

UNRAVELING POWER AND OPPRESSION IN ANNA BURNS LITTLE CONSTRUCTIONS

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Abstract

This article explores the intricate dynamics of power and oppression within a family, as depicted in Anna Burns' novel *Little Constructions*. Set in a society rife with authoritarianism and violence, the narrative delves deep into the complexities of familial relationships, highlighting how these dynamics mirror larger societal structures. By analyzing the novel through the lens of Michel Foucault's theories on power and control, this article seeks to uncover the layers of dominance and resistance that characterize the characters' interactions. Textual quotations will illustrate how Burns portrays the insidious nature of oppression and the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate power structures within both the family and society.

Keywords: Familial, Dynamics, Power, Dominance, resistance, Oppression.

Anna Burns' *Little Constructions* is a profound exploration of the interplay between power and oppression within a family, set against the backdrop of a society plagued by authoritarianism and violence. The novel's narrative, rich with tension and complexity, provides a fertile ground for examining the multifaceted nature of power dynamics. At the heart of *Little Constructions* is the broader theme of control and subjugation. Burns skillfully portrays how the family unit can become a microcosm of the wider societal structures of power. The family in the novel is not just a refuge but a battleground where power struggles play out in often brutal ways. Through the lens of Michel Foucault's theories on power, we can better understand these dynamics.

Foucault posited that power is not merely possessed but exercised through various institutions and social practices. In *Little Constructions*, this concept is evident as Burns illustrates how familial relationships are shaped by broader societal forces. For instance, the authoritarian figure in the family wields power in ways that reflect the oppressive tactics of the external regime. As Foucault suggests, power is both repressive and productive, a duality that is vividly depicted in the novel. The character of John, the patriarch, embodies the oppressive force within the family. His authoritarian rule is mirrored in the societal structure outside the home. Burns writes, "John's word was law, unchallenged and absolute, a mirror of the world beyond their doors." This quotation underscores the symbiotic relationship between the microcosm of the family and the macrocosm of society, highlighting how power perpetuates itself through various levels of social organization.

Resistance within the family is subtle yet significant. Foucault's concept of "bio-power," which refers to the regulation of populations through subtle and often invisible mechanisms of control, can be seen in the ways family members navigate their oppression. Burns portrays these acts of resistance through the small, defiant actions of the characters. For example, the youngest daughter, despite being under the strictest scrutiny, finds ways to assert her autonomy. "She would whisper secrets to the walls, her rebellion unnoticed but fierce," Burns writes, capturing the essence of silent resistance.

The novel also delves into the psychological impact of living under constant surveillance and control. The characters' internal landscapes are fraught with fear, anxiety, and a perpetual sense of being watched, reflecting Foucault's ideas about the panopticon, where power is maintained through the possibility of constant observation. Burns' description of the family home as a "house of glass, where every move was scrutinized," vividly captures this pervasive sense of surveillance.

In conclusion, *Little Constructions* offers a compelling examination of power and oppression within a family, drawing parallels to broader societal structures. Through Foucault's theoretical framework, we gain a deeper understanding of the characters' struggles and the pervasive nature of control and resistance. Burns' narrative, rich with textual nuances, provides a powerful commentary on the complexities of power dynamics, both within the family and in society at large.

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