



# The Little Red Chairs

*Edna O'Brien*

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When a man who calls himself a faith healer arrives in a small, west-coast Irish village, the community is soon under the spell of this charismatic stranger from the Balkans. One woman in particular, Fidelma McBride, becomes enthralled in a fatal attraction that leads to unimaginable consequences.

## The Little Red Chairs Details

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# From Reader Review The Little Red Chairs for online ebook

## Diane S ? says

Awesome writing, original idea for a plot, plucking the Butcher of Sarajevo down in a small Irish Village. Alas, after reading 50% I am abandon,g this one. I am too much of a wimpy reader, and the third very graphic description of violence has done me in. Others with stronger stomachs may take this on but not for me.

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## Margitte says

Just random notes:

The Bosnian war. Brutal, barbaric, shocking. Graphic.

The mores and values of an Irish community: good and bad.

A naive woman falls in love with a monster. She faces the consequences.

London: war refugees from different countries relate their stories.

A trial in The Hague concludes the book.

And I just close the book exhausted, traumatized, and walk away, just as unsentimental as the author presented the tale.

I need some air.

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## Ellie says

The Little Red Chairs begins in a small Irish village where Fidelma, a restless beauty, falls in love with the mysterious stranger, Vlad, a self-proclaimed "healer" who appears seemingly from nowhere. Fidelma, dissatisfied with her life and her marriage, begs Vlad to help her conceive a child. After she becomes pregnant, it is discovered that Vlad is an infamous war criminal (from the Bosnian war). She is brutally tortured by his enemies and rejected by her husband and the town in which she has lived her entire life.

Fidelma goes to London where she attempts to begin a new life. She feels like a double outsider: amongst the English because she is Irish and even with the other refugees, where she feels contaminated by her connection to Vlad.

O'Brien's writing is as gorgeous as ever. I first discovered her 30 years ago (with the wonderful The Country Girls) and her writing remains as lush and evocative as ever. Some of her themes remain the same as well- and remain fresh and interesting. The narrow-mindedness of small communities (no romanticism here) and

the question of whether innocence is over-rated and in fact a dangerous state are major themes in this book. The town's-and Fidelma's-naivete leave them exceptionally vulnerable to the malevolent Vlad. Fidelma's awakening and maturity are gained at a horrible cost.

The epigraph to the novel explains the title: "On the 6th of April 2012, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the start of the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces, 11,541 red chairs were laid out in rows along the 800 meters of the Sarajevo high street. One empty chair for every Sarajevan killed during the 1,425 days of siege. Six hundred and forty-three small chairs represented the children killed by snipers and the heavy artillery fired from the surrounding mountains." We know from the beginning that this is a tragic novel. The tragedy is expressed obliquely through one of Vlad's latest, almost inadvertent victims, Fidelma.

The book contains several scenes of graphic and disturbing violence. I found them difficult to read although necessary to the story. I felt that O'Brien's writing faltered in the first of these scenes and it was difficult to follow but that may be because she was reproducing the trauma and confusion of the victim.

I usually don't like descriptive passages of the environment (be it urban or nature) but O'Brien's were not only vividly depicted but seemed necessary insights into the characters very being.

Altogether a fascinating, beautifully written and disturbing work. Well worth reading.

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## **Sue says**

Excellent and ambitious novel. My first by O'Brien...definitely not my last. I am grateful to Constant Reader for this having been a group selection.

The title of this book is explained at the outset which definitely flavors one's reading.

*On the 6th of April 2012, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the start of the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces, 11,541 red chairs,were laid out in rows along the eight hundred metres of the Sarajevo high street. One empty chair for every Sarajevan killed during the 1,425 days of siege. Six hundred and forty-three small chairs represented the children killed by snipers and the heavy artillery fired from the surrounding mountains.*

As the story begins and a stranger enters the small Irish town of Cloonoila, this message should not be lost. O'Brien uses her own subtle and non-specific foreshadowing.

*Bearded and in a long dark coat and white gloves, he stands on the narrow bridge, looks down at the roaring current, then looks around, seemingly a little lost, his presence the single curiosity in the monotony of a winter evening in a freezing backwater that passes for a town*

*and is named Cloonoila.*

*Long afterwards there would be those who reported strange occurrences on that same winter evening; dogs barking crazily, as if there was thunder, and the sound of the nightingale, whose song and warblings were never heard so far west... (p 4)*

This new man will bring many types of change to this small community, change none of them could possibly foresee. He could not foresee.

This novel alternates moments of quiet beauty, thoughtful insight, and remembered depravity. A very interesting presentation. I'm struck by several elements of this book: in particular, the use of imagery of the natural world and the disjointed appearance of the narrative at times. This latter device may be an aspect of the story itself, a means of presenting/representing the emotional upheaval at work. At least it appears like that to me. Then I wonder...did the author plan this or did it evolve from the story?

There is much fracturing of community shown here...remembered incidents from the Balkans, incidents in Cloonoila, the disparate and variously fractured immigrant community of London, all searching for a home, one of them a refugee from that small Irish town.

*It was called the Centre and people from all over came in search of advice, then once a fortnight they gathered to share the stories of their fractured lives... They are there because they have nowhere else to go. Nobodies, mere numbers on paper or computer, the hunted, the haunted, the raped, the defeated, the mutilated, the banished, the flotsam of the world, unable to go home, wherever home is. (p 203)*

This novel is powerful, difficult, beautifully written, but also manages to introduce elements of hope into memories of some of mankind's worst moments and very current issues. It is timely and recommended because, as has been said before, we must never forget and we must always help the victims.

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## **Amanda says**

3.5 stars

Wow this is a tough one to rate. At 15% I almost abandoned this. Then I saw in another readers review that Juliet Stevenson was the audiobook narrator. As she is my favorite female narrator I decided to give the audio a go. I have seen several reviews that comment on the brutality of this and it is horribly brutal but that isn't why I was having problems. This reads (especially in the beginning) like a series of short stories or vignettes. The prose is breathtaking I had to rewind several times to just hear sentences again, which is not something I normally do. I think this was a really creative idea and beautifully written but something is missing. I just didn't quite come together in the end. And I will absolutely never look at a crow bar the same

way! The audio is totally worth listening to just to hear Juliet read the sentences.

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### **Nancy Oakes says**

It's tough to say everything I want to about this novel, because there's so much here worth talking about that I don't even know where to begin or how to condense my thoughts on this book into a goodreads-sized post. As much as I hate to do this, I think I'll link to my reading journal where I just begin to scratch its surface. No spoilers, and I will not divulge any more than is on the dustjacket blurb.

I will say that despite a few issues with this novel, I was completely engrossed in this book, which isn't really one story but many, and it is most certainly a book I would recommend without hesitation. It's also one where I don't understand the low reader ratings, but to each his/her own.

Here's the link.

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### **Susan Johnson says**

I waited three months on my library's waiting list to get this book and I am glad I did. I found it to be a very moving story about people who have lost everything and must find a new home and a new way to survive. It reminded me very much of Louise Erdrich's *LaRose* where people who have experienced tragedy must find a way to make a new life.

Fidelma McBride is a poor young woman who marries up. The exchange of a new position in life for marriage is not a satisfactory one for her. She falls under the spell of the new holistic doctor, Dr. Vlad. She makes some decisions that seems to work out for her but then go horribly, terribly wrong. It turns out Dr. Vlad is in hiding from a truly reprehensible past.

Horrific crimes are committed against her and the town turns against her. She relocates to London to deal with refugees and make a new home.

There are several points that bothered me:

1. Why did she go with the men when they came for her?
2. The ending with her husband, Jack.

I thought it was an amazing story about refugees and I sit here watching the Refugee Team at the Olympics, I am amazed at their stories and their resilience.

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### **Gary says**

Edna O'Brien's haunting new novel, her first in 10 years, draws its title from its epigraph: "On the 6th of

April 2012, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the start of the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces, 11,541 red chairs were laid out in rows along the 800 meters of the Sarajevo high street. One empty chair for every Sarajevan killed during the 1,425 days of siege. Six hundred and forty-three small chairs represented the children killed by snipers and the heavy artillery fired from the surrounding mountains.” When holistic healer, Vladimir Dragan, arrives in the provincial Irish village of Cloonoila, no one would guess that the charismatic, bearded stranger is in fact the Balkan War criminal known as The Beast of Bosnia (a character inspired by Radovan Karadzic), not even Fidelma, the town beauty who, naïve and in a lonely marriage, dreams of having his child. Fidelma’s “walk on part” in the life of Dr. Vlad then takes a dark and unexpected turn, setting the second half of the novel in motion, and setting Fidelma’s resilience at odds against the horrific evils of our time (which is the real subject of O’Brien’s novel: Fidelma, victim or heroine?). With *The Little Red Chairs*, Edna O’Brien has proven again she is truly gifted writer in posing the questions, who amongst us would recognize the true face of evil in our lives, and how then, would one reconcile one’s own complicity in that evil?

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## **William Koon says**

Edna O’Brien tackles some tough problems. One, she tries to make sense of the modern world. She does a great job—as she has in the past—in showing the Ireland she knew as bigoted, small, and repressive. (I read her autobiography last year, *The Country Girl* and enjoyed it.) In this novel, she creates an almost clichéd cast of characters: the unsatisfied middle aged house wife, the boozy and friendly publican. There’s no whore with a heart of gold, but there is a nun with a heart of gold. Now there’s a switch.

Basically it’s about a Fidelma who fall in love with a military leader in disguise who has committed many atrocities, including in Sarajevo. (I think *Wuthering Heights* may be to blame for more bad novels that we could ever count.) He is captured. She is brutalized in an unforgiving way by enemies. (The rape by use of a crow bar not only is disturbing but also unbelievable. How could she have survived this violence since the reason was to rid her of her “love child?” Certainly it would have killed her.)

She then goes to London where she takes on menial jobs and meets some mighty fine folks and some bullies, too. She also works on a grey hound rescue farm. Then she attends the trial of her lover.

None of this matters much, but then she begins to get into her real theme: the problem of evil. And truth be told, Ms. O’Brien cannot handle the evil. She asks “Vlad,” “Was your essential nature always evil?” Thus she posits the idea that people are born good or bad, i.e. The Anne Frank Syndrome. She then confuses the issue by then asking if he has “chosen” the wrong part, allying him with a Satanic reasoning.

But gloriously it all disappears into a riotous version *Midsommer Night’s Dream* back in London with that wacky bunch of immigrants and displaced persons she was hanging with, including a child, “Misteltoe,” who would have played several years ago by Quvenzhané Wallis. See, if we can make sense of that plot... Ugh.

All in all, there are too many dream sequences, shifts of narrative, awkward transitions and dialogue to satisfy any serious reader. Or any reader for that matter. There’s just too much, “I could not go home until I could come home to myself” self-helpy clap trap sprinkled in the book, especially at the end.

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## **Mandy says**

This book is a mess and I am puzzled by the many laudatory reviews, especially those in the newspapers, where it seems to be taken for granted that O'Brien can do no wrong. I found this a very flawed novel indeed. Ambitious certainly, and I can see that in addressing the problem of evil and the repercussions of the Balkan wars her intentions are admirable. But just because something's worth writing about doesn't automatically make a novel successful. Divided into three unequal parts, it tells of the arrival in a small Irish village of a new-age type healer and sex therapist. The trope of a stranger coming into a community and disrupting it is a well-worn one, and inevitably Dr Vlad's arrival has unforeseen consequences. Part 2 is set in London whither his victim Fidelma escapes having become infatuated with him. And the third part takes place at a war crime trial in The Hague, as Dr Vlad turns out to be a wanted war criminal from the Balkans – based on Radovan Karadzic. So all the ingredients of a good novel are here but O'Brien fails to deliver. Characterisation is superficial, especially in the Irish village, where too many Irish stereotypes are depicted. Much of the book consists of vignettes or set-pieces, where far too many characters extraneous to the main plot tell their stories, resulting in too many narrative voices. And the essential themes of immigration, displacement, the effects of war and the nature of evil all become subsumed into a narrative morass. Any story of atrocities in the Balkans already contains plenty of violence but O'Brien adds some gratuitous violence of her own, which goes completely over the top. Most definitely not for me, this one – although I admit that the central image of the red chairs will remain to haunt me, and that's no bad thing.

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## **Suzy says**

I finished this book with tears in my eyes, moved by its depth and the unexpected places it took me. There is a dreamlike quality to O'Brien's storytelling. We are immediately dropped into the small and somewhat isolated Irish Village of Cloonoila, where one winter's day, seemingly out of nowhere, a larger-than-life man arrives. This unusual man is a poet and new age healer who seems just what's needed to add some spark to the lives of the villagers. But the new arrival, Vladimir Dragan, is also a man with a past. His magical aura enchants many in the town, but they do not know that Dr. Vlad is also the man who orchestrated the murder of thousands of Bosnian Croats and Muslims during the Balkans War. O'Brien bases Dr. Vlad's character on the real Butcher of Sarajevo, Radovan Karadžić, who famously hid out for 12 years in Belgrade as a new-age healer before being caught. (This is a fascinating article on his years as new age healer Dragan Dabic <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/mag....>) Interesting, he was sentenced to 40 years in jail for war crimes just a few days before this book was published, after a 5-year trial.

But I digress. Dr. Vlad is not necessarily the main focus of *The Little Red Chairs*. His appearance in Cloonoila and his subsequent interactions and relationships with some of her residents is only a jumping off point for O'Brien to share some profound truths about human nature and life. The focus of TLRC is primarily Fidelma McBride, who has the most intimate relationship with Dr. Vlad, for which she experiences serious consequences. It's Fidelma's journey that teaches us the most. That we are all vulnerable and can all be complicit. That people are not one-dimensional. That our experience can do us in or can cause us to find our resilience. That life can take us in unexpected directions, whether from a wrong decision or a right one that didn't take us where we thought it would. That many people experience dislocation for a multitude of reasons. That we all have a story to tell. That people we meet in our journey will surprise us in both their caring and their cruelty. That where life takes us is perhaps where we needed to be all along. And that in the end, we're all looking for home with a capital H.



I know from reviews that the structure of the book and the three very graphic passages of gruesome violence did not sit well with many readers. For me, the way O'Brien fashioned this novel in "set pieces" (as one reviewer described them) reflected how life often plays out and it drew me in, making me wonder where we were going. Be forewarned that the nightmarish violent scenes are hard to take and almost stopped me from proceeding. But I'm glad I persevered. The story told in *The Little Red Chairs* has given me lots to think about and I believe will stick with me for a long while.

Kudos to Juliet Stevenson for her marvelous reading of this book.

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### **Lark Benobi says**

This is a terrible book with ludicrous characters BUT it's terrible in a really good way, and the ludicrous characters are never boring. It's as if master storyteller O'Brien were a master jazz pianist sitting down blindfolded in front of a deeply out of tune piano--it still sounds terrific. She riffs on anything she pleases, writing on and on about inconsequential trivia about characters who have no point being in this story. It feels like O'Brien just let any skinny bit of thought that came into her head make its way to the page and then she worked it and made it beautiful. She is so talented--she is even channeling Virginia Woolf here and there, I would say--just compare the chapter "On the Veranda" to early chapters in *The Voyage Out*. The lovely stark beginning which gives this book its title is the best part, though--the novel never reaches the solemn promise of those little red chairs.

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### **Carol - Reading Writing and Riesling says**

My View:

On the menu tonight; contemporary fiction deconstructed! What an interesting way to present a story! There are multiple points of views - the roll call includes the voices of individual characters and of the disenfranchised, the victims and survivors of many acts of atrocities in many regions and finally we hear the true voice of perpetrator when being held to account for his actions. The pace is erratic – unsettling but eventually compelling. Violence, love and compassion share the pages. This is not an easy read, this is a necessary read.

This is a very powerful and moving story of manipulation – it is human nature to expect the best of someone and to trust – Dr Vlad is artful in his ability to say what “you want to hear” and is thus easily accepted into his new community, his true nature bubbles under the surface of his deceit.

Edna O'Brien portrays Fidelma's desire for a child and lover is heartbreaking and so sad. Her downfall is diabolical and so horrendous, her recovery, slow and painful.

This narrative pricks at our conscience and in particular serves to remind us of the notorious siege of Sarajevo where 11,541 innocent were slaughtered in the name of war and ethnic cleansing. This is but one atrocity, a recount of one of incident, confined to one time and place but serves to remind us of the global evil that thrives in our world today. Our conscience needs pricking, our compassion needs this reminder, thank you Edna O'Brien.

Foreword: "On the 6th of April 2012, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the start of the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces, 11,541 red chairs were laid out in rows along the eight hundred metres of the Sarajevo high street. One empty chair for every Sarajaven killed during the 1,425 days of siege. Six hundred and forty-three small chairs represented the children killed by snipers and heavy artillery fired from the surrounding mountains.

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## Julie Ehlers says

I usually try not to write plot summaries in my reviews, but in the case of this novel I think a brief one is necessary if I'm going to explain how I felt about it. However, unlike the publisher in the marketing blurb, I will try not to spoil the whole thing for the reader.

*The Little Red Chairs* begins in a small Irish town full of quirky small-town types, like Stars Hollow but with more nuns. A mysterious stranger named Vlad shows up and sets up shop as a "healer," with botanical remedies and massages and the like, and his practices are so effective that soon the whole town is enamored of him, most especially a married woman named Fidelma who falls for him hard. Of course, it then turns out that Vlad, like most mysterious strangers who turn up in small towns, has an unsavory past he's fleeing—but his unsavory past is, no exaggeration, at least two billion times more unsavory than any past you could possibly imagine for a mysterious stranger. Fidelma experiences some serious fallout from this revelation and goes on her own journey, both literal and figurative, as a result.

My main problem with this novel is, again, hard to describe without spoilers, but what it amounts to is that Edna O'Brien tries to convey the immense suffering of people in a horrific wartime situation through the misfortunes of a white, First-World, relatively privileged woman who is only tangentially connected to that situation. It's almost as if O'Brien believes that many of her readers couldn't possibly sympathize with the victims unless everything was filtered through a character who is "more like them." I found the whole thing bizarre and borderline offensive, this idea that the best way for us to understand a tragedy is to look at something slightly to the side of it instead of directly at it. It didn't work for me at all; it nagged at me the entire time I was reading.

Of course, good writing is everything, and it's possible that even this strange setup might have worked if the book were put together well, but alas, that's not the case here. I really enjoyed getting to know the townspeople at the beginning of the novel; O'Brien does an excellent job of setting the scene there. Unfortunately, once Vlad's secret is revealed, the town is abandoned for other locales and all that effective scene-setting goes to waste.

The book also features numerous monologues by characters describing the conditions that forced them to flee their own countries for asylum in another. Some of these monologues were educational, but as far as the structure of the book is concerned, awkward doesn't even begin to describe them. Clearly O'Brien wanted us to get a sense of what refugees go through, and I appreciate that intent, but there had to be a better way than just having minor characters show up, speak for several pages, and then disappear from the plot. And it isn't only refugees who make use of this device—the worst, most extreme example of this technique occurs in the way the reader learns of Vlad's terrible secret: A dead friend of Vlad's turns up in his dream and explains the whole thing to him—again, in a speech that goes on for several pages. Despite the disturbing subject matter, I found this scene unintentionally hilarious. I mean, a dead friend showing up in Vlad's dream to expound at length on *something Vlad already knows*? This is exposition at its most clumsy.

Sadly, I also really disliked the character of Fidelma. Anytime you put a character in front of me who's been in a bad marriage for decades, has done literally nothing about it the whole time, and then does something drastic and destructive, I'm going to have a hard time believing in the essential morality of that character. There's nothing admirable about keeping your feelings inside for forever and then acting out like a child. Beyond that, despite the horrible consequences Fidelma pays for her actions—consequences that I would never wish on a living soul—I found her subsequent life hard to sympathize with: She was a highly privileged, babied woman who eventually had to live a life more like the rest of us live. Poor thing. And the fact that supposed "redemption" for Vlad's heinous acts comes through her, rather than through someone more directly affected by what he did, was, again, hard for me to swallow. If an author is going to take one character and make her stand in for a vast number of suffering people, that better be one great character. Unfortunately, Fidelma is not up to the task.

To me, this book read like a first draft: rough and unwieldy, with a lot of characters that needed more development and ideas that needed much better integration into the plot. It was my first book by Edna O'Brien and definitely won't be my last, but I do wish we could have had a better introduction.

I won this book via a First Reads giveaway here on Goodreads.

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### Maureen says

When Vlad, an Eastern European, turns up in a small Irish village, he certainly stirs it out of its lethargy. He becomes known as the Doctor after setting himself up as a healer, and, being the Svengali figure that he is, he soon has the whole village under his spell, particularly the women. They are soon to discover however, that this charming man is a wanted war criminal. Fidelma McBride falls for his charms completely, she's besotted, but it will lead her into danger and change her life completely. As with any book that has references to war/conflict, there are some harrowing details, and some very moving moments. It was an interesting story, and it demonstrates how someone with great charisma can hide the very core of evil.

\* I received an ARC from Netgalley in return for a review\* thank you to them and to the publisher.

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### Perry says

**Red, as in Scarlet, Raging..., Bloody..., Ireland** [updated \*9/3/16\*] Warning: contains one of the most diabolical, horrendous acts of sexual violence against a female in all literature.

*Tell Me, Not Being a Student of History, Has a Super-Narcissistic Leader Come into Power in the Last Two Centuries Whose Rule has Not Resulted in Multiple Tragedies on a Wide-Scale?*

[]

Review:

You live in a quaint, if a little busybody, Irish hamlet, a beauty swept off her feet by a much older man, walking down the aisle in your well-earned white wedding dress. 15, 20 years pass in your nice little humdrum life with your husband, yet your clock is ticking and his dock ain't kicking.

A very distinguished, intriguing, attractive foreign (perhaps Russian) doctor/chiropractor in his early 40s moves into town, renting a room near your art shop. At a social gathering, he subtly suggests you look like

the kind of woman who needs a lover. Your biological clock starts to wind in the corner of your mind, and you seek a child with this man, a child your husband cannot give you.

Weeks/months of insatiable attention and you become pregnant despite knowing now of a few of your moody lover's negative character traits. Then One Day government agents blow into your village to make a highly publicized arrest of Serbia's most wanted war criminal (think, Milosevic, Karadzic).

PapaDaddy is, as it turns out, the Prince of Darkness, Beëlzebub in the body, Father of Lies in the flesh, Author of Evil, the Old Serpent.

This novel blasts with double-barrels, driven by morally difficult questions and, to my mind, unloading on some Catholic Church leaders as at best judgmental, indifferent to humanity, and unworthy of reflecting the Redeemer, or worse, complicit in abetting such a monstrous castigation that even Lucifer would look away. Ms. O'Brien has never shied away from criticizing or offending the Catholic Church of her Ireland.

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### **Natalie Richards says**

I'm not really sure how I feel about this book. In parts shocking and brutal but written in such an emotionless way. Having never read Edna O'Brien before I don't know her writing style but have to say this was not for me. I couldn't connect to anyone and for me to love a book that's what I have to do.

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### **Ron Charles says**

Edna O'Brien's chilling new novel inspired by the life of Radovan Karadzic arrives just as the Butcher of Bosnia has finally been sentenced to 40 years in prison for genocide. If Karadzic's long-delayed punishment brings some element of resolution to the Bosnian civil war, O'Brien's novel picks at that war's scars, forcing us to feel the lingering, outlying disfigurement wreaked by an evil man.

Europeans are more likely than Americans to catch the poignant allusion in O'Brien's title, "The Little Red Chairs." In 2012, on the 20th anniversary of the Siege of Sarajevo, a theater company filled the center of that once smoldering town with 11,541 red chairs to commemorate the lives of the victims. More than 600 of those chairs were little ones representing the children who had been killed.

But nothing about this book's opening betrays such. . . .

*To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:*  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entert...>

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### **Julie Christine says**

Edna O'Brien's novels were once censored in her native Ireland. The graphic nature of her subject matter—the violent, shameful, behind-closed-doors reality of Irish rural and religious life—have shocked and scandalized since her fiction debut, *The Country Girls* in 1960. Now eighty-five, she continues to challenge our notions of innocence and guilt, of sex and desire, of politics and prose. *The Little Red Chairs*,

her first novel in ten years, is classic O'Brien: terrible and beautiful, unsentimental and transcendent.

There has always been something otherworldly, a little faerie tale-ish, about O'Brien's writing—a blend of lilting lyricism and fabulist style—that often distances the reader from the immediacy of the tragic worlds she portrays, like a layer of moss softening the blows from the hammerhead of her pen. In this instance she places us, as she often does, in the petty intimacy of an Irish village, a sodden, lush, secret place that both shelters and punishes its inhabitants with religion and tradition and family.

Fidelma is married to a man more than twenty years her senior and, as her husband becomes an old man in the grips of early dementia, she is choked by regret and loneliness. Longing for both children and passion, Fidelma wanders alone through the green fields and forests outside the western Ireland village of Cloonoila, fighting her body's yearnings. Thus, she is an easy mark for the town's newest resident, the mysterious Vladimir Dragan, a self-proclaimed healer and sex therapist. Vlad, with his long white hair, his black cloak and white gloves, and thick, seductive accent, seems a Gothic caricature. Fidelma is not the only Cloonoila resident to be caught in Dr. Dragan's spell: several nearly-comedic encounters, including the massage given to Sister Bonaventure, elevate Vlad to near-mystical regard by the villagers.

Then Fidelma becomes pregnant and the novel's murky, dreamy undertone takes a desperate, wretched turn toward verisimilitude. Let this serve as a trigger warning for those who cannot read graphic violence, particularly against women (a warning which should accompany nearly any O'Brien novel). Doctor Vlad is in fact a Serbian warlord known as “the beast of Bosnia,” accused of torture and genocide against Bosnian Croats and Muslims. The novel leaves the seemingly safe surrounds of rural Ireland and crash-lands in London, where Fidelma serves as a window into the world of exploited migrant workers. We travel with her into the Kent countryside, in search of refuge and redemption, and finally to The Hague and a war crimes tribunal, in search of justice.

Based on the hunt for the leader of the Serb Republic in Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic, who was captured in 2008 after thirteen years in hiding, *The Little Red Chairs*—like Lidia Yuknavitch's 2015 *The Small Backs of Children*—shows us the ancillary victims of war, the lives destroyed beyond the battlefields. She also explores themes of guilt and complicity, our unwitting acceptance of others' lies because we are so desperate to ignore our own truths. O'Brien smashes once again this notion of a charming Ireland knitted together by legend and rain with a hammer of reality ripped from headlines. Fidelma—at first a hapless victim—becomes a witness to others' suffering, as O'Brien herself has often done as a writer, finding redemption and courage in the raw humanity around her.

Gorgeously written, in bold prose that breaks all rules of conventional fiction writing, O'Brien's seventeenth novel shows a writer, now in her ninth decade, at her most fierce and powerful. I am in awe.

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## Vaso says

Το πρώτο μέρος του βιβλίου είναι σχεδόν αδιόφορο θα λέγα, παρήλη την πλοκή που εκτυλίσσεται γρήγορα. Σε ένα χωριό της Ιρλανδίας φτάνει ένας μυστηριώδης άντρας ο οποίος τελικά αποδεικνύεται καταζητούμενος για εγκλήματα πολέμου.

Στο δεύτερο μέρος παρακολουθούμε την προσπάθεια της Φιντλμα να επιβίψει στο Λονδίνο που έχει καταφύγει μετά τον ειδεχθή τραυματισμό της και την τρομερή αποκάλυψη. Το τρίτο μέρος λειτουργεί ως καταλήτης για εκείνη.

Η συγγραφέας, χρησιμοποιώντας την ιστορία του Βλαντ και της Φιντ?λμα, μιλά για τον πόλεμο στη Βοσνία και τις φρικαλεότητες που αυτές προκαλέ?.

Δεν γνωρίζω ούτε το ?ργο, ούτε την π?να τη συγγραφέως. Το συγκεκριμένο βιβλίο το βρήκα αρκετά "χλιαρό" για τα δικά μου γούστα.

3,5 αστέρια

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