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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Study of Female Anxiety in *Hotel du Lac* from the Perspective of Power Theory

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**ABSTRACT**

The *Hotel du Lac* has long been a hub for literary research. However, less attention has been paid to the various sorts of female anxiety that appear in the novel. Therefore, this study employs Foucault's power theory to examine feminine anxiety in the book on the basis of literature research and detailed reading. Three distinct forms of anxiety in *Hotel du Lac* are covered in this essay. One is the stress experienced by married women. Mrs. Pusey and Monica struggled with reproductive issues and body attractiveness, catering to their husband's preferences and requirements. While the loneliness Edith's mother experienced between cultures contributed to her uneasiness in addition to her unhappy marriage. Jennifer's worry as a daughter and an unmarried lady is the second major anxiety in the novel. The last anxiety relates to Edith's appearance, single status, and writing. However, the modest attire she insisted on, her desire for romantic love, and her insistence on making up her own stories were how she ultimately fought the male disciplinary power. According to the article's meticulous analysis of the various anxieties, the patriarchal society's power structure is found to be the main cause of women's discomfort. In order to overcome their identity concern, women are encouraged to choose an appropriate vocation and develop independent female awareness.

**KEYWORDS**

*Hotel du Lac*; anxiety; disciplinary power; women

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### 1. Introduction

English art historian and novelist Anita Brookner has embarked on her prolific if belated literary career since 1981. For a while, she published a novel each year. Her books depict women who have embraced the lasting and constricting elements of patriarchal ideology in various ways, frequently to their own disadvantage. Her characters frequently struggle with desire, enmity, nostalgia, and loneliness. They also adore reading and art. As stated by Margaret D. Stetz(37), Brookner has frequently highlighted pictorial metaphors in her books and has made no secret of her understanding of art history.

Brookner frequently writes about a group of women rather than simply one, including young women who are afraid to enter society, middle-aged women going through difficult times in their lives, and elderly women who live alone. In addition to having the same gender identification, they all experience, in varying degrees, the traditional and contemporary moral quandaries that women in contemporary society face. Among several of her books, the 1984 Booker Prize-winning *Hotel du Lac* has never failed to capture readers' interest. Anthony Burgess and Gore Vidal previously referred to it as a short book about "menstrual cramps in a hotel in Switzerland " in their article for *Horizon*. It was nonetheless lauded by Skinner(1966) as "the most original and innovative of Brookner's novels." The protagonist of *Hotel du Lac*, romantic author Edith Hope, is exiled to a Swiss hotel by friends and, while worrying about her unfinished book, complains in letters home about the flaws of her fellow out-of-season visitors. As usual, there is an amazing array of characters, including the voracious shopper Mrs. Pusey, her submissive daughter Jennifer, and fortune hunter Monica. They talk about "the question of what behavior most becomes a woman," the pursuit of romantic fulfillment and Edith's own marriage fiasco is exposed.

Studies at *Hotel du Lac* are increasingly centered on the subject of anxiety. Skinner (68) highlighted authority and anxiety as the novel's central themes in his book *The Fiction of Anita Brookner: Illusions of Romance*. He believes that Edith's own nearly continual state of uneasiness was just the most noticeable and that the emphasis on Jennifer's physical presence may also be connected to the textual elements of anxiety and silence that are present throughout the literature. In a 2013 essay, Teng(65) makes the case that the "interculturality" of the unmarried, educated women in Brookner's books causes them to worry. While Edith's anxiety's emergence, growth, and effects are thoroughly examined by Fang Xiaozhou using Horney's neurotic theory as a framework. She contends that Edith's tense social and family ties are the cause of her anxiety and that despite her attempts to "fit in," "struggle," and "escape," she fails to integrate into the group. Using Murray Bowen's family systems theory to analyze the book, Lee argues that the female characters in *Hotel du Lac*'s inadequate ability for "self-differentiation," chronic anxiety, and dysfunctional family triangles are all effects of the family of origin. Gao Yiling (12)'s study focuses on four books: *The Start of Life*, *Providence*, *Look at Me*, and *Hotel du Lac*. She summarizes the anxiety consciousness in Brookner's early novels by dividing it into three categories: ontological anxiety in the face of death and fate, moral anxiety in the midst of social transformation, and cross-cultural anxiety about identity. On this foundation, she examines the causes of each experience of anxiety as well as the characters' coping mechanisms throughout the story.

The objectification of the female body in a consumerist and patriarchal culture is another area of study for Brookner's book *Hotel du Lac*. Scholars Zhang Mengling and Nan Jianchong(50-58) contend that Edith Hope's choice of clothing is strongly related to the creation of her identity. They base their argument on the culture of dress, and the setting of the consumer society and the article demonstrates how the consumer market and patriarchal culture have controlled and alienated the contemporary female body. In addition to looking at how the female body is materialized in consumerism, researcher Xu Qihong also examines how the control of the female body by masculine society affects the fate of women in *Hotel du Lac*. This analysis reveals Brookner's concern for women in her work.

Although previous research has examined the anxiety in the *Hotel du Lac* and focused on the disciplinary power over the female body, no one has applied Foucault's theory of power to comprehensively examine the anxiety and its sources among the different women in the book. According to Foucault's power theory, each individual can simultaneously be an actor and an object of power in the interconnected webs of power, which is "micro-power." Discipline is necessary for micro-power to be realized. The underlying goal of the disciplinary power in a patriarchal culture where male standards are the dominant social value is to force women to become "tame flesh"—a "disembodied" body without freedom of movement or independent thought. It is incredibly difficult to challenge patriarchal power, and as a result, women unavoidably struggle with a variety of anxieties.

This study asserts that there are three main kinds of female anxiety at *Hotel du Lac*. One is the anxiety that married women experience, especially Mrs. Pusey, Monica and Edith's mother. The second is the feminine anxiety embodied by Jennifer, and the final is Edith's anxiety. These female anxieties are mostly brought on by the patriarchal society's power structure, which forces them to conform to its rules and change who they are in the process, preventing them from developing a sense of self. We may get insight from examining the characters' sources of anxiety and come to the conclusion that developing a strong sense of independence for women and finding a good fit for oneself is crucial.

## 2. The Anxiety of Married Women

Being reduced to the object of "seeing," the seen commonly objects themselves or alienates themselves by internalizing the viewer's values while being suppressed by the viewer's gaze. The gaze is a technique of observing that incorporates the operation of power or the entanglement of desire (Chen Rong 349). In today's society, where men produce the majority of the world's clothing, women continue to be treated as objects, appearing to actively pursue the consumption of clothing to achieve the ideal presentation of their bodies while, in reality fulfilling the designs and fantasies of men and subjecting themselves to the other's "gaze." Mrs. Pusey, "that relentless seeker of luxury goods" (57), seeks attention from everyone at all costs. Especially on her birthday, in addition to the flowers, champagne and cake specially prepared for her, all the guests of the hotel gathered together to celebrate her birthday. 'Her midnight blue lace was surmounted by a sort of spangled jacket, obviously extremely expensive; this, in its' turn, was enlivened by several strings of beads, pearls, gold chains, and even a rather beautiful lapis lazuli pendant. Her hair had been re-gilded, and her nails were flawlessly pink"(58). Mrs. Pusey's dazzling dress was designed to attract the attention of the manager, the waiters and the guests present and to show her superior status. Patriarchal society's disciplinary power uses the female body and its clothing to suppress and discipline women, making the female body an object of enslavement and losing its own subjectivity. Mrs. Pusey allows her life to fall into the trap of conspicuous consumption in order to satisfy her ever-increasing vanity and to win social approval and admiration.

The patriarchal society that holds the power discourse has established a series of codes of conduct for women and has devised many traditional roles that they are expected to conform to. The dominant cultural expectations of women's motherhood have not changed, and whether a woman chooses or refuses to have children, she is subjected to enormous external pressure and

internal conflict and pain. In this sense, it is far from a woman's free choice whether to have children or not, and she is still far from being the master of her own body. It is mentioned in the novel that Mrs. Pusey's daughter was conceived after a long period of time. This suggests that early on, Mrs. Pusey was faced with the anxiety of not being able to bear children. Although God has endowed women with a special biological mechanism to reproduce, the patriarchal society sees fertility as a natural vocation of women and accordingly attributes all the value of women to it. A woman who is unable to bear children faces a marital crisis, and her life cannot be secured. In society, a wife who does not have children faces enormous social pressure. The power of male discipline over women goes far beyond simple domination to its powerful penetration, which ultimately enables women to discipline themselves and discipline others. Women's fertility is not only taken for granted by men; it is internalized as a responsibility and an obligation. In order to maintain their marriages and secure their social status, women find ways to have children, and their inability to do so becomes a common anxiety. Jennifer is the antidote to Mrs. Pusey's anxiety, rescuing her from the patriarchal social order and providing her with the financial security that her husband provides. The repression of the female body by the disciplinary power of patriarchal society is thus evident.

Under the control of a patriarchal culture, women's bodies and sexuality are merely objects and targets for men; women's bodies and sexuality are manipulated, shaped, disciplined and harnessed (Michel Foucault, 58). Like Mrs. Pusey when she was young, Monica also faced fertility anxiety. Her aristocratic husband demanded that she give birth to an heir as soon as possible, and for this reason, she was sent to *Hotel du Lac* retreat to tone up her body. If she does not have children, she may be left with a failed marriage and a few credit cards. For Monica, who has always been a pampered woman, childbirth is the only bargaining chip she has in exchange for the benefits of marriage. Fertility causes her anxiety and becomes a major factor in determining her fate. It is evident that in a social context where the power of male discipline prevails, women have to passively play the role expected of them - the angel of the house - in order to survive, or they will inevitably end up being abandoned.

Monica and Mrs. Pusey share the same fertility anxiety and body anxiety because they both place the value of their lives in the hands of men. Until she succeeds in producing an heir, Monica's body is built according to male aesthetic standards. Perhaps she could only temporarily preserve her status and position by winning her husband over with her long, graceful body. In the ubiquitous oppression of power, micro-power disciplines the individual, creating anxiety about modifying one's body. In order to appeal to the male aesthetic eye, women often go on self-restraint diets in order to maintain a slim figure, and over time the dieting turns into anorexia. The beautiful Monica is actually a poor anorexic. She suppresses her appetite, not by choice, but to appeal to her husband's aesthetic eye and to ensure that her body is still attractive to him. The truth is that "Society really doesn't care about women's appearance per se. What genuinely matters is that women remain willing to let others tell them what they can and cannot have. Women are watched, in other words, not to make sure that they will 'be good', but to make sure that they will know they are being watched"(qtd. in GIULIANA GIOBBI ); Monica internalizes the male gaze as self-regulation, constantly regulates her body with a male aesthetic, and urges Edith to buy new dresses to meet the expectations of others. It is thus clear that the power of male regulation lies in its powerful permeability, enabling women to achieve self-regulation and regulate others.

Anxiety related to marriage was something Edith's mother also experienced. Having lost her beauty and glamour after getting married, Rosa often showed great resentment towards her husband, projecting her anxiety onto the young Edith. However, Rosa's anxiety stems not only from her disillusionment with her ideal marriage but also from her intercultural loneliness. Despite having a high level of social standing and affluence, the majority of Brookner's single intellectual women live in intercultural isolation, and their lives are marked by a significant degree of suffering due to their "interculturalism," especially in the spiritual domain. One of the most noticeable and immediate effects of intercultural marriage is loneliness. Edith's father is English, while her mother, Rosa, is Viennese, and the cultural and living habits of the two people from different backgrounds inevitably create a gap that affects their relationship. As a result, the couple often quarrels in their married life. As a child, Edith would gingerly slip into her mother's fragrant bedroom, serve her coffee and then gingerly slip out, holding the coffee cup she had deliberately broken. At the age of seven, she accompanied her mother to Vienna, where she heard her mother and Aunt Resi complaining to each other about their husbands and their unhappy marriage. "Schrecklich! Schrecklich!"(24) they shouted, which frightened Edith into hiding behind her grandmother's chair. Women are usually forgotten, marginalized and distorted, and Edith's mother's identity anxiety not only comes from male power discourse but also lies in the loneliness brought by the cross-cultural environment.

### **3. The Anxiety of Jennifer**

The discipline of subjects in contemporary society is carried out through the use of micro-power tools like gaze and surveillance (Cao Shunqing, Zhao Yiheng et al., 174). Being a lady is an admirable quality in the eyes of society. In *Hotel du Lac*, Jennifer has been taught to be a lady since she was little. She is made to experience immense material gratification by Mrs. Pusey and her husband. She always appears stunning in public and acts and looks like her mother. Although she always has a nice grin on her face and talks with elegance, those behaviors are merely a cover for her real presence. In actuality, Jennifer has been suffering from identity anxiety as a result of living in her mother's shadow. Together with her mother for lunch, she will order the waitress to bring her tea in an extremely formal manner and with a lovely grin on her face. But the look on her face softens as soon as the waiter

leaves. When the waitress approached her once again, she had to behave like a noble lady. In the presence of her mother, Jennifer loses the opportunity to express herself since Mrs. Pusey decides how to behave in front of the public. Jennifer thus continually suppresses her inner feelings and obsessively maintains the mask of a lady and obedient daughter, which leads her to experience significant identity anxiety. The disguise of the day fiercely conflicts with the longing of the heart. As a result, Jennifer is obedient and acts like a decent daughter during the day, while at night, she acts rebelliously behind her mother's back.

Using their body to achieve their goals through sexual seduction under the male gaze has thus become a shortcut for many women steeped in consumer culture. The body has become a functional commodity with "exchange value". Jennifer's body has become the object of men's lust and desire as well. She is raised in accordance with the patriarchal society's expectations of femininity by Mrs. Pusey, who plays an accomplice role with the males. Since Jennifer is not financially independent, marrying a man with substantial financial resources is the best way out for her to maintain a luxurious lifestyle. For women, it is a common belief that they should marry a man with a good social status and be able to live in peace for the rest of their lives. In order to maximize the exchange value of the body, Mrs. Pusey carefully dressed up her daughter's body, making her look young and sexy. Although Jennifer is a woman of 39, she lulled the observant Edith into thinking she was only a girl in her mid-twenties.

Her large fair face, perhaps a little too sparsely populated by a cluster of rather small features, shone with the ruddy health of an unsuspecting child. Everything about her gleamed. Her light blue eyes, her regular, slightly incurving teeth, and her faultless skin, all gave off various types of sheen; her blonde hair looked almost dusty in comparison. Her rather plump artless body was, Edith saw, set forth by clothes which were far from artless and possibly too narrow; Jennifer managed to give the impression that she was growing out of them. Everything about her was as expensive as her mother's money could make it, but in a different style from Mrs. Pusey's careful elegance(27).

Jennifer's body has been built by Mrs. Pusey as a bargaining chip to stimulate male desire in exchange for material marriage security, and she has lost the right to control and ownership of her body. Jennifer no longer seems to have a full personality because she has been objectified. Her figure, gorgeously set off by expensive clothes, is given a high commodity value, as are other consumer goods. Laura Mulvey believes that the representation of the female body in a particular form is the key to the process of image deviation... It is easy to be assigned a sexual meaning (Mulvey, 5). Mrs. Pusey and her daughter turn to Mr. Neville for help catching a spider and misunderstand waiter Alan, both of which aim to show Jennifer's sexual body in order to arouse his male desire. When Mr. Neville helps Jennifer catch a spider in her room, he gets a good look at Jennifer's sexy body. "Jennifer herself, the straps of a satin nightgown slipping from her plump shoulders, laughing and uttering little moans, was poised on her bed, her legs drawn up" (41). "And the nightgown revealing quite a lot of very grown-up flesh" (42). When Mrs. Pusey misunderstands Alan for making advances on Jennifer, Neville sees Jennifer's attractive figure once again. "What she saw was indeed Jennifer, but Jennifer propped up in bed, her face moody and Hushed, her mouth set in a pout, her plump shoulders emerging from the slipping décolletage of a virginal but very slightly transparent lawn nightgown" (77).

Indeed, Jennifer's curvaceous figure ignited Neville's desire. One night, Edith caught Neville sneaking out of Jennifer's room. This seems to indicate that Jennifer's plan to seduce a rich man has finally worked out. Sadly, however, Neville has no intention of marrying the cosmetically dressed Jennifer. In his eyes, Jennifer's body was a mere object of pleasure, a tool to satisfy his desires. Jennifer's attempt to trade physical seduction for material marriage ultimately failed. She will continue her anxiety, acting like a lady and cooperating with her mother until a man with great fortune marries her and makes her life secure. However, it is not difficult to imagine that in a marriage based on material benefits, Jennifer is likely to repeat the path of her mother and Monica, facing fertility anxiety and identity anxiety under the disciplinary power of her husband, and can only rely on a man to live without her own subjectivity.

#### **4. The Anxiety of Edith**

Michel Foucault used the 18th-century "panoramic prison" as an example to show how social power operates. The members of the "prison" are continuously being watched and punished by the social power in order to discipline the body (224-227). Under the burden of patriarchal discipline, the patriarchal society served as the "panoramic prison", which caused Edith to feel restless and nervous. She prefers to dress simply and informally and does not enjoy dressing up according to male aesthetics. Her typical clothes consist of plaid skirts and long cardigans. Although she frequently made the decision to dress nicely, she never really changed from her straightforward look. She ended up a dated spinster and was shunned by the general public. As a result, she often dreamed that she attended "an important occasion attended in rags" (9). On a deeper level, Edith's status as a single, educated woman is also reflected in the dream, as well as her sartorial anxieties. Being plainly clothed and lacking in fashion sense put Edith in a "dissociative and inferior posture" in social interactions(Wang Shouren, He Ning, 35).

Women are disciplined and oppressed by social authority via clothes, which reduces their individuality and renders them slaves. When Edith felt the power pressure that the viewer's eyes brought, she started to internalize the value judgment of the viewer and changed her appearance to conform to the male society's standards of beauty: from the simple cardigan sweater at first to the blue silk long skirt, Edith's clothing underwent an evolution from plain to gorgeous. She gradually lost in the process of appeasing the viewers, and her original writing goal was frequently derailed. The outfits that protected the body ended up giving Edith the illusion of a prosperous social life and a successful marriage.

According to Beauvoir's theory in her book *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (1949), the most important aspect of feminine identity is that women are "the other." "He is the subject, the absolute, and she is the other"(11). Despite the fact that Edith is a financially independent writer, Penelope and Mrs. Dempster believe that women are always the "second sex" and that the only way for women to change or maintain their social status is through marriage and male union, regardless of their own accomplishments. Geoffrey, Edith's fiancé, is regarded as a decent man. But the wedding house he provides for Edith is comparable to a luxurious jail since his patriarchal mentality permeates the marital home. Geoffrey frequently griped about Edith's modest bed, despite the fact that Edith enjoyed the minimalist design of the furnishings. Due to this, Edith "chose a counterpane of dull marigold, with expensive marigold coloured towels to hang in their dark green marble bathroom, and some thick satin-bound blankets the color of cinnamon" (68). She also promises to give up writing novels after getting married and take on the everyday tasks of shopping and cooking, just like other housewives.

Whether women like it or not, traditional civilizations have always seen or defined women in terms of marriage since their identity ultimately rests on the identity of males. On her wedding day, Edith did not show up because she couldn't help but worry that she would quit writing novels after getting married and just bury herself in the family. Thus a special trial of Penelope and Mrs. Dempster forces Edith, who opposes the patriarchal marriage, into a brief exile. A modest punishment mechanism, according to Foucault (201), is at the core of every disciplinary system. By applying a "normative ruling" on her, they want to subdue Edith.

Exiled to the *Hotel du Lac*, Edith is courted by Mr. Neville. He had always seen Edith as a decent woman and a potential wife. He constantly watched Edith's countenance while they were speaking in an attempt to deduce her thoughts. He likes to control the conversation and consistently leaves Edith stunned. Mr. Neville views marriage as a business transaction and always views men's and women's interactions through a patriarchal lens. Edith, however, found his proposal to give up her love and accept marriage to be quite alluring. After her marriage, she could continue to write novels and even have lovers as long as she didn't cause scandal. In the meantime, she could also enjoy high social standing and luxurious living arrangements. After her first unfinished marriage, Edith tries to give up romanticism and submit to reality. However, Mr. Neville struck her. By chance knowing Neville and Jennifer's affair, Edith comes to the conclusion that her attempts to elevate her social position and spiritual self-assurance through marriage are eventually futile. She makes up her mind that she would cling to her aspirations for love rather than entering the anxiety of a conventional marriage.

Edith purposefully dressed like her literary hero Virginia Woolf in public to demonstrate her support for the status of women intellectuals. She emulates Woolf's writing style as well. In fact, Brookner reveals to readers and the entire society the stress of being a female author through Edith. Gilbert and Guba once stated in the book *The Madwoman in the Attic* that for a long time, because male invention in the arts was seen as a fundamental quality of males and writing was seen as a masculine activity, the representations of women in literature were the result of the male imagination. Women who wrote suffered "writer's anxiety" whenever they engaged in literary endeavors because they were denied the freedom to portray themselves as they saw fit and had to adhere to established patriarchal norms. For example, Edith's agency urges her constantly to write novels that portray the modern female as someone who dresses stylishly and acts erratically in order to appeal to the consumer market. Women's bodies are made into products to be observed in the market by the numerous books that sell them under the guise of "feminist".

Edith, however, vehemently disagreed with this. In order to maintain her resolve, she creates her own parable of "the tortoise and the hare". In her books, the timid, under-dressed "tortoise" frequently triumphs against the cunning, aggressive "rabbit", which is the story most women expect. While in reality, the tortoise-like Edith never wins the rabbit. She has always been the lover of David, and their relationship is just unacceptable in public. Although David represents Edith's search for romantic love, she is also aware that interfering in another person's marriage is dishonorable. In the novel's conclusion, the protagonist's return is not an attempt to go back to the beginning but rather the fulfillment of her inner demands following the realization of truth. There won't be any more anxiety for Edith. The simple clothes she wore, the persistent creative writing, and the search for genuine love all contributed to the development of her own character. She not only undermined the disciplinary power behind clothing culture and marriage, but she also inspired those women who were subject to the discourse of power to have the confidence to defy patriarchal society's restrictions and become their true selves via her work.

## 5. Conclusion

Everyone may simultaneously play the role of implementing power in the interleaved power network and acting as the object being controlled by it. In patriarchal cultures, a variety of feminine anxieties arise where male disciplinary power dominates societal value. It is discovered that there are three different types of anxiousness existing at *Hotel du Lac*. One is the tension that married women go through. Mrs. Pusey and Monica struggled with fertility problems and physical beauty while meeting their husbands' demands. While Edith's mother's troubled marriage and the loneliness she felt living in two different cultures both contributed to her unhappiness. The second main anxiety in the book is Jennifer's concern as a daughter and an unmarried woman. She presents herself as an elegant lady by day and indulges herself at night, having two distinct personalities. The disguised masculine power control of Jennifer's mother is the cause of her identity anxiety. However, her consent to alter her body to meet male beauty standards in order to secure a happy marriage destined her to later endure the stress that married women go through. Patriarchal disciplinary power was to blame for Edith's grave worry about her out-of-date clothing, acceptance of loveless marriages, and marketable books. She finally overcame the masculine disciplinary power, though, by her insistence on modest clothing, her longing for romantic love, and her determination to invent her own tales. The power structure of the patriarchal society is discovered to be the primary reason behind women's discomfort, according to the article's comprehensive investigation of the many anxieties. Therefore, developing a strong sense of independence for women and finding a good fit for oneself is crucial.

It is a novel way to apply power theory to examine the concerns at *Hotel du Lac*. Readers will gain additional insight into the book and a better understanding of the characters' anxieties with the article. However, the study was unable to include every female character in the novel. Furthermore, the work has a number of details that speak to women's anxiety; these features may be analyzed in more detail by taking into consideration the ideas of the many unmentioned female characters. At the same time, it is recommended that future studies join other characters from Brookner's works for examination in order to enhance the research's findings.

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