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Various Categories of Nostalgia in the Work *The Debut* by Anita Brookner

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Abstract

*The emotion of nostalgia is universal as far as the opinions of researchers and theorists are concerned. There is not a single individual in the world who is devoid of the feeling of nostalgia. It is a psychological phenomenon, and every individual in the world has been influenced by the feeling. It has distinct definitions based on worldwide experiments. The literature published in psychology, pathology, social science, humanities, science, etc. in the world puts on record different definitions of this complex emotion. Though earlier it was considered a disease, today it is simply a sentiment associated with the past. Throughout the novel *The Debut* the protagonist, Dr. Ruth Weiss, looks back on her life at the age of forty. Brookner's use of the flashback technique is important from a nostalgic point of view. Her early days' memories connected to her parents, her grandmother, her school, and teachers remain bitter-sweet. Her childhood memories of family responsibilities, disillusionment with love, feelings of insecurity in the outside world, the loss of loved ones, and so on are all associated with nostalgia. Ruth is mostly nostalgic about her grandmother, and the death of her grandmother seems to be the end of the source of the unselfish love and comfort. Her speechless condition at the death of her grandmother speaks volumes about her psychological state. Though her mother seems harsh, her father is soft on her. The novel explores the daughter-father relationship, friendship, and love. She fails to win the love of Richard and Duplexis, but manages to marry Roddy. But she remains lonely, serving her aged father after the death of Roddy. The other characters, Helen, George, Sally, Molly, Roddy, Mr. Dunlop, etc., are also projected as nostalgic figures on different occasions.*

Keywords: Nostalgia, Complex Emotion, Homesickness, Exile, Rootlessness, Displacement

Introduction

Anita Brookner's first published novel, *The Debut*, 1981, published as *A Start in Life in Britain*) made an art-historian a novelist. Its excellence is noted from the beginning by critics who acclaim it as a specific and poignant enactment, and the author for her unimpeachable prose and crafty wit. One of several novels designed by this British art-historian and author since the early 1980s, *The Debut* deals with the nostalgic world of the characters. Brookner explores the inner world of the characters throughout the fictional knack. The novel reveals a range of elements in the lives of the key characters. The nostalgia powerfully reflects through the feeling of loss and estrangement, displacement, one-sided love, loneliness, marriage, craving for the assimilation into the English society, etc. in the novel. *The Debut* is a story of Dr. Ruth Weiss, a woman who takes a mid-life retrospective to stumble on her present persona. The tone of the novel is reflective and never vindictive.

Brookner's protagonist, Dr. Ruth Weiss, at the age forty, recollects her reminiscences, and recounts her loom about the times of yore. Her reminiscences are jam-packed of astringent-saccharine *savoir faire*. Brookner introduces this theme with the opening words of the novel "Dr. Ruth Weiss, at forty, knew that her life had been ruined by literature... as her nurse breathed the words, "Cinderella shall go to the ball. But the ball had never materialised"

(Brookner, *The Debut* 1). The moral order that is held by the literature proves to have no bearing in reality, and Ruth ponders over it. Dr. Ruth Weiss is seen reflecting on her bitter sweet childhood spent in the company of her hectic parents and the sensible granny, her school and college days, her career in teaching, her love affairs and failure in the same, her marriage of convenience, and her servitude to her ageing parents and this can be a summary of the narrative in a nutshell.

Aristocratic Family with Full of Love

A thriving scholastic, her person has been fashioned by diverse distinctiveness. About this shaping of her persona, Ruth broods "... it has started much earlier than that, when, at a faintly remembered moment in her early childhood..."(7). Her childhood occurrences are relatively worth mentioning as it is the underpinning of her existence, and she feels wistful about her family constituents, diverse bits and pieces, her school time, her instructors, etc. About her upbringing Ruth, "remembered herself as a pale, neat child with extraordinary hair..." (11). This lends an air about her evocative feelings about her childhood. Her mother, Helen, is a demi-actress and her father, a retailer of books. Ruth is brought up under the heed of her parents, principally, her father, George, who supplies her best books to comprehend all through her infancy. Brookner puts this furnishing of books, in apt words, "from Grimm and Hans Andresen, she graduated to the works of Charles Dickens" (18). Ruth reminds him of giving her Everyman edition, with its comfortable assurance on the flyleaf. "Everyman I'll go with thee and be thy guide in thy most need to go by thy side" (18). It is stated in the subsequent chapters that Ruth's life is seen exclusively dedicated to the analysis, lettering and teaching literature. Her mother, nevertheless hectic in her schedule, provides her attention to the child. Ruth congratulates her mother who "promised to buy her some pretty clothes, when we get to the end of this run, darling" (17-18). This is how, Ruth harks back her parents' caring to bestow her as paramount they can, despite the fact that their earning is not satisfactory. The role of literature is perceptible in moulding her persona. The good old days and the days of her childhood are, if truth be told, missed by her. She subsists in

a family that consists of three members; her mother, her father and her dear granny, Mrs. Weiss.

Ruth's father owns a bookstore which never makes much money, and gives him a great deal of time. Ruth memorises his frequently remaining present for the rehearsals of her mother which take place at the theatre. Ruth, as a child, has an affection for her father who cares for her. She estimates, "He was a good son, a tender father, but against their admirable sentiments he was passionately in love with his wife" (15). It is discernible here that she must be missing the tender love showered by him. She longs to witness his obeying to his mother. He has proved a good son as she herself proves a good and dutiful daughter to her parents. She observes their loving each other and sharing their feelings and their thoughts to each other, which she longs to witness. Whenever there is stress in the family, as her mother is always busy in her theatre activities, they struggle to please each other. "Darling heart,' they would call to each other 'do come and talk to me ...'" (16). They are able to voice every passing anxiety. It is their potency. All through this epoch, she also tries to please them with "her earnest efforts" (16). This affinity of her parents to each other is a thing of beauty for her and she misses the same. Currently, she ponders over the events which she can't relish nowadays. Reflecting over her parents, she adds they are, "still glamorous and beautiful" (17). Ruth reviews her childhood in the second chapter and her adolescence in chapter three. She estimates: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, maintained in her childhood by her youthful parents and her ageing grandmother," (17).

In connection with the influence of Charles Dickens, Brookner, who herself was influenced by Dickens, informs the readers about the childhood of Ruth. It seems to be the best of the times as her parents care for her, they feel affection for each other and this is the positive thing she appreciates in her house. It is the worst of the times as she has scarcely any friends. Though her parents care for her, they bestow her diminutive time as they are dynamic in their occupation. It is the best of the times as she receives the sole support, care, love and affection of her granny who is her guide, friend, philosopher, thinker and supporter. The thing touched or handled by granny

prompts wistfulness in the mentality of Ruth. It is the most evil of the times as she has to witness the demise of her grandmother and to acknowledge that the foundation of her oomph drains.

Good Old Friend

Following a survey carried out in 1979, by Fred Davis, a sociologist, nostalgia is now exposed to be a type of gushy craving of an object, event, or place in the past, rather than an emotional rejoinder to homesickness. The nostalgia astoundingly replicates all the way through the reminiscences of her grandmother. The grandmother materialises as the paramount underpinning of vigour and sanctuary for Ruth. Throughout the novel there are unswerving references to her granny which underlines the verity that the granny is the dear and the near person to her. Ruth seems to long for her granny and the days she has depleted in her companionship. Her granny looks after the abode dexterously as her mother is forever active with the world of theatre. She demonstrates to Ruth how one can shoulder the family responsibilities. As Ruth has hardly any friends, her granny is her best friend. Brookner writes, "The grandmother would be moved to take a glass of hot milk and cinnamon to the child's bedside, persuade her to lay aside her book and sit there until the glass was emptied and the light was switched off" (20). Her contemplation about the foodstuff and love displays her evocative stipulation which is moderately photogenic. It is observed that the granny seems to be her mother, father and her friend.

Ruth throws light on her school days and her usual homecoming from her school and her giving a call to her granny who definitely answers her call. This focuses on the healthy relations between the grandmother and Ruth, as well as highlights the support and guarantee of safety she receives from her granny. She nostalgically recalls the particular day when her granny failed to furnish a response to her call, subsequent to her coming back from school. She crosses the threshold of the kitchen to hit upon her granny lying on the flooring. Following this confrontation, her granny is confined to bed due to the sickness. Ruth sits by her couch every hour of daylight. A nurse is held in reserve to attend the granny. One day the nurse reports to Ruth about the

demise of her dear granny, she goes to her and, "took her grandmother's hand and kissed it, then raised the book to her cheek and held it there for a little while, as if for comfort"(19). The event discloses granny's passion for reading novels. The occurrence illustrates how Ruth is affectionate to her granny. At every juncture of her life Ruth reminds her granny and this lends an air of nostalgia.

Loss that Lasts Till the End

Brookner has very deftly explored her childhood. This is her personal nostalgia about her family. It is the nastiest of the times as she has hardly any friends and as such she acquires the companionship of her grandmother who shows her how to shoulder the responsibilities of family. It is the best of the times as she is benefited by the love of her grandmother.

This sort of ambiance is exceptionally widespread in several houses and Ruth seems to yearn for it. She broods over her granny's black gear, her siesta in the afternoon, and her whereabouts in the kitchenette. She longs to glimpse her granny around, "... the pieces of Berlin furniture of incredible magnitude in dark woods, wardrobes with massive doors, sideboards handled by her, fruits stands, dishes, sauce boats, platters, wine coolers, and glass bowls" (12). The elements in the quote are the things that generate wistfulness in the psyche of Ruth who knows that her granny desires, "to preside over a roomful of her sons and their spouses" (14).

Wildschut et al., (2006) in the paper, exploring the triggers of nostalgia states that the discrete negative affective states like loneliness can trigger nostalgia. After the demise of her granny, the things transform and her loneliness forces her to think of her granny all the time. Ruth has to cook her food on her own. Whenever Ruth cooks herself something in the kitchen and sits on the table, she feels lonely as her granny is not in the chair. Ruth makes herself eggs and boiled potatoes and salads but this spinsterish fare does not sit well on the dining room table...and her grandmother's chair. So, "she took to eating in the kitchen" (21). The chair generates the sensation of reminiscence in the mind of Ruth who misses her granny cooking and serving food, and sitting on the chair by the time Ruth draws to a close her eating.

Extending the remembrance, Brookner comments on the foodstuff cooked by Ruth's granny as, "The dining room belonged to her grandmother" (13). In that dining room, "her grandmother buttered a poppy-seed roll for her" (13). Ruth evokes that her grandmother is continually hectic in the kitchen and dining room and cooks the preferred tableware for Ruth. After lunchtime, she would relish a catnap in the small armchair under the window. This depiction of Ruth at the age of forty represents her nostalgia.

Time Heals Everything

About puberties, Ruth articulates that, "it was hardly an adolescence other girls knew it, waking up to their temporary but so exhilarating power over men" (23). She has approximately acrimonious memories about this phase of lifespan as it is not unlike the world of other unconventional girls she knows. She remains squeaky and childlike, and does not breed resembling the other girls. When her mother and the spy maid servant Mrs. Cutler are indifferent to her, she reminds, "George felt sorry for her" (24). Her father takes her to a past world of affection.

It is generally believed that nostalgia transcends age and ethnicity. In Ruth's tender age, her school correspondingly has resilient bearing on her cerebral podium. Her school, being a source of joy, reflects so many syrupy reminiscences about her school days and her teacher. It is a world full of unpleasant and saccharine understandings for any school going child who appraises the recollections for voluminous days in their way of life. Though the experiences are bitter-sweet, it is the component of the world. Ruth also has some sweet and bitter experiences about her school. Her parents being away from home most of the time forces her to treat the school as, "a sort of day nursery" (24). It supplies her console in the form of beans and sausages, stewed prunes and custard. Thus the meal provided in the school, now she remembers, is a kind of treat to her. She still memorises the food that forces her to be nostalgic. The food items are the elements that trigger nostalgia.

Brookner's heroines are clearly rooted in time and space. She cannot escape her childhood memories associated with the school and teacher is also one of the sweet memories. Miss Parker, difficult to erase

from her memory, is one of her favourite teachers. She remembers her pleated skirt in which she came to school. The teacher, "excited anything like interest and loyalty" (24). Thus, she misses the days she has spent in the company of her favourite teacher who persuades her all the time. She makes Ruth significantly take interest in her exertion and be reliable to it. Whenever she meets Ruth, she enquires about her study and discusses the merits and demerits of the books Ruth reads. The outcome of the statement is her immersion, right from her childhood, in the pages of books to get safety. The novel has proof of her father's supplying her series of Everyman.

Social disconnectedness is also in line with nostalgia. Isolation rather than socialisation typifies the years foregoing maturity in the case of Brookner's heroines. If childhood is a record of play, school, and time used up in the company of other students, Ruth appears to possess barely a childhood as the children of Brookner hardly remain children, jumping up to adulthood. Out of her school, in society, Ruth seems to meet only Miss. Parker and it is at the bus stop. She nostalgically remembers her asking, "What are you reading now, Ruth?" Miss Parker would say, removing the book from under her arm. "Zola?" "Yes, I suppose that's no bad thing; but don't believe it all" (24). This is how they argue about the books with each other. Ruth makes out that the teacher is affectionate to her, realising her potentials which can flourish in the university. She desires Ruth, "...to go to university and become a scholar" (25). Ruth knows that her parents inhibit her from going overseas for advance edification.

Importance of education as far as Brookner's protagonists are concerned is a common feature. Coming from this, the meeting between Parker and Ruth's parents proves fruitful and efforts of Miss Parker are fertile as Ruth gets consent to get supplementary education. Her mother remarked, "Well, darling, that's settled. Are you satisfied?" Ruth feels nostalgic at the memory of Miss Parker who is kind, ready to lend a helping hand, and is affectionate to her. Ruth's higher education is the consequence of the exertions of Miss Parker.

Ruth has sweet memories of her school library where she reads passionately. She meditates, "a pleasant sunny room where she was given a little job

of bringing the catalogue up to date” (24). She further reminisces that even in the college, “she could work in the library till nine o’clock,” (24). But at the same time the evening spent in the company of her family members is missed by her. “She thus missed the evening performance in the flat in Oakwood Court” (27). Thus, it is perceptible here that together the household and the library are the source of ecstasy to her.

Ruth’s nostalgia is encapsulated in her remembrance of the library where the heroines of Brookner always move. There is hardly any member, except her granny, to accompany Ruth in the house. The college library is full of books and she enjoys the gratification of functioning in such a library. Brookner narrates: Ruth “found evening hours in the library the most satisfying of her life” (27). She sits in the library and it is a delight for her to perceive others reading. The smiles she receives in the library are a thing of joy to her. Like the school days and library, she has some charming memoirs of her college as well. She likes to exist in the college more than at home. To her, the college, “was more of a home than home had been for a long time” (34). She prefers the seminars and the discussion after the lectures.

Unsuccessful Love between Ruth and Richard

Balzac is omnipresent in the novels of Brookner. Ruth, being a teacher and engaged in writing a multivolume study called *Women in Balzac’s Novels*, develops her interest in Balzac at university when she drafts her dissertation on *Vice and Virtue in Balzac’s Novels*. Romantic nostalgia is tinted during her college days as she is attracted to Richard Hirst who is a psychologist by training. She wins scholarship from the British Council and this entitles her to study for a year in France working on her dissertation. In order to cram away from home and to meet Richard, she acquires a flat in Edith Grove near World’s End. To her, the life in Edith Grove is not so pleasing, maybe due to distinct ethnicity and emotion of segregation.

She barely forgets the visit of Richard and the ceremonial dinner she prepares for Richard. She is reminiscent of her telling Anthea, her friend, that she is going to wear, “that blouse of my granny’s and my tapestry skirt.” (55). She reminds her eagerness and the atmosphere, quixotic. She “stayed as long as possible in the bath, and then sprayed herself with

a great deal of scent...” (56). She is on the wings of love. She ruminates over the ambiance that is thrilling with tenderness and love. Her first innocent love also leads her to confront nostalgia when she spends the whole day in laborious preparation of the dinner. Richard makes her wait and after the late dinner, keeps on speaking about other issues, especially one of his lady patients, Harriet, whom Ruth should have overlooked, as is her mother’s practice. Helen, Ruth’s mother, goes to overlook such meddling women. Richard disappoints her as he keeps on talking, not of love, but of his patients. From that moment, Ruth closes the page of love on Richard, sensing Brookner’s maxim that happiness comes to those who are “engaging” and “attractive” (9), like Miss Fairchild in *Providence*.

Disappointed in love, her homesickness surges up and she succumbs to the safety of home to overlook the episode. During, she reminds her visits to different places on holidays with her granny. She recalls her visits to Isle of Wight, Baden-Baden, Vevey etc. She longs for, “gardens, and for the lounges, planning like walks, their rests...” (75). Her granny is very kind and she takes Ruth all over the place. The place Baden-Baden has a long enduring impression on her. Though her parents want to visit such places, it is not possible for them. So Ruth arranges a holiday visit for them. They decide to approach Molly Edwards, one of Helen’s friends. During their absence, she enjoys working in the house more liberally and begins to imagine going to France and having her oxygen.

Home; A Place of Nostalgia

Home has got a particular position in the novels of Anita Brookner. There is no doubt that a home is a place that makes one nostalgic when one is away from home. Home, good or bad, has a colourful and pleasant disposition in one’s memory. That is the very first place one has come to know; the most secure place on the earth. This is universal nostalgia. Ruth when leaving for France seems unhappy. Her future loneliness distresses her. Referring to her condition Brookner writes, she “could not make out the words she was mouthing. Her throat ached, her eyes burned with loneliness” (97). This loneliness makes one to miss the dear and the near. Hence, Ruth also remains discontented. While parting she perceives the friendliness of Mrs. Cutler who raises her thumb

and says, “Keep in touch” (97). The affection of Mrs. Cutler moves Ruth.

Paris seems to epitomise domestic obligations and a break to postponed happiness. It also registers a fresh start and this seems quite opposite to what London represents in the novel. Displaced in Paris, she lives at the flat of Rhoda and Humphrey, but she squanders most of her time in Bibliotheque Nationale. There she has to speak French. But on a particular Sunday; her encounter with a couple that is speaking English evokes her love for homeland. The eavesdropping communication of the couple in English takes her to England and she feels nostalgic about her country and her family members. She, “... wished that she could signal to them that she was English herself” (105). The craving for assimilation in English society is explicit in their company. When they leave, she “... felt exhilarated and grateful. That night, she sleeps without dreaming” (108).

Institutionalised nostalgia is recorded by another incident when Ruth is on the way to the library, Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, in alien culture, where a bus seethes past on silent wheels. The bus conductor sings a Christmas song that makes Ruth remember the Christmas festival celebration in her house. Her granny “... had filled the flat with the odour of roosting goose and red cabbage, although officially she ignores the celebration of Christmas. Helen, on the other hand, became sentimentally religious, fingered her late mother’s rosary” (112). This remembrance constitutes the institutionalised nostalgia in the novel.

Romantic Nostalgia

To Belk (1992), the collective nostalgia is generation specific. Ruth loves the company of Hugh, Jill and Duplessis, another colleague in Paris. To add to it, she meets her friend Anthea in Paris. “They were longing to see each other” (116). ‘They’ in the quote hints at the cohort that reflects collective nostalgia, representing a sentimental yearning by the entire generation including the above mentioned participants, in this case the young generation. Ruth gives up the flat of Humphrey and moves into the flat of Jill and Hugh who move to England being homesick. Her encounter with the famous professor Duplessis, a kind, patient man of fifty in Paris leads

her to another, second in the series, love affair. Both work together but the experience with Richard still lingers in her mind. She, “...still measured her efforts and her experiences against her disastrous failure with Richard” (153). Though presently enjoying the company of Duplessis, her threads to Richard are not cut. It is indicated when she receives and reads a letter of Richard, and “During the evening she reads the letter several times and weeps a little before she fell asleep” (145). The letter proves a tear-jerker. It hints at her misunderstanding him and not giving him enough time to come out of the hectic schedule.

Romantic nostalgia is reflected in the arranging the dinner and waiting for the man the heroine loves. Ruth’s arranging a dinner for Duplessis, like Richard, similar arrangements, and waiting for him, registers her nostalgia. Recording her reminiscences, Brookner writes, she “bought a bottle of wine, and after only one rehearsal, made for Duplessis the beautiful cake called, ‘le marquis’. She sits down to wait for him. Once more on that occasion, which she could recall with a smile...” (146). She reminds him of eating cake and drinking wine. He takes her hand and kisses it, carefully with dignity. However, he, like Richard, hardly speaks of love and disappoints her. She needs the companionship of men. She acquires it but it lasts for a short while. It is indicated when her journey to her homeland materialises in the form of a phone call from her mother who suffers from chest pains and she needs to go back to London. Duplessis promises to keep in touch with her and goes to the station to see her off, enduringly, and in this way her subsequent love affair suspends, another time, highlighting that happiness comes to those who are lucky and deserving.

Personal Life Vs Professional Life

Servitude to ageing parents and the demise, particularly of a mother, are persistent in the narrative of Brookner. Ruth comes back to perceive that George succumbs to the love of Sally who is in charge of the book stall. After the unearthing of the surreptitious love affair, Helen refuses to live under the same roof. Ruth’s pronouncement of taking her mother to her friend Molly for the time being proves fatal. The news of George’s suffering from a stroke is received immediately after she reaches there,

and she retraces. The event at the Victoria station tests her patience. She recalls, "At Victoria, things began to go wrong" (177). Ruth's mental state is exposed when the taxi fails to come, and when Helen succumbs to death on the station. The emotion of loss surfaces and distresses her.

The circular pattern is characteristic of Brookner's novels, and in this respect, Ruth has to return to London, discontinuing her study, to assume the role of a dutiful daughter, to look after her ailing father. She gets a job teaching in a local college. As George is taken to Oakwood Court after the discharge from the hospital, the departure of Sally is bound to be there. Ruth depends on Roddy, the son of Sally's sister, for help. They get nearer during the infirmity of Roddy and the upshot is the marriage of convenience. Her search for the company of a supportive man completes in the form of Roddy. She possesses the memories of the short-lived marriage, focusing on the view of Brookner who writes, she "felt a great sense of security, which is what every woman needs" (188). Roddy's entry in Oakwood Court cheers George and relieves Ruth to see them taking care of each other. Ruth thought, "She had been lucky" (188), just like Edith in *Hotel du Lac*.

Love is Plight

The theme 'predestination will triumph over the free will' materialises when Roddy succumbs to a car accident, leaving Ruth lonely and assuming the role of the caregiver in the family that has been delineated by her since the death of her German-born granny. Both Ruth and George are dazed. It is difficult to judge her mental landscape at this stage of her life. George, being a loving father, feels very sorry for his child. He does not want to lose Ruth who reminds for the first time in their life that they converse to each other openly. Mrs. Cutler has been very kind to Ruth. After her marriage she comes to George and Ruth. One Saturday Cutler's dropping in to see Ruth records her affinity to Ruth. The warm discussion between them throws light on her kind nature. Seeing the plight of Ruth, she suggests, "You have been a good girl.", and added, "But if I were you...Well, if you want a break" (192). "A good girl" seems a maxim in the novels of Brookner as her heroines tend to be good, modelled after the heroines

of Charles Dickens. The hint of Cutler is perhaps for another marriage or her going abroad to complete her education.

The sum of these and other details amounts to a more complex picture of the protagonist who, thus, contributes to developing the theme under scrutiny. Apart from the protagonist, there are other characters that also assist in creating the aura of nostalgia in the novel. The first among them is George, Ruth's loving father, who is also presented as a nostalgic character. He reflects through flashback technique on his past. He cherishes the sweet memories of his mother, who is very stern and runs the house on her own. Contemplating over the treatment given to him by Helen, he thinks that he should have behaved like his mother who wants Helen to perform like a responsible woman, particularly like the nineteenth century women. The features of his mother are deeply rooted in his mind, "the large slow woman with a little child huddled in her lap..." (167). In this critical time, he strongly reminds his mother. About his caring mother, Brookner states, "...all these meals she had invented for him" (167-68). He notices himself, "sitting at her table while she buttered a poppy seed roll for him before he went to school, to university, to work" (168). He recalls, "Her hands swollen and shiny with immersion into many bowls of cold water. ...At home she had servants, But he had never heard her complain" (168). Further he reminds, "her at his bedside when he was ill, sitting sometimes through the night" (168). Helen's treatment of him and Sally's love, like his mother, make him nostalgic for his mother.

Nostalgic Effects in George

Displacement materialises when he escapes from the Oakwood Court and finds comfort in the flat of Sally due to insufficient money and lack of company to share his feelings. Brookner narrates George's feeling of nostalgia when he is tentatively displaced to Molly's town with his wife Helen, who is sick and not on holiday for many days. The new environment makes him restless and there:

George thought longingly of Mrs. Jacob's flat, of the entry phone and the door chimes, and the electric blanket and the frilled nylon pillow slips he had seen airing in the bathroom. He thought

of the record player and the sunlamp and the towelling bathrobe he intended to hang on the back of the bedroom door as soon as he got back. (87) Here, George is clearly nostalgic. The forced journey and the alien atmosphere provide a specific account of his homesickness. According to Hofer, people who are not able to accustom themselves to living outside their previous life are prone to this state. George, being displaced, displays Hofer's diagnostic signs which indicate increasing sadness and melancholy. But for the sake of his wife and daughter he bears the sadness. The lavish food that Mrs. Sally Jacobs cooks and feeds him every day, triggers his nostalgic feelings. His yearning is for her flat which is painstaking, spotless, and more specifically his love for the foodstuff. Registering his nostalgia, Brookner narrates that his longing surges up as in:

... with fierceness that surprised him, to sit at a decent table and have someone serve him food. He longed to eat a meal without knowing in advance what it was. He longed, if not for Sally, then for life in Sally's flat. Sometimes caught longing for his mother. (90)

Sally resembles George's mother in the respect of showering love and concern. Hence, in the Bays water, George rediscovers the delight of his youth. He longs to enjoy the same old days in the company of Sally who takes care of George like his mother. He pines to take pleasure in the chow doled out by his mother. The behaviour of Sally makes him ring a bell regarding his mother. He reminds Sally's saying, "You look tired. Why not take a shower" (91). He is reminiscent of the foodstuff as in:

A little bit of smoked fish as an appetiser, cold meat loaf and horseradish cucumber in sour cream. And cheesecake, which Sally made herself, and which was so rich that he had to eat it with a spoon. And all the while he ate, she would sit at the table ... to see that he left nothing on his plate. (91)

This is what his mother does, he reminds, and Sally does the same thing. The feeling of estrangement and loss in terms of Sally, when he is at Molly's house with Helen, makes George, "... think of Sally sitting in her bed in her expensive night dress, her special little pillow behind her neck" (166). His squabble with Helen, who overhears him

making a phone call to Sally, results in his separation from the house. After the clash, his stay at the flat of Sally seems to comfort him. Both of them blame Helen who has treated him analogous to a lady-in-waiting. However, his restlessness is explicit in his remembrance of the preceding retentions associated with the days spent in Helen's company. "He thought of the courtship and many honeymoons, for they had liked to think of themselves as perpetual lovers" (167). His natural inclination, like Bertie in *A Misalliance*, who even after the divorce with Blanche, keeps visiting her, towards Helen is perceptible in his above stated considerations. George's pining for Helen reconnoitres his fidgety essence.

Frederic Jameson, the film critic who has done research on postmodernism attacks such feelings by calling them "regressive" (cited in Hutcheon, 2000, p.203). Death of Helen and departure of Sally make him regressive. In addition, he receives a stroke that makes him bedridden resulting in his loneliness. Because of the timely hospitalisation of Sally and Roddy, he survives. Sally senses his lonely state after the death of his wife. He desperately seems to miss both Helen and Sally. Though he is taken home after the treatment, he misses Sally. Brookner writes: "He lived for her visits and tried to hold her hand... '(181). Reminding the food Sally has cooked for him, he gives vent to his feelings and says, "Such a cook... such a housekeeper" (183). Immediately after every ringing of the doorbell he expects Sally's coming. He asked Ruth, "Is Sally coming today?" (183), speaks about his mental podium. The subsequent citation serves as a better illustration of his intensive reflective stipulation. After the bell rings, "George shuffled out of the drawing room and stood expectantly in the hall... George was disappointed that it was not Sally" (184). This is how George supports the development of the argument under analysis.

Helens Nostalgic Behaviours

Manifestation of nostalgic traits can be found in another character, Helen, the mother of Ruth. Helen, a demi-actress of middle age, manages to keep herself fit for the theatre by taking intermittent exercise. Her attraction for the profession and the glamour is explicit in her efforts. The breaks in the shooting and out of work situations make her restless. Brookner

narrates, “when she had finished filming *You Must Be Joking* and no other work was immediately on offer, it seemed such a pity to break her delightful routine”(25). Her constant brooding over the past sensational days makes Mrs. Cutler say, “Why not make it the story of your life?” (26). Helen’s regretful reaction over the suggestion of Cutler seems to focus on the reality which she ultimately accepts. She turns her still beautiful but rather more cavernous eyes to the window and reflects, “I’m too old for the part now” (26). She adds, “But my autobiography would sell. Darling heart, buy me some exercise books, and a new nightie can work as well in bed, better in fact, and you can help me”(26). The demands highlight her hankering for the early days despite the fact that they are out of her reach. The youthful and beautiful days are still in her eyes. It is clear here that she feels nostalgic for the earlier life.

Her reminiscence is replicated in another occurrence when Ruth requests her to attend the school to meet her teacher Miss. Parker who motivates Ruth to set out to the university for her further education. Ruth tempts her to attend the school by informing her about the people at school who are fans of the roles she performs in the theatres and adds that they demand her at the school. At this point Helen’s reaction is quite nostalgic, “Oh, God, don’t, let’s talk about the future. The past is so much more interesting” (26). Her past, to a great extent, is fascinating but she does not crave to gossip with reference to the theatre life, and it is apparent that the precedent reminiscences make her despondent.

The holidays are one of the triggers that generate nostalgic feelings in one’s mind. The references of the holidays, for a change, turn her nostalgic. Her face gleams up at the prospect of going to the house of Molly, her one time friend. She visualises her past days she has enjoyed in the company in her youthful period. She reminds, “...mainly of the late nights, fast cars, dancing in the waves, with the glass of gin in her hand and someone to iron her evening dress” (84). At Molly, her homesickness surges up due to the nuisance she undergoes during the journey. She has become too feeble. Being displaced and uncomfortable, she longs to go home. She, lying on the divan, says, “Tomorrow, we go home.” Her reminiscences about her past love affairs with various

men, marriage with George against his mother’s desire comes like current reflecting the feeling of nostalgia.

Mrs. Cutler & Mrs. Sally’s Part in Nostalgia

Apart from Helen, another female character, Mrs. Cutler is also seen displaying the feeling of nostalgia. She works in the house of Ruth as a servant after the death of Ruth’s grandmother. But she dislikes working for others. She also has her reminiscences about her past life. She remembers a time when, “she had been mistress of her own small house in Batter Sea, when Douglas would take her to the pub on Friday evening, when she had a captive audience of her own” (96). The statement highlights that she still cherishes the memories of her husband, Douglas, and the days she has spent in his company. The desire to enjoy a married life and to have a husband surfaces again and again in the novel. The feeling of estrangement and childlessness pervades her. After reading *Woman’s Own* she convinces herself that a woman needs a man. So she feels that she should enjoy the same days again. Her decision of remarriage evokes the yearning for living a married life. She says, “I might like to get married again” (96). She has registered her name in the marriage bureau where she gets the proposal of Mr. Dunlop. She marries him and accepts the job of Clarence Nursing Home as manager.

Nostalgia powerfully reflects through the character of Mrs. Sally Jacobs who looks after the shop of books that is sold to her by George. In the later phase of his life George escapes to the flat of Sally as there is no one to share his feelings. He spends most of his time with Sally who also is lonely and needs company. This character also has nostalgic feelings about her past life that she shares with George. About her husband she reminds, “Earnest was very good to me. More like a father really....he looked after me so well. Everything was well taken care of. I never had to make a decision all the time I was married to him” (67). The memories of her husband prove a tear jerker. Her weeping here is proof of her nostalgic condition. She desperately longs to enjoy the same good old days in the company of her husband. However this being not possible she seeks solace in the mutual relationship with George. Hence she

“... liked seeing George every morning” (121). Her expecting a phone call every night is an indication of her pining for him. Brookner narrates, “When he called she felt warm and tearful and anxious to prolong the conversation...” (130). Consequently, she desires a gentleman to take care of her and accompany her as she is lonely. Significantly, loneliness can make a person nostalgic and Sally is an example of the same.

Her serving George in his illness in the hospital displays her goodness like Mrs. Duff who serves Blanche in her migraine in *A Misalliance*. During his hospitalisation she is with him like a shadow. After the discharge from the hospital, he is taken to the Oakwood Court and a sentiment of lonesomeness generates in her mind that provokes her to set off to her sister to Manchester. The things that are brought by George for Sally evoke melancholy in her mind. Seeing the things taken to Oakwood Court, Sally weeps openly when she articulates, “George’s things, like abandoned toys...” (145). But her act of hiding George’s favourite record of Viennese Waltzes in a drawer in her bedroom underlines her sentiments. Accordingly, the character of Sally plus the events interconnected to her are evidence that assist to develop the idea under scrutiny.

Techniques and Treatment of Themes in *The Debut*

Significantly, the theme of nostalgia, thus, powerfully reflects through the protagonist and the other characters as well. It is also significant that Brookner’s theme of exile or outsidership within the family contributes to developing the nostalgia in the novel. Ruth feels that she is sometimes neglected by her parents. But the fact is that they are busy in their world. Yet they pay attention to her. What’s more her granny is with her all the time. But her feeling that she is neglected leads her to feel as an outsider in her family itself. In Paris, she has the same feeling. She is unable to find friends and her own flat in Paris. Her routine to Bibliotheque Nationale makes her lonely. Her feeling of loneliness makes her homesick.

Remarkably, the flashback technique used in the novel reflects nostalgia. There is narrative within the narrative. As an internal narrator, Ruth’s all memories of her life are told by using flashback technique. Ruth’s nostalgia is explained by the

past memories of her life right from her childhood. Her present life is the result of her past. There are narrative levels in the novel. At one level it is the story of Dr. Ruth Weiss as she thinks back on her life at forty. The events told by Ruth as she remembers her past constitute the second level narrative. The introspective narrative reflects Ruth’s feeling of nostalgia.

The setting also had its contribution in reflecting the theme of nostalgia. The initial setting of Weiss family is Oakwood Court, which is free from any description of the days spent by Weiss family at Oakwood Court reveals the lonely state of the place. The very realistic description of the ancient massive dark furniture of Weiss house reveals itself in the nostalgia in the mind of Ruth. Her secluded room upstairs in Humphrey house in Paris is significant to reveal her lonely state that makes her feel nostalgic about her family and friends in London. The descriptive phrases about the settings like-tranquil streets, silent library, speaking to no one, alone waiting on the platform, silent days in the alien streets, and many more contribute to develop the nostalgia in the novel.

Not only the setting but the imagery and symbolism used in the novel also contribute to reflect the nostalgia. The novel opens by stating not only that the protagonist is brought up to emulate the characters of Dickens but also ponders the careers of *Anna Karenina* and *Emma Bovary*. In Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Emma’s loveless arranged marriage contracted to please her father as it happens with Ruth who marries Roddy to please her ailing father, George. The character of *Anna Karenina* is also significant regarding Ruth’s thoughts about her. In Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, Anna leaves her husband and child for her lover and finds herself alone and rejected by society by feeling that she has lost her lover as well as her social status, her husband and her child, after which Anna throws herself under a train and commits suicide. Ruth thinks over Anna’s career at the age of forty. She feels that reading too much literature has led her life to be lonely. She also has lost her lover Richard, Duplesis, Roddy and her status as a wife.

The phrases -The dark dining room, dry summer, cut off from the realm of speech, eating alone single figures watching the train disappear a silent ageing

life –spread all over the novel are symbolic and add the effect to the nostalgic atmosphere. The name of Ruth itself is symbolic. The meaning of the word Ruth is sorrow, grief, compassion, regret. Her life is full of bitter sweet experiences and she also has the feeling of loneliness. So she is sorrowful and longs to live her past life associated with sweet memories.

Conclusion

The theme of nostalgia in the novel also emerges through the world—a view reflected in the novel which is realistic. It seems that Brookner exposes the reality of human behaviour in the novel through Ruth's coming to reality from a fictitious world. Actually Ruth's most of the years are spent in studiousness. But at the age of forty, after getting so many bitter-sweet experiences, she understands the reality and seeks remedies to overcome the problem of nostalgia. She gets the job of lectureship and takes care of her ailing father.

Hence, from the above discussion it is clear that in *The Debut* Brookner narrates the state of mind of Ruth, George, Helen, Sally, Molly, Roddy, the causes of nostalgia and remedies they find in every situation. The novel explores various categories of nostalgia such as romantic, real, personal, historical, geographical, stimulated and collective. There is the exploration of different triggers of nostalgia. The use of structure, the themes, the narrative techniques, the significant settings, imagery, and symbolism in the novel are suggestive to reveal nostalgia.

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