short stories. They were magic woven from her life. It was flat to read the memoir after.

Edna O'Brien, now in her 80's, has shared with us many of her life experiences. Her prose is as lyrical and precise as poetry. I was surprised to learn of her harsh upbringing, her calamitous marriage, and her social-climbing. However, because the memoir was so well-written, I plan to read more of her books. I recommend the memoir to older women and writers.

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