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SHAME AND CLASS: A FEMINIST READING OF ERNAUX'S *SHAME*

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Abstract

The current research paper presents a feminist examination of Annie Ernaux's Shame through the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's influential work, The Second Sex, revealing the intersection of shame and class in determining the female experience. Ernaux's seminal work Shame, a highly subjective account, shows how shame, engrained in socio-economic position and gender, becomes prolonged in women lives. Through a feminist appraisal, this research observes how Ernaux's description discovers the intersection of class-based oppression and the societal restrictions on women. The article examines this with de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, where she reveals how female`s inferior rank is socially erected, concentrating on how the notion of the other functions in determining of female identities. De Beauvoir's investigation of the ways women are trained to accept their sidelining presents a theoretical agenda for understanding Ernaux's depiction of shame as not just a particular, but a socially imposed experience. The examination mirrors how Ernaux's work donates to feminist discourse by revealing the personified and psychological significances of class-based shame, while also drawing attention to the ways in which female experiences of shame are thoroughly tied to their cultural and social settings.

INTRODUCTION

Annie Ernaux's Shame (1997) suggests a touching account of how shame, mostly emerging from one's social class, pervades the women`s experience. Ernaux, through her autobiographical account, reveals the deep spiritual of living in a society where class differences and gendered prospects combine to form a multifaceted web of domination. Her examination of subjective disgrace inside the setting of socio-economic position presents an influential critique of how shame becomes internalized and often related to the concept of femininity. In modern feminist debate, the exploration of shame as both a subjective and objective element remains a vital area of investigation, chiefly when bearing in mind the ways in which class and gender intersect to form female experiences.

Ernaux's Shame, in this research work is analyzed through the feminist theoretical outline carved by Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949). It is her seminal book written on criticism that observes the social construction of womankind and the conducts women are downgraded to the position of the Other in a male-controlled society. Her analysis of female domination through the perspective of existentialism offers a priceless outline for acknowledging how shame functions as an instrument of societal control over women. De Beauvoir claims that the women`s condition is not biological but socially constructed, and this

construction is deeply up-to-dated by a multifaceted interplay of social, cultural, and psychological forces. This research aims to analyze how Ernaux's Shame demonstrates the undercurrents of social elements of shame, where the societal forces of economic sidelining and gendered prospects form female characteristics. By linking Ernaux's personal account to de Beauvoir's theoretical visions, the current research seeks to expand our understanding of how female existed experiences are influenced not only by gender, but also by the social and cultural settings in which they exist. Besides, this feminist reading reveals the ways in which Ernaux's portrayal of shame as a class-based phenomenon speaks to wider themes in feminist theory and literature, exploring the intersectionality of class and gender inside the construction of female subjectivity.

1. Research questions

The current research is conducted to answer the following questions.

How does Annie Ernaux's Shame demonstrate the influence of male-controlled structures and male superiority in worsening the deteriorated condition of women?

To what degree can the deteriorated socio-psychological condition of women in Annie Ernaux's Shame be understood as self-imposed through the internalization of submissive gender norms?

2. Research Problem

The research problem inspects the two-fold aspects contributing to the worsened state of women represented in Annie Ernaux's Shame. It is seen, how women's suffering in society is, to some extent, a result of their own self-imposed submission to societal standards and passive gender roles, and secondly, how male supremacy inside society worsens their subjugation. The research will reveal how Ernaux's representation proposes that, through internalization of male-controlled standards, women may instinctively continue their own suppression, thus electing a form of subjective suppression. At the same time, the current work will investigate how patriarchal elements of social expectations actively impose and deepen female misery and anguish, making their relegated place in society not only a consequence of individual choice but also a product of general disparity. This dual examination will propose insight into the complex connection between individual entity and societal oppression in determining the experience of shame.

3. Research Methodology

The primary method will comprise on a close reading of Annie Ernaux's Shame, concentrating on how the novel reflects the socio-psychological decline of women in relation to patriarchal elements. Significant themes such as internalized oppression, shame and submission will be studied, particularly looking at how these synchronize with de Beauvoir's concepts on the structure of woman as the Other in society. This will include recognizing examples in the text where Ernaux's depiction of shame mirrors the societal training that de Beauvoir analyses.

For evaluation of objectives of current research feminist theoretical methodology will be used. It will be based on famous French theorist Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, concentrating on how patriarchal societal structures contribute to the worsened socio-psychological state of women in Annie Ernaux's Shame. Through a close textual examination, the research will reveal how Ernaux's description of shame reproduces de Beauvoir's idea of women as the Other, demonstrating how women adopt societal subjugation and, in some situations, reserve their own suppression. By applying de Beauvoir's feminist theory, the current research will examine the strain between subjective and objective patriarchal structures, reflecting how female suffering in Ernaux's account results from both the universal supremacy of male power and self-imposed psychological restraints.

4. The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, which provides a foundational feminist lens to analyze the socio-psychological condition of women in Annie Ernaux's Shame. De Beauvoir's concept of the Other is central to understanding how women are socially constructed as inferior in a male-dominated society. According to de Beauvoir, women are positioned as the Other in relation to men, who are defined as the default, superior subject. This framework will be used to examine how Ernaux

portrays the internalization of these gendered power dynamics, where women, due to their socialization, internalize and perpetuate their own subjugation. Additionally, de Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy, particularly her ideas about freedom, self-definition, and the psychological impact of oppression, will be applied to explore how women's suffering in Ernaux's Shame can be understood both as a consequence of societal structures and as a result of the internalized beliefs that women accept about their place in the world. This theoretical framework will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between external patriarchy and the internalization of submissive gender norms in shaping the female experience of shame.

5. Literature review

Ernaux's seminal work Shame, a highly subjective account, shows how shame, engrained in socio-economic position and gender, becomes prolonged in women lives. Miller, (1999) inspects Ernaux's presentation of societal traits and characterization inside town perspective. He highlights the influence of organizations like the Roman Catholic Church and their impact on decisive individual characteristics. He analyzes Ernaux's struggle for conventionality, underlining the pressure to reserve secrecy about the shocking event due to fear of scandal. Miller offers extraordinary insights into Ernaux's storytelling practices, the communication between personal experiences and larger societal prospects, subtle account of shame inside the novel of Shame. Meanwhile, English literature is extremely important for expanding our knowledge of human experiences and world issues, including psychological concerns (Akram & Yang, 2021; Amjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023), because of its rich history and diversified body of work (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Ramzan et al., 2023). Its universality enables it to cut across cultural divides, offering a forum for considering and addressing urgent psychological (Ahmad et al., 2022; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Ramzan et al., 2020) and educational issues (Akram et al., 2022). This paper offers emotionally to understanding Ernaux's thematic exploration and the socio-psychological features portrayed in her novel. Miller delves into Annie Ernaux's novel Shame, focusing on themes such as identity, shame and societal pressure. Miller reveal Ernaux's narrative methods, underscoring her cautious approach in presenting memories and emotions related to a vital childhood event, where author`s father threatened her mother, becomes the central point through which Ernaux navigates the experiences of shame and personal change. In the meantime, its proper regulation is further recommended (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Akram & Oteir, 2025).

Just like Ernaux, Bacholle (2021) also confirms the female right of sexual activity and is embodied as a device for empowerment, possibly contributing to a cultural alteration in addressing sexual domination and supporting for agency. Bacholle underscores Ernaux's discloser of her story, termed as a "pig-outing," and her use of the term "sluttish" in Judith Butler's words as a means of endorsement. The article inspects Annie Ernaux`s story of first sexual experience and the following significances she faced as a 17-year-old summer camp counselor in 1958 France. Researcher offers the shock of the young girl after that disgraceful experience further revealing the influence of societal gender roles and double standards of the society. The article reveals Ernaux's biography as a statement of women right to sexual activity, placing it as a tool for empowerment. Ernaux allows herself to save her younger self from the harassment she confronted by recovering the portrayal and reframing the abusive term.

Annie Ernaux's exceptional quality to work between compassion and impartiality in offering her younger self adds perspicacity to her fiction, determining a delicate study of political and social themes that presents both the personal and the broader social relations of her experiences. In his article Kemp (2023) delves into how Ernaux's exclusive approach of harmonizing compassion and distance in portraying her younger self influences the political and social themes inside her fiction. Kemp observes the influence of descriptive method on understanding societal apprehensions, determining the moral manner of Ernaux's biography, and pleasing readers in empathizing with her experiences during that phase. She depicts her personal recollections from a third-person viewpoint, representing her younger self as if observed by an outsider. This neutrality from her experiences

includes considerable happenings like experiencing sexual misuse, social shaming due to overriding sexual standards, subsequent struggles with individuality, and an eating condition. It enquires the moral posture the text takes about these themes and inspects how Ernaux includes readers by offering her adolescent self from a bystander's viewpoint in the context of 1958.

The vital point of Annie Ernaux's Shame lies in the examination of how upsetting experiences, primarily the perceiving of physical violence in 1952, influence both memory and self-expression. Kritzman (1999) inspects Ernaux's valuation of language, memory and the strong effect of shock on personal character and the fitness to express experiences. He shows Ernaux's pursuit of understanding her shame's perspectives and origins, highlighting the lifelong impression of that surprise on memory and individual identity. Kritzman's evaluation of Annie Ernaux's Shame focusses on how shocking experiences, primarily observing domestic violence in 1952, affect memory and self-expression. The work examines how Ernaux faces the challenge of her past. This paper reveals the problems of voicing experiences designed by insightful emotional accounts, ultimately unsettling the construction of the social narrative.

Ernaux recollects disagreeable memories of abortion, re-counting the complications of relationships and love, while also mirroring the complex suggestions of family connections in her account. Taylor (2004) investigates Ernaux's complex connotation with writing, where she mirrors it as a necessity to confront with and express unpleasant memories connected to love, abortion, relationship and family construction. Taylor examines the instincts behind Ernaux's writing, inquiring why she feels obsessed to create fiction grounded on disturbing past events and shape them in auto fiction. Taylor studies Ernaux's zealous struggle with writing auto fictional literature she sees troubling and disgraceful to expose in public. He evaluates Ernaux's clashing moods—feeling enforced to write yet experiencing shame and anxiety about sharing her personal accounts. He sees her writings, going beyond Ernaux's private experiences as characteristic of modern subjectivity. He attaches Ernaux's struggles with Foucault`s idea of individuals as "confessing animals," where personal revelations become indispensable to shaping one's identity.

Ernaux expresses emotional recollections tied to relationships, abortion, love and matrimonial ties. In the research Ernaux's Testimony of Shame by Lawrence D. Kritzman, the emphasis is on Annie Ernaux's semi-autobiographical novel La Honte (Shame). Ernaux reveals how shocking memories, chiefly observing domestic violence in 1952, are deposited in her mind, clogging direct contact to true testimony. She struggles that language questions memory, leading her on an expedition to recollect her past as "little Annie D" without imposing an artificial reality. Ernaux admits the incompleteness of her story but sees it as an instrument to undo unadjusted memories. She defines the primary shame of pronouncing the improper, leading her to wear a guise of routine until she can accept observation without fear. At the centre is Ernaux's chase to comprehend the origins of her shame, which she traces back to the traumatic event in 1952, designing her being with lasting suffering. The shock leaves her powerless to reveal the experience, resulting in a memory of ferocity without words. Ernaux's proof doesn't refute the truth but fails to articulate it orally. She faces doubt and an incapability to regain the past due to the trauma's commotion in her life's account, making language impervious and rendering self-expression impossible.

Ernaux, through her autobiographical fiction, challenges traditional portrayals, emphasizing the interconnection of distinct experiences inside the larger societal context. Annie Ernaux's tales explore the subtle appraisal of personal identity, examining the impact of societal shame and expectations. Gale (2016) studies the themes offered in the novel Shame written by Annie Ernaux. Gale offers comprehensive breakdown and visions into Ernaux's autobiographical novel. Furthermore, the guide comprises critical clarifications and debates that help readers understand the thoughtful exploration of personal identity, shame and societal expectations inside the novel. The guide covers a thorough examination of the account structure, themes, characters, and literary methods used in Ernaux's novel. It could offer clarifications of the historical and cultural setting inside which the story explains, examining the implication of proceedings and their

influence on the writer`s life. Moreover, the study guide serves as a valued source for readers looking for a deeper understanding of Ernaux's Shame.

6. **Research Gap**

By analyzing the above-mentioned literature review the research gap is clearly visible. It is in understanding how shame and class interconnect in Annie Ernaux's Shame, particularly from a feminist viewpoint. While Ernaux's novel has been examined for its personal reproduction on shame, there hasn't been much emphasis on how shame is tied to class and gender together. Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir's ideas from The Second Sex about women's social position have not been fully applied to Ernaux's writing. This research aims to fill this gap by revealing how Ernaux displays shame as not only a subjective and individual feeling but also a result of class-based and gendered social constructions. By linking these two opinions, the research paper will present new visions into how female experiences of shame are formed by both their gender and their social class.

7. **Analysis**

Ernaux has shown the passive and submissive nature of women in Shame. Feelings of shame and decisive role of patriarchal structures have been explored through Ernaux in her short novel. Man appears free to act according to the male-controlled ideals. In the initial lines of the novel, she narrated the event in which her father tried to kill her mother with a Scythe. It was a shameful act not only for the mother and daughter but also for the female folk. Instead of stating regret he feels the incident non serious. Ernaux remembers a moment where her father recurrently asks her mother about why she is crying, proclaiming that he hadn't wounded her. She narrates herself threatening that he would bring calamity upon her. But her mother tries to assure everyone, gesturing them to move on because it's over. He insistently asks her, "Why are you crying? I didn't do anything to you." Meanwhile, she recalls herself warning, "You'll breathe disaster on me." Her mother attempts to console her, saying, "Come on, it's over." (Ernaux, 1997, p.14)

Her mother's response, "Come on, it's over," though seemingly an effort to resolve and regularize the situation, also reflects a form of submission. Her words show obedience of softness. It was a way to appease her husband, and to proclaim an impression of peace, although at the cost of her self-respect and self-worth. Her words can be taken as reducing the tension, a reconcilable method in tense circumstances where the object may feel helpless to change the circumstances. The situation embodies a lack of compassion and a leading attitude of male societal traditions where the male members refuse to acknowledge the impact of their actions. They unreasoningly place the blame of the condition back on the woman.

In Ernaux's depiction of the family tension, the episode reflects a deeply upsetting conversation that presents larger themes of patriarchy and female submission. The father, apparently ignorant or uncaring to the emotional situation he has caused, repeatedly questions his mother's tears with a kind of indifferent resolve. His action proposes a rejection of concern for any harm. Ernaux herself, trapped in those tense familial circumstances, states a sense of disaster. She attributes it to her father's behavior and indicates how his acts threaten to bring disaster upon their family. The condition could be seen as an expression of the current emotional turbulence started by her father's conducts.

Ernaux states her comprehensions about that event exemplifying personal family aspects that represent the larger family matters of male-controlled structures and the suppression of women`s voices. She reveals painful reality of how gender dynamics can play partial roles inside the family life, with women often positioned in subordinate roles, intended to bear rather than challenge. This situation is acknowledged by authors like de Beauvoir who speaks against the division between man and woman. ''Being a woman poses unique problems to an autonomous human being today'' (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 815).

As this work seeks to explore the matters of patriarchal ferocity, the study focuses its attention to a regretful example given by Ernaux that proves the seriousness of this issue of gender-based discrimination. Consider the headline from a weekend publication that severely restates us of the serious realities many women face: Ernaux writes a statement in her diary, "I got to the weekend edition

dated Saturday 14-Sunday 15 June....she had been thrown into an outdoor latrine by a neighbor who confessed to the crime" (Ernaux, 1997, p. 30). It is a statement that leads us towards equality, justice and a future where no female life is helpless just by virtue of her existence. The report is a solemn notice of the social injustice that remains. It reflects our failures to protect and to order the female lives. In this story, we hear the voice that was hushed, we honor the spirit that was overwhelmed, and we burn a violent resolution to face and change the social standards that permit such tragedies. The account told mirrors not only the crime committed but also a delicate illustration of the weakness' women face, the spaces they steer, and the determined chase of security in their own groups.

Simon de Beauvoir relates in her book The Second Sex, ''the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who have shaped it and ruled it and who still today dominate it'' (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 725). She expresses her anxieties claiming how the female experiences have normally been exceeded by patriarchal system that upholds male authority and viewpoints. The theorist underlines those discernments that have viewed as the female experiences. Furthermore, she states that through female experiences, societies can commence to untie the age-old gender injustices that have intended and ruled our world. It is a challenge to reflect how the experiences of women can be enhanced and accepted in determining patriarchal structures. A critical inspection of present systems and an energetic effort is desirable to guarantee that the female experiences are central to decision-making procedures.

Only through a resolute struggle to appreciate and act on the experiences of women can we suppose to create a balance that de Beauvoir advocates for. It would be an significant phase toward a really unbiassed society. The experiences of women, regularly affected by gender prejudices, demand for a change towards appreciating and acknowledging these experiences equally inside the present discourses.

In light of de Beauvoir's understandings, it is essential for both leaders and official to involve more deeply with the female experiences, regularly using these experiences to create an atmosphere that encourages sincere gender impartiality. By inspecting the experiences of women through the viewpoint of this report, we can see a structure where their subtle experiences are normally overlooked. These soft experiences are not just precise examples of disparity but are part of a general and larger issue where the experiences of women are increasingly undervalued and underrated.

..... Actions by women to involve in discussions about any familial debates may be met with dislike or abhorrence. It mirrors a male supremacy where female independence is weakened. In presenting the modes of inter communication, principally in the family context, the unpleasant experiences of women are exposed. Consider this condition: inside the internal circle, one male member repeatedly reads the local newspaper, never engaging in discussions about familial matters except to condemn another female member. This strand reflects higher social features that prolong discrepancy and support traditional gender roles. Women are assessed to observe certain values and actions; these comprise respect to male authority, while their own experiences and insights are ignored. Ernaux exclaims, ''my father will only read the local newspaper; he never mentions religion except to bark at my mother'' (Enraux, 1997, p. 89).

In many male societies, female attitudes, experiences, desires and opinions are often ignored, chiefly in matters of home life. This irregular behavior invites us to investigate deeper into the disparities of societal structures. Through feminist viewpoint, we can evaluate how these behaviors mirror and strengthen higher societal aspects. The indecision to engage with societal behaviors except in moments of criticism towards family member reflects pattern power, where female opinions are crumpled. By perceiving this picture through feminist lookout, the complicated relationship between gender, class and power inside the familial unit can be detected. In patriarchal spheres women remain inactive due to their inactive roles. Consequently, Ernaux`s mother was misbehaved by her father due to her inactiveness. De Beauvoir also offers such situation in her book. ''The more passive or less infatuated woman will suffer from society's censure; she will think herself degraded, perverted, frustrated. (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 497).

.....The account discloses a serious insight about the limitations forced by societal norms and the potential consequences for women who do not follow them. It underlines the importance of challenging these traditions to create a more neutral society. Her words refer to the criticism that women may face from the male-controlled societal organization when they do not conform to prevailing traditions. This misconduct can be seen in numerous means like social loneliness or presumed feelings of inadequacy.

Women who are forceful, independent, or not mostly fixated on romantic activities are sometimes perceived as conflicting shared norms. Feminist discourse reflects this historical approach toward women and their roles in society, particularly in relation to male members of the family. Furthermore, women have often been expected to be subservient and passive, while their worth is often synchronized with their relations with men. In simple words, de Beauvoir states that women, who do not conform to societal prospects of being obedient and inactive, may face criticism from the society. Her declaration proclaims that this social conduct sprouts from the internalization of societal ideals, which can lead women to judge themselves based on these morals. This social pressure on women proposes that those who do not perceive traditional gender roles may experience feelings of frustration and deficiency.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this feminist analysis of Annie Ernaux's Shame, informed by Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, discloses the multifaceted ways in which shame is entangled with both gender and class. Through Ernaux's personal explanation, we see how shame is not just her subjective emotion but a socially forced experience fixed in the connections of socio-economic position and the societal prospects of women. By using de Beauvoir's notions of the social construction of female inferiority, this study delves into the deep impact that class-based oppression has on the female experience of shame. Eventually, this research paper contributes to feminist debate by presenting a deeper understanding of how shame functions as a tool of societal control, while also highlighting the need for a more subtle investigation of how class and gender continue to outline female lived realities.

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