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## The Personality Features of the Female Protagonist in Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the portrayal of avoidant personality traits in Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*, focusing on the character of Edith Hope. This paper aims to analyze how Edith's introspective nature, emotional detachment, and self-devaluation reflect key features of avoidant personality disorder. The analysis reveals that Edith's submissiveness contrasts with the narcissistic tendencies of Mrs. Pursey, highlighting the stark differences in self-perception and social interaction. Additionally, the paper examines the influence of Edith's domineering, narcissistic mother, arguing that their complex relationship contributes significantly to the development of Edith's avoidant traits. The study concludes that Brookner's depiction of familial and interpersonal dynamics provides a nuanced understanding of the psychological factors shaping Edith's identity and emotional struggles, offering insight into the impact of external relationships on the formation of avoidant personality characteristics.

### Keywords

avoidant personality features; narcissism; Hotel Du Lac; social avoidance; mother-daughter relationship

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## 1. Introduction

Anita Brookner is celebrated for her incisive wit and elegantly restrained prose, as well as her penetrating portrayals of solitary, introspective women navigating the chasm between romantic idealism and disillusionment. Though Brookner herself eschewed the feminist label, her work has been widely lauded for its psychologically nuanced depictions of intelligent, often erudite women whose pursuit of self-fulfillment is subtly thwarted by internal insecurities, societal expectations, and the quiet cruelties of interpersonal dynamics.

Central to Brookner's oeuvre is a recurring archetype: the emotionally isolated woman of intellectual refinement. These characters—financially independent yet psychologically vulnerable, professionally accomplished yet perpetually self-doubting—exist in a state of quiet desolation. They are marked by a striking dissonance: keenly analytical minds juxtaposed with profound uncertainty about their physical appeal and social worth. Their lives, though outwardly orderly, are haunted by unrealized yearnings and a pervasive sense of having been sidelined by fate.

In *Hotel du Lac* (1984), Brookner's Booker Prize-winning novel, this archetype finds its most poignant expression in Edith Hope, a middle-aged romance novelist exiled to a tranquil Swiss hotel following a public romantic scandal. The novel unfolds as a masterclass in psychological subtlety, tracing Edith's reluctant journey of self-reckoning through a narrative steeped in restraint and introspection. Brookner's prose, spare yet luminous, mirrors the stark emotional landscape of her protagonist, whose retreat to the exclusive *Hotel du Lac*—a sanctuary for the emotionally wounded—becomes both a physical escape and a metaphorical descent into memory.

Set against the muted backdrop of the hotel's off-season lassitude, the story immerses readers in Edith's world of quiet desperation. Through her interactions with the hotel's eccentric guests—a self-centered and arrogant widow, a neglected aristocrat, and a pragmatically detached suitor—Edith is compelled to confront the unresolved tensions of her past: her ambivalence toward romantic convention, her guilt over failed intimate relationships, and her fraught negotiation of autonomy and vulnerability.

Ultimately, *Hotel du Lac* transcends its narrow setting to pose broader questions about identity, agency, and the cost of emotional survival. In *Edith Hope*, Brookner crafts an anti-heroine for the ages—a woman whose quiet defiance and unflinching self-awareness elevate her private struggles into a profound meditation on the human condition. The novel stands as a testament to Brookner's singular ability to find grandeur in quiet despair, transforming the muted tones of loneliness into a resonant exploration of what it means to live—and write—on the margins of one's own life.

## 2. Literature review

Scholars have extensively analyzed *Hotel du Lac*, shedding light on the novel's exploration of cultural, feminist, and postmodern themes, particularly focusing on the psychological complexity of its protagonist, Edith Hope, and how Brookner examines the social and emotional dimensions of her solitude.

Lassner et al. (2010) broaden this reading by placing Brookner within a transnational context. They argue that Edith's displacement goes beyond personal failure, resonating with broader post-Holocaust and post-imperial anxieties. The hotel, as a microcosm of European bourgeois society, becomes a space where Edith confronts her "Anglo-Jewish aesthetic" (Lassner, 17), navigating the cultural dissonance of being caught between English reserve and Continental sensibilities.

Fisher-Wirth (1995) highlights Brookner's portrayal of women trapped in patriarchal structures. Despite Edith's literary success, she internalizes societal expectations that measure female worth by marriage. Fisher-Wirth observes that Edith's rejection of Mr. Neville's pragmatic proposal—choosing instead to return to an uncertain future—becomes a "tragic affirmation" of her refusal to commodify love (Fisher-Wirth, 9). This decision, although appearing as defeat, underscores her commitment to authenticity, even if it is painful.

In *Misreading Anita Brookner* (Mayer, 2020), Brookner's heroines are described as embodying a duality: they seek connection but fear the vulnerability that comes with it. This tension reflects a broader commentary on feminine identity, as the protagonists oscillate between the intellectual independence they pursue and the emotional dependence they desire.

Ruth Hoberman's essay, *Sad Women: A Look at Anita Brookner* (2021), situates *Hotel du Lac* within Brookner's broader oeuvre of "sad women" who defy the romanticized notion of female fulfillment. Edith embodies the introspective, solitary woman whose sadness stems more from societal marginalization than personal failure.

Hoberman compares Brookner to Samuel Beckett, noting that both authors focus on existential stasis: “Godot doesn’t arrive” in Brookner’s novels either, but her characters live in “comfortable London flats” rather than barren landscapes (Hoberman, 211).

This view aligns with B. Lakshmi Kantham’s analysis of Brookner’s protagonists as “Ms. Lonely” figures, whose introspective struggles reflect broader existential alienation (Lakshmikantham, 2013). Lakshmi extends this to Henry James, drawing parallels between Edith’s observational detachment and the Jamesian protagonists who “live little” (Lakshmikantham, 2013).

Hosmer (1993), on the other hand, approaches Edith’s sadness through the lens of exile, a recurring motif in Brookner’s work. He identifies Edith as a “divided soul,” (Hosmer, 10) estranged from her English milieu due to her Austrian heritage and romantic idealism. He emphasizes her “homesickness” and “restless walking” as markers of existential wandering, yet notes her eventual “acceptance” of her condition, which grants her clarity without erasing her solitude (Hosmer, 36–38).

J.A. Hurtley (1988) contrasts Edith’s defiance with the passive resignation of Brookner’s earlier heroines. Edith’s rejection of a pragmatic marriage to Mr. Neville signifies a feminist assertion of agency, albeit one tempered by unresolved longing. Hurtley interprets Edith’s final telegram—“Returning” instead of “Coming home”—as a rejection of false closure, symbolizing her refusal to capitulate to societal expectations (Hurtley, 1988).

While Henrik Specht’s (2001) analysis focuses on Providence, his insights into self-deception and moral growth resonate with Hotel du Lac. Specht argues that Edith misreads Mr. Neville’s motives, projecting romantic fantasies onto his pragmatic offer.

Chinese scholars have also provided insightful interpretations of Hotel du Lac. Wang Shouren and He Ning (2003) argue that Edith represents a displaced woman in society. As a single, intellectual woman, she struggles to fit into the traditional social order. Her experience at the hotel serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by women in a male-dominated world. They suggest that Edith’s time at the hotel is a form of both physical and psychological exile, forcing her to confront her inner self.

Jiang Xue (2015), another Chinese scholar, argues that Brookner’s female characters, like Edith, are intellectual woman with strong personalities, yet they face significant challenges within a patriarchal society. Edith’s rejection of traditional gender roles is clear in her struggle for self-identification.

The existing scholarship on Hotel du Lac provides a robust analysis of the novel’s exploration of feminist, cultural, and psychological themes, particularly the emotional and social isolation of the protagonist, Edith Hope. However, most of the critical literature primarily situates Edith within the frameworks of post-Holocaust, post-imperial anxieties (Lassner et al., 2010), patriarchal struggles (Fisher-Wirth, 1995), or existential alienation (Lakshmikantham, 2013). While these discussions highlight Edith’s social dislocation and emotional distress, they often overlook a more nuanced psychological dimension of her character: the avoidant personality traits that shape her responses to intimacy, vulnerability, and emotional connection. My paper will delve into these avoidant features, examining how Edith’s fear of rejection and reluctance to engage in close relationships manifest in her behavior throughout the novel.

### 3. Research Methodology and theoretical framework

This paper combines theoretical analysis with quantitative textual interpretation. The primary theoretical framework utilized is Millon’s (1996) theory of Disorders of Personality, which offers a structured model for understanding the avoidant personality disorder and narcissism personality disorder. This study applies Millon’s framework to analyze the personalities of key characters within the texts, identifying their alignment with specific personality disorders as outlined by Millon. The analysis focuses on the traits, behaviors, and cognitive patterns exhibited by the characters, interpreting these through the lens of Millon’s classifications.

The primary data for this study consists of the selected literary texts of Hotel Du Lac. A close reading of the texts is performed to identify key behavioral and emotional patterns within the characters’ dialogues and actions. The identified traits are then mapped onto Millon’s personality disorder categories.

According to the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) is characterized by social inhibition, a desire for interpersonal affiliation, feelings of inadequacy, hypersensitivity to negative evaluation, and a fear of rejection. However, it is worth mentioning that this article will not treat Edith with

diagnosed Avoidant Personality Disorder, it will explore her character traits and behaviors that align with features of tendency towards avoidant personality, particularly in contrast to other characters who exhibit narcissistic traits.

#### 4. Demonstrations of avoidant personality in the protagonist

##### 4.1. Social Avoidance as a Consequence of Self-Doubt and Social Inhibition

In an interview with *The Paris Review* (Guppy, 1987), Anita Brookner is described as skillfully portraying female characters who are “forlorn figures... always looking for Henry James’s bench of desolation on which to deposit their meekly skirted behinds for an afternoon of fruitless anticipation.” (Guppy, 1987) These women are intelligent, deeply introspective, and possess high moral standards, yet they consistently fail to attain their greatest desires: love and a marriage with an apparently ideal man. Furthermore, they habitually undervalue their own talents and dismiss their considerable professional achievements.

In *Hotel du Lac*, the protagonist, Edith Hope, epitomizes these traits. She is blind to her own worth and dismisses her accomplishments. Longing for a sense of order and a place within a rational world, she finds solace in the mundane tasks and repetitive routines of daily life. With a compassionate nature and a strong moral compass, Edith demonstrates empathy and a deep emotional sensitivity.

These characteristics—social isolation, emotional detachment, and a fear of intimacy—coupled with a pervasive sense of self-inadequacy, are indicative of avoidant personality disorder (AvPD; DSM-5). Throughout the novel, Edith grapples with forming close, meaningful relationships, often opting to keep others at a safe distance. This reluctance to engage in intimate connections mirrors the hallmark symptoms of AvPD, as outlined by Millon (1996). AvPD is marked by a desire for social contact but is coupled with intense anxiety that leads to avoidance of such contact. Core features include pervasive social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to criticism (Weinbrecht, 2016). Individuals with AvPD often perceive themselves as unwanted and tend to isolate themselves as a result (Weinbrecht, 2016).

This article, however, examines Brookner’s heroines as potentially exhibiting traits of avoidant personality rather than being diagnosed with avoidant personality disorder. As noted in *Understanding Anita Brookner* (Malcolm, 2002), Brookner’s protagonists frequently experience a sense of disconnection from others, often feeling ensnared within their internal worlds. This detachment functions as both a coping mechanism and a tragic outcome of their inability to reconcile their internal desires with external realities.

In a 1985 interview with John Haffenden (Haffenden, 1985), Brookner described herself as “this grown-up orphan with what you call success,” before revealing, “I feel I’m walking about with the mark of Cain on my forehead. I feel I could go into the Guinness Book of Records as the world’s loneliest, most miserable woman.” (Haffenden, 75) Edith’s sense of solicitude mirrors Brookner’s own life experience.

According to Robert Hosmer (1993), Anita Brookner’s initial three novels share so many similarities that they can be regarded as subtle adaptations of a common theme. Hosmer (1993) pointed out that these novels are so alike in certain aspects that they can be grouped together and seen as different versions that still revolve around one central theme: “the plight of a painfully sensitive, lonely woman on the cusp of middle age, who, despite keen intelligence and considerable learning, never quite gets things right.” (Hosmer, 5)

Edith Hope embodies many traits that align with an avoidant personality. She is extremely introspective, constantly reflecting on past traumas. Her avoidance is subtle but pervasive throughout the novel, manifesting in her actions, thoughts, and interactions with others. When the novel begins, Edith retreats to the remote Swiss hotel after a personal crisis—running away from her planned wedding—another important feature of avoidant personality disorder: a craving for intimate relationships but fear of getting hurt. Rather than confront the painful emotions associated with her failed relationship, she withdraws to a solitary place.

“The hotel was a place of rest and refuge, but also a place where time seemed to stand still. It was here, in the quiet of the Swiss countryside, that I had come face to face with the parts of myself I had long tried to avoid” (Brookner, 1984, p.3).

Throughout *Hotel du Lac*, Edith demonstrates a pronounced fear of self-disclosure, consistently maintaining emotional distance from the other guests at the hotel. She rarely participates in meaningful or intimate conversations, opting instead to remain aloof. Despite the attempts of other characters to engage with her, Edith remains largely unresponsive, effectively preventing any deeper connection. When others share personal stories,

Edith listens attentively, but she refrains from reciprocating, redirecting the focus away from her own emotions. Her reluctance to form close relationships reflects a deep-seated distrust, both of herself and others, which ultimately inhibits her ability to cultivate intimacy. This behavior exemplifies the avoidant personality trait of deliberately hindering emotional closeness, thereby maintaining an emotional barrier.

"We were all so different, and yet we were all the same. Each of us had come to the hotel to escape something, to hide from something. We were bound by our silence, our refusal to speak of the past" (Brookner, 1984, p11).

"I was, as I had always been, an outsider. I observed the lives of others with a detached curiosity, a curiosity that was not borne of affection but of the wish to remain unaffected" (Brookner, 1984, p12).

In this passage, Edith articulates her propensity to observe others from a distance, carefully refraining from emotional involvement. This behavior underscores her tendency to maintain emotional detachment, thereby avoiding the intimacy and vulnerability associated with close relationships. The phrase "detached curiosity" further emphasizes her deliberate distancing from others, signaling her avoidance of emotional closeness and the risks inherent in forming intimate connections.

"I did not wish to examine my feelings any more closely. I had done enough of that for one lifetime. It was time to stop the analysis, to stop the probing, to stop the endless self-examination" (Brookner, 1984, p55).

This passage captures Edith's reluctance to face her emotions directly. Instead of confronting her emotional issues, she prefers to suppress them. Her avoidant tendencies manifest in her desire to stop analyzing herself and avoid dealing with painful memories.

#### 4.2. Feelings of self-inadequacy

A key characteristic of individuals with avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) is a pervasive sense of self-inadequacy, which often manifests in low self-esteem and hypersensitivity to rejection (Weinbrecht, 2016). As depicted in *Hotel du Lac*, Edith Hope, despite her professional success and practical qualities, chooses to devalue herself and overestimate others, particularly men to whom she feels emotionally attached. This behavior exemplifies how individuals with avoidant tendencies often underestimate their own worth while idealizing others, driven by their deep fear of rejection and emotional vulnerability.

Edith's internal narrative is dominated by self-criticism and self-doubt. She frequently reflects on her perceived failures, particularly her romantic history, which exacerbates her sense of emotional inadequacy. This continuous sense of shame contributes to her avoidance behaviors. Edith fears judgment from others, prompting her to maintain emotional distance as a defense mechanism against potential rejection or criticism. As she states:

"I had long ceased to be surprised by my own inadequacy. I had known for some time that I was in a state of profound disarray. There had been a moment when I could have done something about it, but that moment had passed" (Brookner, 1984, p.76).

This passage reflects Edith's recognition of her internal disarray, as well as her inability to act when she had the opportunity, emphasizing her feelings of irreversible personal failure.

The fear of vulnerability and rejection is also a significant characteristic of avoidant personalities. Edith's reluctance to form new relationships is rooted in her fear that others will not accept her or will inflict emotional harm. She reveals her fear of future rejection:

"I had been rejected once, and I did not think I could stand it again. I could never expose myself to that kind of hurt again. It was easier to remain distant, to not risk anything" (Brookner, 1984, p.77).

Here, Edith acknowledges her fear of rejection and the emotional harm she has suffered. This reflects a common feature of avoidant behavior: a deep aversion to emotional exposure that leads to avoidance of intimate connections. Individuals with AvPD often prefer emotional distance to safeguard themselves from further pain.

Edith's avoidance of emotional confrontation further highlights her avoidant personality traits. Rather than confronting difficult emotions or relationships directly, she prefers to let situations unfold on their own. As she reflects:

"It was easier not to confront the situation, to let things unfold as they would, rather than risk facing them head-on" (Brookner, 1984, p.102).

This passage illustrates Edith's tendency to sidestep emotional engagement and confrontation, a hallmark of avoidant coping strategies, where individuals prefer passive responses to emotional challenges rather than taking the direct risks involved in facing their issues.

In an interview with *The Paris Review* (Guppy, 1987), Anita Brookner remarked:

"The contrast is between damaged people and those who are undamaged," but in *Hotel du Lac* the people are damaged. She also explained, "Edith Hope twice nearly marries. She balks at the last minute and decides to stay in a hopeless relationship with a married man. As I wrote it I felt very sorry for her and at the same time very angry: she should have married one of them—they were interchangeable anyway—and at least gained some worldly success, some social respectability" (Guppy, 1987).

This reflection reveals Brookner's sympathy for Edith while simultaneously expressing frustration with her avoidance of potentially beneficial life choices. Edith's tendency to stay in unfulfilling relationships rather than embracing the possibility of a socially acceptable marriage further illustrates her fear of emotional risk and her avoidance of emotional confrontation.

Individuals with avoidant personality often exhibit passive behavior, characterized by a tendency to avoid conflict rather than engage in confrontation. This is reflected in Edith's interactions throughout the novel, where she opts for compromise rather than rebellion, demonstrating how people with avoidant features typically avoid conflict to protect themselves from potential rejection or emotional harm.

## 5. Interpersonal relationship between avoidant protagonist with narcissism characters

### 5.1. Edith Hope's interpersonal relationship with the narcissist Iris Pusey

Brookner has been criticized for her recurring emphasis on the hare/tortoise motif, particularly in relation to the submissiveness of her tortoise-like protagonists. In several of her works, moral conflict plays a central role, with her passive heroines often clashing with more self-interested and ambitious characters, especially in the context of romantic relationships and societal expectations. Despite their moral integrity and sincere efforts, these protagonists are often outmaneuvered by the egoism of others, resulting in feelings of defeat and disillusionment. *Hotel du Lac* exemplifies this theme, as it is explicitly represented through the "tortoise and the hare" fairy tale, which underscores the central moral tension of the narrative.

In *Hotel du Lac*, Edith writes popular novels in which the tortoise always outruns the hare:

"Now you will notice, Harold, that in my books it is the mouse-like unassuming girl who gets the hero, while the scornful temptress with whom he has had a stormy affair retreats baffled from the fray, never to return. The tortoise wins every time. This is a lie, of course," she said, pleasantly, but with authority. (Brookner, 1984; p23)

"The tortoise and the hare, of course. The tortoise wins because it is steady and determined, whereas the hare believes in its own speed and superiority and so gets distracted. It is always the hare who loses in life, of course." (Brookner, 1984; p24)

This perspective arises from Edith's realization that the true facts of life are too harsh for the kind of fiction she writes. In any case, she acknowledges that her target audience is the "tortoise market"—"hares have no time to read. They are too busy winning the game." (Brookner, 1984, p.24)

Brookner also contrasts these two personality types in an interview with *Paris Review* (Guppy, 1987), where she discusses the concepts of "the complete woman" and "the ideal woman." She remarks:

"A complete woman is probably not a very admirable creature. She is manipulative, uses other people to get her own way, and works within whatever system she is in. The ideal woman, on the other hand, is quite different: She lives according to a set of principles and is somehow very rare and always has been." (Guppy, 1987)

To some extent, Edith embodies the "ideal woman" archetype, representing the frustrated "tortoises" who adhere to moral principles, but remain passive and indecisive. She is submissive, waiting for opportunities, but ultimately fails to grow or take action. Her youth is wasted on unworthy people and circumstances.

From a psychological perspective, Edith, along with other characters in the novel, exhibits traits consistent with grandiose narcissism, though not necessarily pathological. Kohut (1971) argued that grandiose narcissism refers to a person's outward expression of inflated self-esteem, a need for admiration, and a sense of superiority. While such

individuals may present themselves as confident and powerful, Kohut (1971) suggested that their grandiosity is often compensatory, masking deeper vulnerabilities. These individuals are dependent on external sources for validation, and their self-esteem remains fragile.

Iris Pusey, a secondary female character in *Hotel du Lac*, exemplifies overt narcissism. As noted by Brookner, she represents “the complete woman” and is the “hare” in the story. Iris embodies the “hare” who wins in life through manipulation, whereas Mme de Bonneuil’s invisibility symbolizes Edith’s fear of being erased. Fisher-Wirth (1995) describes Brookner’s female characters as “hunger artists,” metaphorically starving for validation in a world that denies them agency.

Iris exemplifies overt narcissism through her arrogance and self-assured persona, characterized by a need for constant admiration and a lack of empathy. Throughout the novel, Iris manipulates others to maintain her sense of superiority, particularly in her interactions with Edith. One key excerpt illustrating Iris’s narcissism is when she speaks about her own beauty and social status:

“I think I’m one of the few women who has never had to make an effort to be admired. People admire me without my having to ask for it. Isn’t that the way it should be?” (Brookner, 1984, p. 44)

This statement reflects Iris’s belief in her inherent superiority and entitlement to admiration, a hallmark of narcissistic behavior (Kohut, 1971). Iris also belittles Edith in their interactions, displaying a lack of empathy for her feelings:

“You should really wear something more becoming... something that flatters your complexion. Your dark clothes just make you look... so ordinary.” (Brookner, 1984, p. 85)

This remark illustrates Iris’s need to maintain a sense of superiority by demeaning others, underscoring her narcissistic tendency to treat people as objects that serve her self-image.

Edith’s submissive nature and self-devaluation are evident in her relationship with Iris. Rather than confronting Iris’s criticisms, Edith internalizes them, reflecting on her own perceived flaws and attempting to please Iris in hopes of gaining validation. For instance, when Iris criticizes her appearance, Edith responds:

“I must say, I never considered how badly my clothes suit me. But now that you mention it, I suppose I could try something different. Maybe I’ll change when I get home.” (Brookner, 1984, p. 87)

This passage highlights Edith’s passive submission, her lack of self-assertion, and her deep desire for external approval. She defers to Iris’s opinion, allowing it to dominate her self-perception rather than asserting her own perspective.

Edith’s submissiveness extends to her interactions with other hotel guests, where she often yields to their authority or decisions. Her low self-esteem is evident in her inability to make independent choices, as she continuously seeks reassurance from others. These traits reflect Edith’s dependence on external validation for her sense of self-worth.

The theme of the will to power and the utility of egotism as a means of navigating the world is a recurring motif in Brookner’s works, clearly demonstrated in the dynamic between Edith and Iris.

## 5.2. Psychological Exploration of Mother-Daughter Relationships

In Anita Brookner’s novels, the family casts a long shadow over her central characters. Parents often emerge as selfish, self-absorbed or essentially absent. Their children grow up in the absence of nurturing love, marked by insecurity and isolation. In most of Brookner’s works, the protagonists—usually daughters—approach the world with scrupulosity and puzzlement, keeping seeking relationships with men who are not their true matches. Central to Brookner’s character development is a recurring theme: the contest between those who must become adults prematurely and those who remain childlike despite growing older. In Brookner’s world, the latter often prevail.

Family, in this context, functions as a space for self-survival, embodying one’s roots and cultural traditions. The idea of “home” evokes a complex mix of place and belonging. The typical heroine in Brookner’s early fiction is a middle-aged intellectual who has sacrificed her youthful happiness to fulfill the demands of controlling parents. These dynamics often mirror Brookner’s own life experiences. In an interview with *The Paris Review* (Guppy, 1984), Brookner reflected on her upbringing, stating:

"I was a lonely child who early in life assumed the role of caretaker for my eccentric, careless parents. I was brought up to look after my parents. They were transplanted and fragile people, an unhappy brood, and I felt that I had to protect them. Indeed that is what they expected. As a result, I became an adult too soon and paradoxically never grew up. As for the 'displaced person' aspect, perhaps it is because although I was born and raised here, I have never been at home, completely." (Guppy, 1987)

Brookner's experience as a surrogate parent to her own parents profoundly shaped her writing. This inversion of the parent-child relationship is a key feature of her works. The complex and often damaging relationships between mothers and daughters are a central theme, as exemplified by the dynamic between Edith and her mother, as well as Jennifer and her mother, Mrs. Pusey.

In *Hotel Du Lac*, Edith's mother is portrayed as emotionally distant and devoid of the nurturing affection typically expected of a mother. Her lack of warmth and detachment contribute to Edith's emotional isolation. Rather than serving as a source of comfort and guidance, Edith's mother embodies the "bad mother" archetype, inflicting mental and emotional harm on her daughter. In contrast, Edith is depicted as a gentle, obedient, and well-behaved daughter, whose actions are motivated by a deep-seated need to please her mother. Edith's relationship with her mother is defined by an absence of overt affection and emotional distance. As Edith reflects:

"Her mother had never been one to hug or to speak kindly. She had always demanded an autonomy from Edith that no one could ever explain. Perhaps that was what had made her life so difficult, this demand of distance when closeness was required." (Brookner, 1984, p. 75)

Psychologist Murray Bowen's (1978) family systems theory provides a useful lens through which to interpret the complex dynamics at play in Brookner's novels. Bowen suggests that human behavior is driven by the interaction between two opposing forces: individuation and integration. Individuation leads individuals to seek independence and self-direction, while integration pulls them toward connection and the expectations of others. Self-differentiation refers to the balance between these forces, with individuals who have low differentiation investing more energy in relationships and those with high differentiation retaining more energy for personal functioning. (Bowen, 60)

In Jennifer's case, her relationship with her mother, Mrs. Pusey, is similarly complex. Mrs. Pusey's narcissistic tendencies and excessive control over Jennifer severely restrict her daughter's autonomy, fostering a deep sense of dependency. While Jennifer longs for her mother's approval, she is simultaneously tormented by the constraints imposed upon her, which hinder her ability to establish healthy, independent relationships. As Brookner observes,

"She had spoken of her mother with both tenderness and resentment, a combination that Edith could understand, though she could never quite feel. Jennifer had been an obedient daughter, but she had paid a high price for it, one she was now refusing to acknowledge." (Brookner, 1984, p. 132)

Mrs. Pusey's excessive attachment to her daughter, driven by her own anxiety about infertility, results in a suffocating mother-daughter relationship. The two are almost inseparable, spending their days together in activities like shopping and vacationing, which are more appropriate for a much younger woman. Jennifer, at the age of 39, remains wholly dependent on her mother, never pursuing her own career or developing her own social connections. This dynamic reflects an unhealthy and regressive form of attachment, where Jennifer's role is to serve her mother rather than to define her own identity.

Erich Fromm (1956), in *The Art of Loving*, highlights the importance of a mother's role in encouraging her child's independence. Fromm argues that true maternal love lies in allowing the child to separate and become an autonomous individual. However, in Brookner's portrayal, Mrs. Pusey's love is not rooted in this essential component of separation; rather, it reflects a stifling attachment that prevents Jennifer from becoming a fully independent person. Fromm writes:

"The essence of motherly love lies in caring for the child's development, which means wishing the child to leave her. In maternal love, the two individuals who were originally merged now separate. The mother must not only tolerate but must also wish for and support the child leaving her. Only when this stage is reached does motherly love become so difficult." (Fromm, 55)

In Brookner's novels, both Edith and Jennifer, as 39-year-old adult women, exhibit personalities shaped by their mothers' narcissistic control. Edith is passive and lackluster, avoiding confrontation and rarely asserting herself. Jennifer, in contrast, remains a mere reflection of her mother, with little to distinguish her as an independent adult. These women's experiences are not just a commentary on the complex dynamics of mother-daughter relationships,



but also a broader reflection on the psychological toll of living in the shadow of an overbearing and emotionally absent parent.

## 6. Conclusion

In *Hotel du Lac*, Edith Hope uses isolation and self-imposed exile as a form of self-protection. However, this deliberate distance only intensifies her loneliness and emotional distress. Her avoidance of relationships, reluctance to embrace vulnerability, and tendency toward self-examination underscore the complexity of her emotional state and the psychological challenges she faces. Edith's avoidance mechanisms are central to the novel's exploration of her character, and as the narrative progresses, she begins to confront some of these inner struggles. Nevertheless, avoidance remains a fundamental aspect of her personality throughout much of the story.

Edith's tendency to avoid social interaction can be partly traced to her childhood experience of assuming a surrogate parental role toward her mother. Subjected to the emotional dominance of a narcissistic antagonist—who embodies traits such as arrogance, conceit, and a disregard for others—Edith develops avoidant personality traits as a protective defense mechanism. By the end of the novel, Edith comes to a faint realization of her circumstances and begins to take tentative steps toward changing her situation. Rather than relying on her habitual avoidance tactics for self-preservation, she embarks on a journey of self-improvement and personal growth.

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