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POST-MARITAL PROBLEMS OF ANNIE BROWNER: REFLECTION OF THE FAMILY MYTH
IN JUDITH GUEST'S *ERRANDS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper brings out the hidden emotional story of the protagonist who is struggling with a family crisis. Due to sudden death of her husband, the family becomes isolated from actual life. As a wife loses her husband, her children lose their father. Each one of the family is moving towards different directions his or her own level of acceptance. Still it is a family, but a different one. The author's timing and skill makes the family loss and its aftermath searching of the protagonist's new journey alone without the moral support of her husband. She believes that the one person in the novel who tries to hold together everything is her sister. But, she is also fighting her own battles with a married man. The guy has become the part of the family but disappears as well, leaving the family with yet another loss of the protagonist and the children. Her parents also cannot provide her with the kind of support which the family needs. Because, they cannot bring back her husband to home for the family comfort. Especially, the children are trapped in confusion with the loss of their father, and they experience pre-adolescent angst.

Keywords: Grief, loneliness, loss, Inner struggle, the trails of family, frustration

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INTRODUCTION

Judith Guest is known by her first successful work *Ordinary People* (1976) has propelled her to fame as a best-selling author in American literature. Her second publication is *Second Heaven* (1982); it tells the story of three lonely, troubled two adults and an adolescent who are trying to help each other. The author's first two works are set in contemporary middle-class suburbia. Both novels have dealt with a troubled adolescent boy as the central focus. Guest's portrays her characters in these novels grasping with such problems as depression, teenager- suicide, isolation, divorce, and child abuse. In her third book *Errands* (1997) again Guest explores her specialty of familial tribulations – the impact of a young man's death on his inconsolable wife and her innocent children. The family is finding their new world without the man and then they turn upside down, especially his wife. She is consumed with grief, and everyday tasks that seems to be

insurmountable. Through this novel, the author once again gives a picture of the unforgettable family sufferings that finds the bits and pieces of their lives' aloofness.

Errands is Judith Guest's own family myth, her own of the most autobiographical novel. The Events of the novel may be exaggerated or altered for artistic or thematic purposes and for author's own family myth. An autobiographical novel that portray settings and/or situations with which the author is familiar are not necessarily autobiographical. There are novels that include aspects drawn from the author's life as minor plot details. Autobiographical novels have written about intense, private experiences such as war, family, conflict, or gender. *Errands* also deals with the family conflict of the one family members and their unendurable grief. "The word 'autobiography' was first used deprecatingly by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical the *Monthly Review*, when he suggested the word as a hybrid, but condemned it as "pedantic." However, its next recorded use was in its present sense, by Robert Southey in 1809" (1). In an autobiography, the author writes of his/her own life and its achievements. The writer may give a full account of his /her own life in detail or the writer may give few anecdotes. Judith Guest also presents an account of the grandmother's life. *Errands*, an autobiography reveals the characters and their inner struggle in which Guest presents an analysis of her temperament and intentions. Guest has also introduced her imaginary characters and they bring out the author's personal sad story of her lonely grandmother who is grieving about her children's future through Annie Browner's family in her novel.

Sudden demise of Keith Browner - Consequences

As the novel opens with Keith Browner and his family, are on the way to Lake Huron to spend their summer vacation. Keith is a famous high school English teacher, and is the father of three children. He is good teacher-painter and enthusiastic; his students love him more. For past six years they rented the same cottage in the lake view. Both husband and wife especially their children are eagerly visit the Lake Huron where they planned to stay up north until September than kids go back to school. Browner, "all the things he will not do. Never sail across Lake Huron, never go horseback riding in Montna, never see his kids graduate" (Guest1997:08). The family is not aware of that is the false shadow in this trip Because Keith Browner is dying of cancer. He feels that the safest place is home for in this critical situation. The children will be disappointed if in case the trip is cancelled and so he accepts to go with them. He knows that this is the last trip with his family. He confirms that he will be separated from the family soon. These things are going on his mind, and everything blurs. He himself comes to the realization that he is slowly passing away; he has this premonition already because he is helpless and cannot move anywhere without the help of anyone.

Annie Browner has spent seventeen years of happy married life with her husband. She wonders why so many misfortunes had struck the family in quick successions. Many things have changed a lot for the Browner's family. Being a helpless woman, Annie, is expected her husband's hundred percent participation with the family events in future without fail. One day her morning hour's dreams portend the bad events that clear her doubts: "probably something left over from a dream. She has too many of them these days: violent scenes of fathomless, unfixable misery, causing her to wake to a trumpet blast of fear, a certainty that all is lost" (Guest 30). Annie sees this image in her mind; her struggles further threaten to add danger. There is no sign of rescue of her husband from his sickness. She thinks that death is not something new and that she need not be curious about that. The truth is that she also feels like an ailing lady. She has focused that her vision is going inward: the last journey of her husband with family. He is going toward the opposite direction, and there is no going back to reunite with them.

Annie's encounter with an interview

After the death of Anne's husband, she needs to go for a job. Being a college dropout, it is a real challenge to manage the interview without marketable skills. That is her utmost problem and looks hard at everything now. She has been too afraid but she must climb slowly to search her destination. For saying herself she needs a more personal relationship with God. Nothing would save her, nothing in this world for her, and her way is reflecting her own emptiness. "Nothing feels right anymore- cleaning house, cooking, washing clothes, paying bills-meaningless tasks put there to drive her to exhaustion, making her feel like a ghost in her

own life (Guest 90). Previously, she was familiar with only household works. Prior to attending the interview, she realizes that she might find the official work extremely challenging. Later, she feels ready to attend the interview for the post of clerk at one of her close relative's office. She needed recommendation to get the job because the company has received more than two hundred applications for the clerical post: "That was what was so hard about interview-feeling rejected over job that she wouldn't want if she got it" (Guest 114). Annie has the capability to carry out the domestic responsibilities confidently. Her thought of working outside home makes her anxious. Somehow she managed at the interview spot: "at last she's making her phone calls and getting a few appointments; most people don't even want to talk to her when they find out how long she's been out of the job market" (Guest 114).

Annie is being afraid because the company people are looking for someone who is having more experience than her. They are telling that it is important to recruit only qualified candidates. She says that this job is not difficult for her: "And she has done exactly this kind of work. I managed the entire financial department of the Church" (Guest 132). She tries to convey her experiences gently but in vain as they never get convinced. At last, the interview was over "but the interviewers appreciate her coming in. again, the dismissive smile" (Guest 133). She would not say anything and come out of the office with disappointment and says, "She is a bitch, she thinks. And she wouldn't work here to save her soul" (Guest 133). She did not know what to say her children when she reaches home. They are waiting for her arrival at home. When she reaches home she does not reflect her anxiety and the problems on her children. Because kids cannot understand her problems and also they are not mature enough to solve it. The second interview, she got an opportunity and continued her work for children's future. Finally, she had temporary solution for the permanent problem but her struggles continued until the end.

Annie's distressing anxiety with her children's activities

Annie and her three children were totally disappointed of Browner's impending demise. Hereafter, she fails to see the family that she does not bring comfort to the kids. Thirteen year old Harry, the oldest, changes into a brooding teen. He is roaming in the streets with a new rebellious friend. Julie, the youngest at nine, who starts to lie about her whereabouts. But she keeps a secret journal that reveals her true feelings at the end. Jimmy is a eleven year old, sandwiched forever in the middle of the family. He no longer gives the pressure, instead of being the peacemaker among them. The children and their way irresponsible ways of conduct is a second threatening factor that affects Annie's mentality. She has tried to teach them for future betterment but the children do not regard their mother's advice. Her utmost problem is her elder son, Harry and his playful activities out of home, who never worries about future. He hates his mathematics class, and he would hide in the bathroom until the class is over. He is far away from stupid story problems such as, "who cares if the two trains travel toward each other at different speeds? Who cares if they crash head-on and everybody on board dies of heart attack?" (Guest91).

Another problem with Harry's friends is that he has gone for picnic just a few miles away from his home town. At last, they returned with empty hands; he and his friends lost their bike and that irritates and adds more tension to his mother. Then, he quits from school hockey team. This is the one of the things his mother loves him for but he comes out and irritates her. His mother says that "he's as stubborn as Dad. We can't tell him anything" (Guest 146). After that, one evening Annie has finished dinner with her children in a restaurant, way to home. When they had a heated argument among children especially Harry. Annie got irritated by Harry's impolite argument and then she asks him to get down from the car. She never minds what he will do when he out of the car and how can he reached home that night. Finally, she continued her travel without him but Harry never turned up. Annie reaches home and waits for his son's arrival, and she called his friends and enquires about his visit there. During the midnight hours she would search of missing boy. She is confused and is planning to give a police complaint. At last, she dialed her sister's number then she found that the boy was there. She knows everything about her children's problems but she cannot put up with the insulting remarks on the children and pelts them with stones. All the confusions and problems are getting worse from his children, and she is forced to balance the pressure both family and working place.

Conclusion

To sum up this paper, the novel *Errands* is really an account of the inside of author's mind and shows her family myth. It is followed by the novel's protagonist whose angst against on her life journey without the husband. Moreover, the protagonist, Annie is a tragic character fit according to the author's description. Her tragedy is partly the fault of her house atmosphere, especially children move toward their level of acceptance after the death of Keith Browner. The protagonist's life that is filled with profound dilemmas is a fate she has accepted. However, be rightly says that Annie is wholly a victim of the social system - the family unit.

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