



## ASSESSMENT OF LONELINESS IN ANITA BROOKNER'S INCIDENTS IN THE RUE LAUGIER

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### ABSTRACT :

Anita Brookner's fifteenth published novel, *Incidents in the Rue Laugier* (1995), illustrates the loneliness in a female protagonist's life. Brookner seems to convey the endeavours of escape from the cocoon of bourgeois modesty might lead one to confront various problems in person's life. As always she seems to observe the desire and folly which resulted in the feeling of lifelong loneliness. The novel also exhibits the causes for loneliness like the feeling of exilence, exclusion, the longing for lover, being in outcast state, isolation from life partner etc. The loneliness due to the acts out of desire and the follies committed emerges through the plot of the novel which centers on the young French girl who shares a flat namely, rue Laugier, in Paris with two English boys. Out of her desire to escape from the cocoon of bourgeois modesty, she behaves quite boldly and freely to achieve David's love which results in pregnancy from which Edward by marrying rescues her. Again her loveless marriage to Edward makes her lonely and arouses the feeling of absurdity. At the end, her death seems to be suicide as she doesn't eat properly after Edward's death due to Brain tumour.



**KEYWORDS :** Anita Brookner, *Incidents in the rue Laugier*, loneliness.

### INTRODUCTION :

The loneliness is reflected through the title, *Incidents in the Rue Laugier*, significantly. It refers to the root cause for loneliness in the protagonist, Maud Gonthier's life. The incidences like lovemaking, pregnancy, Edward's proposal of marriage and the memories of love affair with David hovers over her mind throughout the life which lead her to face the problem of lifelong loneliness. In her loveless married life she reminds David's love and longs for him who doesn't meet her but once which also creates the problems in her life. Thus the title given to the novel is apt in the sense that it is the main incident in Maud's life and becomes the turning point to her loneliness.

The loneliness emerges through the behaviour of the central character, Maud Gonthier and her feelings reflected throughout the novel. The whole story of the novel told by Maud's daughter, Maffy, is fictitious one. It is the outcome of her imagination from her sight of mother's notebook. Like other Brookner's protagonists, Maud's character is also presented as docile and dutiful daughter to her mother. Although she wants to escape from the whole scenario and live her life as per her desires. Maud's primitive nature of remaining stranger is evocative to bring forth her alienated condition. It can be seen when Maffy writes about Maud:

. . . she kept the little notebook, with its inscrutable code, just as she kept the beautiful silk kimono, which she certainly never wore at home. I found to my surprise that as I contemplated this evidence my curiosity turned to sadness, for I realized that she was doomed to remain a stranger, had indeed elected to be a stranger, bequeathing me only little gestures, such as shading her eyes when she looked up from her book, as if the light of reality were too harsh, and those sighs, which I am told I utter without knowing. (Brookner, *Incidents in the Rue Laugier* 7)

Here it clearly reveals that Maud didn't come forward and remained stranger forever. Her nature of being stranger which elected by herself is noteworthy and reveals her loneliness. According to Maffy, the evidence of the never-worn silk kimono and the notebook with inscrutable code make her to feel sad than curious. The whole description of Maud is more than sufficient to reflect her lonely and sad state.

Maud's desire to remain alone and escape from the bourgeois modesty and home reflects very clearly when Brookner writes, "Maud simply wanted to live in Paris, with or without a husband, preferably without" (22). It means that she prefers living alone and has a secret desire to escape all forms of control. She also seems to long for the freedom.

Maud's aroused feeling of exilence, and exclusion can be seen when she goes to spend summer holiday with her mother to her aunt, Germaine's big house. Brookner exhibits Maud's these inner feelings in a very impeccable manner. She narrates:

In the afternoons her mother and aunt would take a siesta, Xavier and his friend or friends would disappear somewhere in the car, and she would be left to her own devices. It was assumed that she would go into the garden or sit on the terrace with a book, but as often as not lingered in the upstairs corridor, . . . or leaned her head against the glass of sunstruck window, and wished that she were in Paris. (43)

This clearly reveals Maud's loneliness in Germaine's big house at which she is left alone having no one companion but only a book namely *Jane Eyre*. Her desire to be in Paris is naturally the outcome of her loneliness. But the friends she gets are seemed to be her intimate enemies. Marie-Paule and Patrica don't behave cordially with her but seem to criticize and suppress Maud's emotions. In this sense she is alone there having no company, though Maud doesn't like their company and humiliating gestures. This makes her to feel sad. Her inner real longing about the events happened inside the house reveals when her inner thought regarding exclusion are expressed in the words like: "She longed to know exactly what went on; she longed to be included. But, more than to be included, she longed for exclusivity" (74). As Maud considers both the girls obscenely physical and their grossness makes her to imagine them as the prostitutes for their attempts to please David Tyler and Xavier, especially David because Maud also feels about him in her heart. In the big house, she also longs for lover, though she doesn't know who he is. Her loneliness due to this longing for David as a lover extends and remains intact throughout her life. It can be seen revealed when Brookner narrates Maud's longing, "She was lonely for Tyler, not merely because he would never again make love to her, but because he constituted her only emotional capital" (168).

The loneliness due to longing continues even to Maud's married life. She loves David by heart and remains faithful to him. She seems to contemplate about the love with David and Edward. The reminiscences of David's love arouse the feeling of loneliness in Maud's mind. Brookner narrates the perplexity of Maud in self-evocative words:

In the same way Edward would love her, but she would never love him. His love would hardly touch her, since her thoughts would be given over entirely to other matters, principally to memory, which she saw as the appropriate repository of her desire – of her former desire – and to a loneliness which it would be heedless of her to ask him to share. (128)

Here, it is clearly revealed that Maud's thoughts are full of David's memory and the loneliness occurred due to it and she doesn't want to share her sadness with Edward. She seems to think that though Edward would love her very much she would not response in the same way. So it is her loveless marriage which she has to endure for the sake of Nadine's happiness. Maud seems to become the victim of this imposed marriage and blame herself for the situation to which her reflection is narrated as:

. . . she would never blame Tyler for his legacy to her. The revelation of Tyler was such as to make her tolerant of her own weakness: if she were not now Tyler's partner it was because she had failed, and failed not for any mundane reason but because she was earthbound, obedient to more prosaic rhythms, because she was simply one of those whose destiny it was to be visited by a transcendent being, and then left alone to ponder her outcast state. (127)

It is evident here that Maud's confession of her docile, dutiful and obedient nature to her mother and blame for herself makes her to feel as a lonely person and has in outcast state.

So her marriage with Edward also proves absurd which results in Edward's disappointment as well. Her going alone to bed early and desire to remain undisturbed makes Edward as well as Maud disappointed. She doesn't come to life which Brookner narrates Maud's inner thoughts for the situation in the self-reflexive words:

She did this as much for his sake as for hers, knowing how he savoured his solitude, once he had satisfied himself that she was at home, waiting for him. She sensed in him an immense disappointment that she had failed to bring her to life, failed in fact to bring them both to life. (183)

Thus, it is clear that their marriage is futile and nobody is satisfied. Maud's recognition of Edward's savoury of solitude makes her sad even the failure in his bringing them to life reveals their embarrassing married life.

Maud's isolation from husband also contributes to increase her loneliness. But it is also true that she is isolated from everyone. The realization of discrepancy in hopes and the reality leads her to be lonely, though she seems to accept it. Brookner brings forth it in the words:

. . . she knew, . . . that it was her destiny to live with the reality of her situation and to keep a closely guarded secret the fact that she had once defied reality, that she knew the difference between acceptance and danger, and that even as she went about her ordinary everyday tasks she would be filled from time to time with the incandescence of a certain memory, and the momentary conviction – . . . that that memory was shared. (207)

Hence, Maud's journey from fantasy to reality and revelation of the truth that the mere memories are momentary and her married life is only the reality, is significant to reflect her imaginary life with David's love which is one of the causes for loneliness. Then her pregnancy after nine years of marriage is also symbolic to suggest her acceptance of Edward.

Not only Brookner has presented the character of Maud, mother of invention by Maffy, as a lonely person in herself but also the other characters like Edward, Nadine, Mr. and Mrs. Kroll in the novel can be seen as lonely persons. Edward's loneliness due to his sad feelings which is the outcome of his imagination of lovemaking of David and Maud in the past. His act of marriage against his best interest of travelling the world alone and unhappy married and home life from which he escapes by taking refuge to his bookshop most of the time reflect his lifelong loneliness. Maud's mother, Nadine, is lonely because she is shown as a young widow at first and then because of Maud's marriage with Edward and not with David or Xavier to which she had imagined her. Max Kroll and Nelly Kroll are seen as lonely couple as they are childless and seems to seek solace in Edward's company and helping him in his book trade. Thus most of the major characters can be found facing the problem of painful feeling of loneliness, although sometimes satisfied because of their alienation.

Significantly, the loneliness reveals through the themes reflected in the novel like love, marriage, solitude, sadness, desire and folly which are associated with the feeling of loneliness. The theme of Maud's passionate long-lasting love towards David and Edward's caring and dutiful love towards Maud is tragic one which is resulted in the feeling of loneliness in their respective life. However, the marriage based on the mixed feelings of sympathy and love doesn't bestow much happiness. The Edward's solitude Maud's sadness, her desire to escape from bourgeois modesty and the follies she commits herself to achieve love all result in developing the feeling loneliness in their life.

It is also significant that Brookner's use of technique in the novel contributes to reflect the loneliness. The novel opens with the first person narration and ends with the same and has the present

tense used. But all the remained chapters are narrated in third person and have the past tense. There are at some certain points flashback technique is used. Brookner has used a small notebook as a framing device to invent Maud's life. It is entirely a fictional past which Maffy reconstructs in order to live in the present as a survivor. The novel has a circular pattern which returns to the start which means all the narration is the narrator's reminiscences and imagination. There is the text within text and one event leads to another is the scheme of the narrative style. Intertextual literary references like *Jane Eyre*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Mme Bovary* are found symbolical to contribute the atmosphere of loneliness. The influence of new historicism or poststructuralist narrative theory can be found at the end of the novel. Return to the tragic past to rediscover Maffy's present is the lonely activity in itself.

The loneliness also emerges through the setting, images, associations, and symbols used in the novel. At one point it is the description of the room where Edward has to live at rue Laugier in Paris is self-evocative. Brookner describes, "It was like a room of someone who had dies, some elderly relative, piously taken in, and removed in due course to a hospice, the room kept unchanged as an earnest of good intentions" (56-57). It is the gloominess and alienated status of the room which arouses the feeling of loneliness in Edward's mind. Edward's reluctant attitude towards room is enough to reflect his mental state of his obligatory stay there.

The loneliness also emerges through the description of the atmosphere when Maud marries to Edward and considers him as a stranger. Brookner describes the atmosphere, when Maud waits for Edward, as:

. . . she looked forward to his (Edward's) homecoming, every evening, conscious, after the long silent day, of loneliness, conscious of the black leafless trees outside the window, and the sad sounds of footsteps in the quiet street, where no cars passed all the long afternoon, so that she sometimes had the impression that she was the only person live in this permanent winter. (183)

It is clearly evident here that flat's surrounding of the flat and the atmosphere make her to feel the loneliness. The allusion of phrases like black leafless trees, sad sound of footsteps, quiet street, no cars passed and the feeling of being only person living are symbolic to suggest the flat's lonely status. Apart from this, there are some certain phrases of descriptive details like – *quiet grey street* (10), *alien room* (31), *sad room* (57), *silent flat* (169), *uneventful evenings* (183), *blank streets* (200), *empty flat* (214) in the novel which help to constitute in the atmosphere of loneliness.

The framing device of empty notebook used to evoke the story of the novel is quite symbolic. The narrator, Maffy, has invented her mother's life by fantasy, imagining it by looking at the notebook. Except some inscrutable codes on the notebook, it is empty as she imagines Maud's life and nature which Maud herself to put in record, though the intention behind keeping the notebook is clearly to write. But she has failed to express herself which suggests Maud's life as empty as the notebook. Actually, writing notebook or diary is an activity of loneliness in itself but then also she has failed to do so. In this sense it is a symbolically used device to reveal Maud's loneliness. It's remark that ". . . any notation, any record, is better than none." (233) is noteworthy here.

Then another symbolic use of the Flying Dutchman to reveal Edward's situation is also important one. The term *Flying Dutchman* actually refers to the unfortunate captain who was struggling to round the Cape of Good Hope in the teeth of terrible gale. He is cursed and returns to land every seven years in a hopeless search for salvation because the Dutchman can only find eternal peace in the arms of a faithful woman. Like that Dutchman, Edward is also has the desire to travel the world but fails and gets disappointed in his marriage with Maud and doesn't find solace in her. Thus these symbols used serve to reflect the loneliness in the novel. Moreover, there are some certain descriptive phrases like – *unendurable lightless street outside the dusty window* (28), *solitary canter* (42), *isolation of the countryside* (43), *solitary leaf fall* (51), *solitary visits* (99), *stay-at-home existence* (152), *long silent day, the black leafless trees* (183), *solitary hours* (188), *solitary perambulations* (191), *the leafless tree, lightless sky* (206), *armour of loneliness* (212), *empty life* (217), *quiet life, clam afternoon* (226) scattered all over the novel contribute to form the atmosphere of loneliness.

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Thus the various dimensions of loneliness are reflected in the novel, *Incidents in the Rue Laugier*, which is remarkable. Maud's story is an invention of Maffy. It can be seen that the reality of marriages shatters expectations and arouses the feeling of loneliness. Tyler's character is presented as an object of mere fascination as much as love for Maud. She seems to be the victim of her innocence. It also can be said that the novel is the tale of love and loss. It is the finely rectified understanding of longing trapped in convention. It is the fastidious and thorough exploration of Maud's inner world which exhibits her painful and harmful feeling of loneliness. As it is the story of the mother named Maud, which resembles to Brookner's own mother's name, Maude Sciska, it can be said that Brookner's cathartic effect reveals through the novel.

#### WORKS CITED

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