**A Thematic Analysis of *Milkman* from the Perspective of New Criticism**

# Abstract

From the perspective of an eighteen-year-old girl living in Northern Ireland, British author Anna Burns’ work *Milkman* tells the story of her experience of the repression and danger in rumor violence and the deep social pressure she feels when she is repeatedly stalked by a middle-aged man codenamed “The Milkman”.

New Criticism, a western literary criticism theory of the mid-twentieth century, advocates close reading of texts, taking the language, imagery, and composition of texts as its main objects of study, and objectively analyzing the literariness in language. Based on the perspective of New Criticism, this paper uses a close reading of the text to analyze and interpret the thematic meaning of the work from six aspects: symbol, tension, irony, paradox, ambiguity, and metaphor, exposing the plight and helplessness of the women represented by the young heroine who suffer sexual harassment from male authority and gossip from the community. In this extremely repressive atmosphere where no one believes in the truth and only wants to hear rumors, the eighteen-year-old heroine starts to resist and cope with her growing up. The work presents the significance of the theme of the plight of women caught in the “lack of truth” and the “violence of rumors”, thus reflecting its literary value. Anna Burns became the first Northern Irish writer to win the Booker Prize for this work.

**Keywords:** *Milkman*, New Criticism Theory, Close reading, Women’s plight, Rumor violence

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