

Reviews

"Shame Heirs" by Anna Ilyina

Reviewed by Kam Aures for Rebecca's Reads (07/11)

When I first received "Shame Heirs" to review the very first thing that struck me was the cover picture. The little girl on the front cover made the book very intriguing to me. If I were walking through a book store I would definitely be enticed to pick up this book to see what it was about.

The contents of the book were different than what I expected, but in a good way. Here is a brief excerpt to give you an example of Ilyina's writing style: "...We're extremely tired of our incomprehension that we ourselves doom us to painful weariness. Our souls change their properties because of tension and deformations, repeating this cyclically. Our souls have lost their stamina. Our souls have been deformed to such a degree they're deformed now even without the external influence. Our souls became self-adjusting to certain algorithms of existence..." (p. 124). Paragraphs such as this one throughout "Shame Heirs" really make the reader stop and ponder what the characters' lives are like.

The novel was very philosophical and thought-provoking. It was quite interesting to see inside the thoughts of the main characters and realize that all of the people in the book are not really who they appear to be on the outside. The characters harbor much hatred and scorn.

One detail I found unusual was that the individuals in the book go by descriptive names such as "Neighbour's Boy," "Girl," "Madam," and "Monsieur." Choosing not to use names was a unique touch. If you are looking for an intelligently written, philosophical book, then I recommend giving "Shame Heirs" a try. Ilyina's work proves to be quite a unique read.

Reviewed by Linda Salisbury, ForeWord Clarion Reviews (08/11)

"HUMAN BEING is pathologically persistent in his yearning for unhappiness," writes Russian-born author Anna Ilyina. And based on the characters she brings to life in *Shame Heirs*, it must be true. They succeed in finding unhappiness, despair, gloom, shame, and especially, hate in their relationships. The allegorical characters—Madam and Monsieur, their offspring, Son and his pregnant wife, Girl—live dreary lives, despising each other and the work that they do.

Meanwhile, Madam attempts to present them as normal, respectable people. "We're cited as an example of the ideal family," Madam claims. Under the "ideal" surface, Son is wimpy and impotent. Monsieur is the father of Girl's child and hates his office job. All but Son are having affairs. Despite yearning for love, they are incapable of rising above their unhappiness.

Son is a mama's boy, pampered and bathed by his mother even as an adult. He's ashamed of his obedience to her, as shame is also a burden for the others, including, eventually, the illegitimate child. Both Monsieur and Madam are worried about aging and are preoccupied with their miserable lives. Son is distant. Girl and her unborn child are observers of life. The child, thought to be a boy when in the womb, has numerous philosophical monologues addressed to Mummy within the text. Actually a girl, the child is ejected by her mother at age 4 and develops a love-hate relationship with Mummy. And so the generational cycle of hate and anger continues. Despite the darkness of the relationships, there are occasional moments of humor, such as when the well-connected, snobby Benefactress and her husband pay a visit to Madam and Monsieur's flat and then "pinch" various small items.

Girl's wanderings reveal the author's keen eye for detail as she relates an incident in the park. Girl silently watches when a woman is beaten by her thuggy companion, crawls to him and tries to kiss his knee: "The bashed woman felt intolerable pangs of shame as she was forced to be humiliated...Wounds on protoplasmic membrane can be healed or licked, but a soul is a completely different substance...that can't be patched up."

There is little plot to engage or move the characters to a crisis or change. Much of the action is after the fact, as they remember events or deal with the mundane. The heir's birth isn't even noteworthy. The most dramatic scenes come when Girl dreams of her own mother, and has a confrontation with her young child. Lack of plot also reinforces the quagmire in which the characters wallow.

The book's greatest stumbling block, however, is its tendency toward dense, sometimes incomprehensible sentences. For example: "Girl almost immediately, when it became possible, started to honour splendour and thought fashionable rags from a prestigious boutique to be worth genuflection and of falling into the next lowland, filled with stinking imperfection." In such instances, heavier editing could have streamlined the writing and made the meaning more clear.

Despite those shortcomings, the author has a creative flair that makes her characters nonetheless curiously engaging.

Reviewed by Molly E. for Readers Favorite (08/11)

Shame Heirs by Anna Ilyina is written in a distinctive style. The author uses "nicknames" that describe the characters rather than names. I wasn't sure I liked that at first but soon adapted to "Girl" and "Neighbor's Boy," etc. The life of this family was miserable and they chose to be miserable. They attempted to present a façade of normalcy. I hope this family is anything but normal. I liked the unborn child's part. The brilliant child talked to her mother with great

wisdom. I was saddened when the mother rejected the child a few years later and developed another relationship filled with hate and anger.

This book has potential. Many will relate to growing up in a dysfunctional family. We see it all the time in our society but the plot wanders along on its own without any real direction. If I saw change perhaps I would feel differently. There are sentences that are impossible to grasp. No matter how many times I went back and read them they still didn't sink in. I suspect the author is very intelligent and does not know how to write for the average person. The sentences are long on words. A great writer knows their audience and writes to the audience. If the intend audience was a sociological class then the author is right on mark. I think this book should be required reading in such a class. If that was not the intention then author needs a good editor.

The author has a knack for characterization. While I certainly didn't like the characters, I found them very realistic. She has possibilities and I hope she will continue with her art.