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THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN BROOKNER'S *A FRIEND FROM ENGLAND*

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Abstract: *A Friend From England* (1987), Anita Brookner's seventh published novel, once again explores the loneliness in the protagonist's life due to failure in expectations of the same good behaviour. The loneliness occurs in one's life due to orphanage, careless childhood experiences, exclusion, childlessness, lack of companion, failure in love, hate from close friend, deliberate alienated behaviour, the dependency on the lives of others, melancholy in family, etc. These causes of loneliness can be seen in the novel which also provides remedies through the behaviour of the characters which can be found very useful to overcome the problem and live well.

Keywords: *A Friend From England*, Anita Brookner, theme of loneliness.

Introduction

The title of the novel, *A Friend from England*, is significant. A friend in the title refers the protagonist of the novel, Rachel Kennedy. Her serene behaviour with Heather Levingstone and her family gets misunderstood by Heather whom she feels burdensome which leads Heather to the hatred towards Rachel. The indifferent behaviour of Heather in return to her good behaviour makes Rachel to feel sad and lonely. It seems that the title is given from the ironic question of Heather, "A friend from England?" (Brookner, *A Friend from England*, 202) Her tone and doubtful behaviour towards Rachel is one of the causes of loneliness. At the end of the novel, Rachel learns this hate in Heather's mind which she doesn't justify. She can't tolerate the hate in other's mind despite her good behaviour towards others.

Theme of Loneliness

It is also significant that the structure of the novel contributes to the effect of loneliness. Brookner's use of dreams of Rachel about drowning is the effect of her feelings of fear and loneliness. She is shown as an orphan. In fact, in her childhood, she had gone with her father to swim in the sea but now she has fear of water. She also dreams about

bearing children which reflects her longing for children and family. Even in her journey to Venice for Heather's search, Rachel goes to Academia and sees the picture of the woman suckling her child reflects her laying for children and also helps to arouse the feeling of loneliness.

Remarkably, the loneliness emerges through the behaviour of the characters in the novel. Mainly, Rachel Kennedy can be seen as the victim of the problem of loneliness. Brookner presents her as a lonely and orphan, thirty-two years old, single woman having a bookshop of which she is a part owner. She is shown as kind-hearted woman and her good behaviour, helping nature can be seen throughout the novel. Till the end of the novel she never gives up her good behaviour despite which she receives sadness and frustration. Her failure in expectations of the same good behaviour from others is one of the causes of loneliness. She is the mentor for Heather, a young twenty-seven years old girl of Oscar and Dorrie. Apart from her busy hectic schedule in the bookshop, she behaves kindly and serenely towards Heather. Even in her own illness the care for her Heather turns into frustration as Heather behaves with negligence and doesn't even asks about her health. At that time, Rachel's

in her work (123). These descriptions of Rachel's flat over the bookshop reveal itself the lonely state of the place. Like other novels, the present novel also can be seen describing the emptiness of the street. As Rachel comes out of Oscar's flat in a exhausted mood, her comment that *I drifted through the chill streets as if dreaming, barely noticing the dark and loneliness* (185) of the street is rich in self-evocative. The present description of the street contributes to reveal loneliness in the novel.

In addition to this, the description of various places and atmosphere helps to reflect the loneliness in the novel. The descriptive details like - *empty afternoon* (9), *disappointed air* (13), *quiet streets* (41), *almond blossom was fading* (41), *empty evening* (129), *deserted flat* (153), *gloomy days* (153), *mournful street, still dark, still wet and utterly unpeopled* (163), *eventless square* (194), *deserted saloons* (195), and *small white bunker* (207) are the situational descriptions of the setting which contribute to constitute the loneliness milieu in the novel.

Brookner's use of imagery and symbolism throughout the novel is quite significant in this regard. Her use of water imagery is symbolic one. It can be seen symbol of dangerous passion leading to death in literature and drowning in love. Her fear of water which is known as hydrophobia has a past reference in her life. Her distaste towards love is also can be referred to her past failure in love affair with a married man. Her fear of drowning in water can be connected to drowning in love which she deliberated avoids and also suggests the same to Heather. Heather's cutting of hair short is also symbolic to reveal her cutting short the family ties and flee to Venice. However, the imagery like - *undemanding as that of Victorian matron* (15), *pale milk-fed appearance* (16), *distinct culture, that had prevailed in the Russian novels, in which endless days are spent sitting on terraces* (24), *habitual melancholy* (36), *Giaconda-like smile which was a*

little too placid, a little too immovable (51), *landlocked freedom* (82), *pared-down life* (85), *as if sitting in a waiting room of a deserted railway station* (109), and *prospect of solitude* (138) help to constitute the loneliness atmosphere in the novel.

It is also significant that her realistic world-view emerges in the novel when Rachel says, *I live in the real world, the world of deceptions* (157) to Heather. The realistic world-view is the outcome of her austere living and loneliness.

Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that *A Friend from England* is the story of the attachment of loner and orphan, Rachel Kennedy, to the Levingstone family. Brookner seems to explore the cosmic, cultural, social and interpersonal dimensions of loneliness through the novel significantly. Rachel feels growing distaste for this life, realizing that freedom was not really a viable proposition and leads inevitably to lifelong spinsterhood. In the present novel, love is seen in the terms of devotion not romance, the fulfillment of responsibilities not desires, sacrifice not gain. Rachel's self-revelation is shown at the end of the novel. It also shows Rachel's admiration towards Heather's instincts for survival. It ends with the end of relationships. The protagonist can be seen as suffered from her loneliness though she also finds the remedies to overcome the problem by keeping everything in limits, in proportion, living the life on surface, enjoying her role as the spectator, resolving herself never to be reduced to any form of emotional beggary, never to plead never to impose guilt, never to consider the world well lost for love, exerting herself by long night walks, learning to keep her life to herself, not to belabour others with it, learning not to back herself against the world, learning caution, politeness, and learning how to be alone and to put a good face on it.

Works Cited:

Brookner, Anita, *A Friend from England*, (1987), Vintage Contemporaries, New York, 2005.