

The Representation of the Unrepresented: A Study of Anita Brookner's Freeze-Frame Narrative in her Novel *Hotel du Lac*

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This paper attempts to delineate how Anita Brookner's "freeze-frame" narrative in Hotel du Lac visualizes the internalized fears, desires and responses of female characters who are experiencing a lonely life. As a modern writer, Brookner adopts the objective and visual sight rather than subjective narrative, for her realism is not to decorate but to transmit the quotidian things in order to externalize her characters' internal self without coloring them with romantic illusions. By recording the ordinary experiences and representing the material world she succeeds to depict how her female protagonist, Edith, undergoes the process of attaining self-awareness to confront her existential loneliness rather than escaping from it. This calculated method is likely to help the reader to experience the fluid and instable reality through his/her eyes rather than the mind and also contributes to the narrator's effort to represent the unrepresented world of women which is marred by a patriarchal society.

Introduction

In her discussion of women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf traced the position of women writers through the centuries and claimed that the woman writer was corrupted by an alien standard of art. In her evaluation some writers such as Emily Bronte or George Eliot failed because they wrote in an accepted masculine style of their time. The only exception was Jane Austen who, according to Woolf, "wrote entirely as a woman."¹ Now the question is: what made her style a woman's style? Austen's works were mainly based on women's marriage and family life but she stopped writing about such matters in an unimaginable environment current in fantasy works. Her female characters are described very vividly in an objective style. "She described social problems in a unique way from a distinct perspective and keen observation."² However, some scholars put Austen in the tradition of realism because of her "finely executed portrayal of individual characters and her emphasis on the everyday."³ Others

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1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Gutenberg: Gutenberg Org, 1929), 33.

2. Zhaoying Li, "On Feminine Consciousness Reflected by Jane Austen's Works," paper presented at the 4th International Education, Economics, Social Science, Arts, Sports and Management Engineering Conference (IEESASM 2016), 2016.

3. Ibid, 1.

contend that there is a sense of psychological immediacy in exploration of her characters. Though depicting a sarcastic view and ironic tone in her voice of narration, she never intrudes into the development of her characters as she lets them move freely within their own limitation, follow their own ordinary lives and pass the process of getting self-consciousness, a feature which adds to her subtle objective style.

Anita Brookner has a deep respect for the 19th century novels of Austen and her concentration mainly on human emotions and personal life. However, Brookner has not attained such universal fame as her admirable ancestor did, her *Hotel du Lac* won the Booker prize in 1984. Like Austen, she also worked with the same categories of realism, manners and comedy. Her style is well-calculated, and according to Alexander Flora, "she is a writer interested in expanding the possibilities of realism."⁴ Her fictions are also suffused with moral questions. Indeed, "Brookner novels are moral allegories and they announce their allegorical status by visual means."⁵ Similar to other modernist writers, facts contribute in the representation of the ordinary experience. In fact, Brookner's focus on the everyday and the ordinary goes beyond of the understanding of what realism means.

Born on 16 July 1928 in a British Jewish family, Anita Brookner studied at King's College- London- and at the Courtauld of Art in London. She spent three years studying in Paris as postgraduate, and then she took the post in art at Reading University and the Courtauld Institute, where she became an expert in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century French art and that influenced her picturesque style. She became the first woman to be named as Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge University in 1967. She wrote more than 20 novels most of which explore themes of emotional loss and difficulties associated with fitting in the society, and typically depict intellectual, middle-class women, who suffer isolation and frustration in love.

Gender has always had some effects on her writing. However, Brookner is not considered as a feminist in the true sense of the word. She never called herself a feminist but all her novels deal with women's challenges in their routine life. Flora Alexander wrote that "Brookner makes use of traditional story-telling technique to give form to women's everyday experience."⁶ To represent the psychological life of her characters and to express her female characters' conflicts with the accepted norms of society, she preferred to describe objects, landscapes, domestic architecture and exteriors in her narrative rather than using some

4. Flora Alexander, *Contemporary Women Novelists* (Edward Arnold, 1989), 30.

5. Phyllis Lassner, Ann V Norton, and Margaret D Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (2010): 36.

6. Alexander, *Contemporary Women Novelists*, 1989, 33.

7. Lassner, Norton, and Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," 2010, 16.

modern techniques like stream of consciousness. In the essay "Anita Brookner in the World" Phyllis Lassner explained this point:

"Instead of privileging the subjective as the epistemologically correct perspective for our time, Brookner's narrative points of view often question attempts to represent interior stream of consciousness in order to investigate selfhood."⁷

Such approach is quite different from the general belief about the modernistic fiction which holds that people's spiritual world is privileged over the external, material world. Generally, it is believed that contrary to the fictions of the 18th and 19th century which focused on the everyday experience and details of the external life of the characters, the modernist novelists shifted their attention from the external world to the inner world of characters and through some techniques, such as stream of consciousness, they attempt to reveal the alienated self and the emotional crisis of the characters. But as Liesl Olson discussed the role of the everyday details in her book, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, everydayness is expanded not overlooked in the modernist novels.

Discussing the famous moments of the so-called "transcendent" understanding such as "epiphany" or "magic moment" in the major novelists' works, Olson claims that such understanding is not based on a transcendent, mystical moment but on the very ordinary: "the ordinary sometimes maybe internalized but it is never transcendent...the ordinary is not always transformed into something else, something beyond our everyday world; the ordinary indeed may endure in and of itself, as a "final good."⁸ Studying the style of some important modernist novelists such as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, Olson challenges the mythical method of epiphany and claims that Joyce "attempts to equalize events and objects in an environment chock-full of everyday stuff."⁹ In fact, by capturing the facts and the routine details of life, the novelist succeeds to "create a palpable sense of what constitutes a person's life"¹⁰ to highlight those moments and details which are taken for granted and to represent the unrepresented.

Anita Brookner is one of those novelists for whom the everyday plays a central role in her art of fiction. She effectively captures a freeze-frame which not only does echo the spiritual paralysis of her female characters in *Hotel du Lac* but also "characters stand frozen in their frames, enacting scenes that suggest Renaissance paintings of moral conflicts embodied in static tableaux. They are surrounded, moreover, by objects that announce their own allegorical status."¹¹ She privileges the visual so that the reader can accurately picture those apparently unimportant, minor elements which are overlooked, giving them a significance that they do not seem to have in the first glance. Besides, focusing on

8. Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

9. Ibid, 4.

10. Ibid, 7.

11. Margaret D. Stetz, "Anita Brookner's Visual World," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 29, no. 1 (2010): 36.

a short period of time that the protagonist of the story, Edith, has to spend in the Hotel to "pass her exile" and "to come back older, wiser, and properly apologetic,"¹² the writer describes the quotidian things carefully not for embellishment but to externalize her deep loneliness and self-disintegration. In fact, Edith projects her own reality upon the objects, landscape, and other environmental elements. This ordinary life according to Olson "becomes the context in which epiphany is subsumed, reconsidered."¹³ Epiphany which is usually initiated by a trivial event gives the ability to the character to change his/her behavior. At the end of the novel in the process of self-recognition, Edith finally attains such ability to accept her own existential loneliness rather than resorting to the "secure" but paralyzing values of patriarchal society. Trapped in the attitudes of all the people as well as she herself, Edith's final solution for such paralysis is a Stoical acceptance of situation while not conforming to those patriarchal, ideological values.

Literature Review

The question of a female writing has been considered as an important issue in analyzing women's novelists in recent years. Regarding the significance of language, some feminist thinkers state that women should create their own language, reject notions of objectivity and neutrality and write from subjective positions informed by specific circumstances. However, this subjective position does not mean to overlook the ordinary experience. In fact, as Liesl Olson refers in *Modernism and Ordinary*, the ordinary has attained a new centrality in modern novels. Studying some selected modernist novels such as Woolf, Joyce and Proust, Olson grounds her analysis in wide-ranging philosophical and cultural studies. She challenges the primacy of transcendent epiphany in modernist novels and studies the modernist focus on the ordinary through its defamiliarization. By drawing attention on the ordinary, such novels attempt to reveal and signify the unnoticed moments and details.

Privileging this approach in modernist novels, Phyllis Lassner, Ann V. Norton and Margaret D. Stetz in their paper, "Anita Brookner in the World,"¹⁴ have attempted to respond those critics who criticized Brookner as a writer whose concerns are narrow because of her attention to the ordinary details. The paper claims that although, unlike Woolf, Brookner does not use subjective methods of narration such as stream of consciousness, her "narrative points of view often question attempts to represent interior stream of consciousness in order to

12. Anita Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1984), 2.

13. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 2009, 8.

14. Stetz, "Anita Brookner's Visual World," 2010, 35-46; Lassner, Norton, and Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," 2010, 15-18.

investigate selfhood."¹⁵ This paper studies how psychological life of the characters is represented through graphic, visual-descriptive details and how the "exteriors define and express their desires and responses."¹⁶

In "Anita Brookner's Visual World", Margaret D. Stetz claims that Anita Brookner expands the boundaries of realism. While working with the categories of realism, manner and comedy she does not remain inside them. As a child of a Jewish Polish family, her texts refer to post-Holocaust time and the realism and the studies of manners refer to the realm of the political. Rejecting Brookner's works as "miniature", Stetz claims "her narrative is instead large with references to secrets, terrors, exiles and losses that are not only personal but communal. Regarding her novels as moral allegories, Stetz studies how her knowledge of painting contributes to her visual world and claims that the objects in her novels "announce their own allegorical status."¹⁷

Examining and analyzing the style and narration of three women novelists, Rajni Walia utilizes autobiographical links between the writers and their novels. Studying Jean Rhys, Barbara Pym and Anita Brookner, Walia discusses that woman novel is a novel which attempt to illuminate female experience and portrays the writer's "own aspirations, longings and emotions". She reviews the feminist movement from the second wave and claims that feminist reform and women's liberation were not successful enough to challenge and change the fundamental ways in which women see themselves. To prove her claim, she refers to those three novelists and their female protagonists who "would like to shower their love and devote their lives to the man, who would thus validate their being."¹⁸ She believes that the depiction of the lonely, isolated women who are not successful to have a fulfilling relationship with men signifies their inability. Contrary to her, this paper attempts to justify that the protagonist's acceptance of loneliness is a courageous decision attained through and existential view in her life.

Novel: The Art of Verbal Painting

The correlation between the art of the painter and that of the novelist exists in the fact that both attempt to represent reality with an "uncompromising visual focus,"¹⁹ as life is, after all, experienced through the eyes. However, it is believed

15. Lassner, Norton, and Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," 2010, 16.

16. Ibid.

17. Stetz, "Anita Brookner's Visual World," 2010, 35-46.

18. Rajni Walia, *Women and Self: Fictions of Jean Rhys, Barbara Pym, Anita Brookner* (Book Plus, 2001), 3.

19. Gerard Doherty, *Dubliners' Dozen: The Games Narrators Play* (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2004), 49.

that this is the realistic novels of the 18th and 19th centuries which through their "visual narrative" described the images of the external world with all its details. The modernist novels in contrast, mainly focus on the portrayal of the spiritual world of the characters, presenting it through subjective modes of narration. But in fact, the ordinary details and the routine facts play a very important role in modernist novels. Modernist novelists' attention to descriptive details (especially of the body) is not for the sake of realist embellishment but as a means of communicating the visual, to get across an accurate depiction of the image they aim to represent, an image that is as fixed and unmovable as that of a painting.

The use of exactly visual images was advocated in the early modernist schools of the twentieth century. It was Ezra Pound who emphasized the image "which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"²⁰ which paved the way for other modernist writers who like James Joyce got across an accurate depiction of the image to represent the world, an image that is as fixed and unmovable as that of a painting. Writers such as Joyce or Woolf privilege objective sight and the visual over other, more subjective, narrative means that "magnify an awareness of the self (such as epiphany, internal monologue etc.)"²¹ This allows the reader to experience reality and the ordinary in the novel through the eyes rather than through the mind of the narrator.

The desire to duplicate the ordinary experience is not exclusive to Modernism. In his well-known study, *The Rise of the Novel* (1965), Ian Watt studies the relationship of realism and the novel form and considers realism as opposite to idealism. In discussing different aspects of realism in novel he states "the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents."²² According to Watt, the novel attempted to render a realistic portrait of man contrary to his idealistic vision presented in classical works and he claims that novel is a "detailed description of everyday life, including an accurate depiction of time and an intimacy with the texture of physical experience."²³ Such tendency continued to the modernistic novel as well, but with a new perspective: "The modernist novel treats the everyday with a new centrality, putting pressure on the notion of a coherent individual subject, and reconfiguring (but not rejecting) representations of temporality and material culture as crucial to a representation of character."²⁴

In fact, in modernistic novel everydayness is reshaped and expanded which may suggest the attention to every individual life. By focusing on the very ordinary details of everyday life and description of ordinary objects, which are

20. T. S. Eliot and Jon Cook, *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900–2000* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 84.

21. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 2009, 3.

22. Ian Watt, "Rise of Novel," *The United States: University of California* (1965): 11.

23. *Ibid*, 30.

24. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 2009, 18.

25. *Ibid*, 6.

taken for granted because of their repetitive nature, a sense of importance is given to that part of life which has been ignored. In his classification of the ordinary, Olson considers this definition of the ordinary of activities which are overlooked and ignored as a "genre: unheroic events and overlooked, neither crucial moments of plot development nor temporal points that signify accomplishment."²⁵

Modernist epiphany happens in the heart of these ordinary details. It is a moment of self-awareness, a shock, which is often the result of a trivial event or a banal moment. In many modernistic novels after attaining such awareness the character comes back to his/her ordinary life: "a return to the world of ordinary experience gives form to shock and integrates shock into a world where things happen, for better or worse, through legal institutions, social systems, and biological necessities of living."²⁶ Although that shock does not change the character's life permanently, it may give him/her a sharper view toward the environment and its determining forces. The next part of this paper discusses how in *Hotel du Lac* Anita Brookner's choice to represent the "real" through vivid images and movements objectively serves to emphasize her allegiance to writing a visual experience of life, separated into instant moments or images, rather than favoring a growing tendency to reflect subjectively upon thoughts. It also discusses how effectively she captures a "freeze-frame" (echoing the paralysis and loneliness of female characters in the novel) and portrays the journey of her protagonist as she escapes from that loneliness to its acceptance, a journey which ends in the recognition of her authentic-self.

Brookner and the Freeze-Frame Narrative

All Brookner's novels deal with women. They represent women as intelligent and sensitive subjects who are tussling with complex realities of work, marriage, human relationships and ethical values in a male-dominated value system. *Hotel du Lac*, which won the 1984 Booker prize, portrays the reality of Edith Hope, a thirty-nine-year-old unmarried woman who writes popular, romantic fiction. The novel begins with her arrival at Hotel du Lac. She reaches there in a state of bewildered confusion at the turn of events in her life. After a secret and often lonely affair with a married man and an aborted marriage, she is banished by her friends. They advise her to go on "probation" so as to "grow up", "be a woman", and atone for her mistakes. Edith comes to the hotel swearing not to change. However, the hotel's silent charms and her observations of the guests there all tug at Edith with questions about her identity, forcing her to examine who she is and what she has been. At the hotel, she observes people from different walks of life — Mrs. Pusey and her daughter Jennifer, their love for each other, and the splendid oblivious lives they live; Madame de Bonneuil, who lives at the hotel in

26. Ibid, 9.

solitary expulsion from her son; and Monica, who came to the hotel acceding to her husband's demands. Edith falls for the ambiguous smile of Mr. Neville, who asks for her hand in marriage. She considers a life of recognition that being married to Neville would confer upon her, but ultimately rejects the possibility of a relationship with him when she realizes he is an incorrigible womanizer. This also finally leads her to realize what her life is expected to be. Once again, she breaks chains and decides to take things into her own hands and leaves Hotel du Lac.

One of the main concerns of modernistic novels is to portray the modern human and his/her quest to find the meaning of self in a new world where old values have been weakened or destructed. As it is said in *Alienation in Modern Society*: "The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture and of the technique of life."²⁷ Modern issues such as civilization, authority, control, oppression and chaos have so much affected lives of people that they seem to be spiritually paralyzed and left with a disintegrated self. Many modernist novelists reflect this spiritual crisis through experimental methods such as interior monologue, stream of consciousness, free association and impersonal narrative. As a modernist novelist, Brookner also attempts to focus on the portrayal of the spiritual world of her characters and to reveal the character's inner reality but unlike some of her former writers, she does not use some modernistic techniques such as stream of consciousness or unusual language style which violates the regular syntactical pattern. As a painter who paints nothing other than visual facts, Brookner prefers the visual through the evidence of her factual, opinion-free presentation of what characters see. It does not mean that she is not interested in the inner world of human; in fact, she represents the psychological realism in a method different from some other modernists: "Instead of privileging the subjective as the epistemologically correct perspective for our time, Brookner's narrative points of view often question attempts to represent interior streams of consciousness in order to investigate selfhood."²⁸ Her novels certainly use first-person narrators, but they also employ limited on looking narrators. As we see in *Hotel du Lac*, Brookner attempts to depict the inner desires, fears and frustrations of her female characters conflicting with the external social and cultural codes of behavior and conventions. But her narrator does not intrude on their struggle for "individuation", instead she represents the psychological life through graphic, painterly details. In this story the still life, objects, landscape and the exterior express the characters' inner desires, fears and frustrations.

27. Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson, *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern So-Ciety*. (New York: Dell, 1968), 154.

28. Lassner, Norton, and Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," 2010, 15.

In this novel the characters, particularly the female characters, suffer from a spiritual paralysis. The oppression of the society and the inability of the individuals to achieve a self-autonomy lead them to a kind of paralysis which is reflected in the physical setting and environment as well as the spiritual stasis of the female characters in the story. Brookner's choice of a novelist as the narrator of the story whose visual narrative describes everything in the written word like a painted picture echoes the characters' as well as Edith's inner reality upon the objects. At the beginning of the novel, the author vividly depicts the depressive environment seen through the window:

From the window all that could be seen was a receding area of grey. It was to be supposed that beyond the grey garden, which seemed to sprout nothing but the stiffish leaves of some unfamiliar plant, lay the vast grey lake, spreading like an anesthetic towards the invisible further shore, and beyond that, in imagination only, yet verified by the brochure, the peak of the Dent d'Oche, on which snow might already be slightly and silently falling.²⁹

The imagery of the first paragraph establishes the atmosphere of disillusionment and passivity which suffuses the story. The metaphoric use of "window" which refers to Edith's eyes illuminates her condition of mind and feeling. The repetition of color "grey" with the simile of "spreading like an anesthetic" heighten the sense of paralysis which is projected upon the landscape. Words like "unfamiliar" and "invisible" make clear that nothing is clear, everything is vague and based on supposition. Edith is framed by the window as she observes everything out, an observer who is surrounded by "a land of prudently harvested plenty, a land which had conquered human accidents, leaving only the weather distressingly beyond control."³⁰ The world which is created here is a visual one, and this visual, freeze-framed narrative reflects successfully the frozen, static and paralyzed feeling of the inhabitants of Hotel du Lac. As Patricia Waugh puts it, "Edith experiences the grayness of the Hotel du Lac as an objective correlative for her own state of mind."³¹

The main paralysis of the novel is spiritual paralysis of the characters, particularly the female characters. This spiritual paralysis is scanned from Edith's eyes. The Hotel "a place guaranteed to provide a restorative sojourn for those whom life had mistreated or merely fatigued"³² acts as an exile place for all its inhabitants who have been frustrated with the realities of their life. This sense of frustration and disillusionment is the source of their stasis. Since this passivity weakens the possibility of discourse among the characters, so their appearance

29. Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac*, 1984, 1.

30. *Ibid*, 1.

31. Patricia Waugh, "Contemporary Women Writers: Challenging Postmodernist Aesthetics," *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London: Routledge (1989): 143.

32. Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac*, 1984, 5.

and performance play an important role in Brookner's ironical characterization of them. She describes one of the guests, Madame de Bonneuil as follows:

...chewing steadily and without expression, had a curious way of taking her wine, in large gulps, as if rinsing her mouth out, and between courses would sit with her hands on the table, waiting for more. Edith could just see, embedded in her brownish fingers, small rings, one crested, but with the indentations worn away.³³

The picture of an old, expressionless woman conveys a sense of passivity and paralysis suffering from isolation and "self-effacing". Mrs. Pausy, another character who cannot move easily due to her heavy body is marked by a noticeable appetite to eat in whom Edith "perceived avidity, grossness, ardour."³⁴ Even younger female characters are portrayed in a caricature way. Jennifer "a reflection of her mother that although she occupied quite a large space and had a curiously insistent physical presence, she did not have too much to say for herself."³⁵ Monica, a woman with a little dog and eating problem whose role is limited to talk about other people in the hotel, "proved to be something of a disappointment". As Helga Kurz puts it in her essay "irregular features, fatness, sick or crippled bodies or the symptoms of old age are scrutinized by the central woman character because they seem to vindicate her withdrawal from and dislike for her female vis-à-vis."³⁶ Brookner's descriptive power to reflect this sense of paralysis is particularly prevalent and noticeably visual in her paintings of the people which proves her skill as a portrait artist as well as the painter of landscape.

Besides the reflection of paralysis through images, Brookner's concern is to explore at length human being's alienation from one another and from the world. Alienation emerges as natural consequence of existential predicament both in intrinsic and extrinsic terms which is the result of loss of identity, a loss which is rooted in the anxiety and loss of self-authenticity. To represent this inner sense, Brookner prioritizes the visual representation of characters rather than focusing explicitly on their thoughts, so the reader is not only presented with a clear image of their appearance but is also more likely encountered with the reality and essence of that character. From Hotel du Lac which "took a quite pride, and sometimes it was very quiet indeed, in its isolation from the herd, knowing that it had a place in the memory of its old friends,"³⁷ to Monica's holding the little dog "quivering with anxiety" with "the same boneless uncoiling movement" and Edith's fear of being with the others since "in any event, meals in public were not

33. Ibid, 14.

34. Ibid, 18.

35. Ibid.

36. Helga Kurz, "The Impossibility of Female Friendship: A Study of Anita Brookner's Female Characters," *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (1990): 13-25.

37. Ibid, 6.

to her taste, even when she was accompanied "all signify the sense of isolation and aloofness. The objects are tools to embody the loneliness of the characters. Monica's dog, Kiki, which should be always looked after and is caged whenever intrudes its owner's privacy, symbolizes its owner: a lonely woman and an extra, decorative, luxurious tool for her husband who sends her to exile apparently for having peace but actually to get rid of her.

Identity crisis and ontological insecurity is a shared feature among the female characters in this novel, whether minor or major ones. What distinguished them from each other is their reaction and response in the face of this crisis. Some of them adapt themselves to the authority, without any attempt to question the framing situation." the oppression of the society and the inability of individuals to achieve their self-autonomy lead them to be directed by the authority."³⁸ For Jennifer, with her "rather large, flushed, blond face" this authority appears in the form of a domineering mother who controls her daughter's behavior (or she thinks so) so there is no room for Jennifer to define herself and to recognize her place in the world. Mrs. Pusey, a narcissist woman, does not want to let Jennifer go. Even if Jennifer will get married, Mrs. Pusey will not leave her. "... [O]ne thing I [Mrs. Pusey] will not do is lower my standards. I have always striven for the best. It is an instinct, I suppose. As my husband used to say, only the best is good enough."³⁹ Although a middle-aged woman, Jennifer has no voice for herself. As Edith observes her: "Jennifer was so much a reflection of her mother that although she occupied quite a large space and had a curiously insistent physical presence, she did not have too much to say for herself."⁴⁰ A very triviality of Jennifer's personality in contrast with her physical presence supports Brookner's ironical delineation of the character. Her description of faces and bodies contributes to her visual narrative which offers us an insight into the character, as opinions are formed on appearances.

However, it is Edith whose sense of isolation and emotional conflict are emphatically reflected in the everyday details of life. Brookner's emphasis on "facts" emerges from how to create a palpable sense of what constitutes a person's life. Olson refers to this point in modernist writers who "dwell on the detail not as some synecdoche for some larger ideal, but as a source of realism"⁴¹ The visual details, such as objects, landscape, food, places etc. represent her psyche. From the beginning of the novel Edith suffers from her loneliness and her sense of stasis: "now I am reduced to pure tortoisedom, she thought, opening her eyes and gazing fearfully around the still deserted salon."⁴² In another part of the story,

38. Glden Yuksel, "Identity Crisis and Ontological Insecurity in Anita Brookner's *Hotel Du Lac*," in *7th International IDEA Conference, Pamukkale University*, 2013, 151.

39. Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac*, 1984, 53.

40. Ibid, 18.

41. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 2009, 24.

42. Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac*, 1984, 14.

being conscious of this loneliness, she is upset and "thought how limited her means of expression had become: nodding to the pianist or to Madam de Bonneuil, listening to Mrs. Pusey, using a disguised voice in the novel she was writing and, with all of this, waiting for a voice that remained silent, hearing very little that meant anything to her at all."⁴³ And Edith's letters to David which express her emotions and thoughts but are never sent. A one-sided relation which reflects Edith's loneliness. Location is another important element. Descriptions of the spaces are functional in the novel for they correspond to different areas of protagonists' existence. In a conversation with Mr. Neville, Edith reflects her inner sense through description of the hotel: "that hotel is hardly the place for you. It seems to be permanently reserved for women. And for a certain kind of woman. Cast-off or abandoned, paid to stay away."⁴⁴ As Margaret D. Stetz points out: "in the novel the protagonist remains aware of her lack and finds her visual semblable in the formless and sometimes frightening gray lac."⁴⁵ The use of the visual as a tool for painting the interior as well as the exterior of a character contributes to reflect Edith's evolving sense of selfhood which finally leads her into enlightened awareness.

This awareness or in modernist term, epiphany, is often initiated by a banal moment or in Joyce's term "the vulgarity of speech". As Olson puts it "Ordinary life becomes the context in which epiphany is subsumed, reconsidered, and assessed in light of its continuity or its ability to actually change one's previous behavior."⁴⁶ However, as a romantic fiction writer Edith's main intention of writing is to distance all real circumstances over which she has no or little control, ironically this is the very daily life with its details which leads her to understand the reality. During her short residence in Hotel du Luc, she spends her time relating with other guests which dissolves her loneliness for a short time: "the desert of the Hotel du Lac has begun to blossom like the rose with strange new relationships."⁴⁷ Edith is eager to watch people. People seemed very interesting and worth watching. During this process of watching the people and their still life she attains a better understanding of "reality". For instance, her first impression of Mrs. Pausy as a lively, sociable woman changed to a perception of "avidity, grossness, ardour". Brookner states "it was her [Edith] perception of this will to repletion and to triumph that had occasioned her mild feeling of faintness when she watched Mrs. Pusey and Jennifer eating their dinner."⁴⁸ This is one instance of eating scenes which dramatizes and embodies the moral qualities of its characters. Observing them drinking and eating food helps Edith to see that hidden moral quality and thus to attain grace through vision.

43. Ibid, 32.

44. Ibid, 50.

45. Lassner, Norton, and Stetz, "Introduction: Anita Brookner in the World," 2010, 44.

46. Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 2009, 8.

47. Brookner, *Hotel Du Lac*, 1984, 42.

48. Ibid, 18.

The critical moment which helps Edith in her self-recognition lies in the conversation with Mr. Neville. Edith's mind is filled with the questions of life and happiness and as a woman with the female identity in a patriarchal society: "what behavior most becomes a woman?"⁴⁹ In their conversation, a contrast between Mr. Neville's "realistic" outlook and Edith's "romantic" view is distinguished when they discuss the concept of life, happiness and love. According to Neville happiness should not be confused "with one particular situation, one particular person" since he "freed himself" from all that I have discovered the secret of contentment."⁵⁰ He believes that emotional bonds captivate human being, and consequently "without a huge emotional investment, one can do whatever one pleases."⁵¹ What he emphasizes is "your own centrality" which may bring a new life." On the contrary, Edith defines happiness in the presence of love and an emotional connection:

I mean that I cannot live well without it. I cannot think or act or speak or write or even dream with any kind of energy in the absence of love. I feel excluded from the living world. I become cold, fish-like, immobile. I implode. My idea of absolute happiness is to sit in a hot garden all day, reading, or writing, utterly safe in the knowledge that the person I love will come home to me in the evening.⁵²

Such romantic view is criticized by Mr. Neville. He makes Edith face the reality of her loneliness behind such romanticism. He tells her "your romanticism might keep rueful thoughts at bay for a time, but the thoughts would win out. And then you would discover that you had a lot in common with all the other discontented women."⁵³ These words frighten Edith. Her sense of fear and loneliness are described in a visual narration: "Edith felt the hair on the back of her neck begin to crepitate. She had told herself as much, many times, but had been able to dismiss her own verdict. Now she recognized the voice of authority."⁵⁴ This is the ripe moment for Neville to hit the point. Brookner's description of him while "inspecting a butterfly, which had perched, fluttering, on the rim of one of the boxed geranium plants"⁵⁵ foreshadows the next scene when he traps Edith in that vulnerable situation and tells her: "what you need, Edith, is not love. What you need is a social position. What you need is marriage."⁵⁶ As the voice of a patriarchal society, Mr. Neville's proposal reflects the cultural and

49. Ibid, 19.

50. Ibid, 51.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid, 53-54.

53. Ibid, 55.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid, 51.

56. Ibid, 55.

social codes. For an unmarried woman like Edith, marriage can provide a social position, a safe future. In her relationship with David, Edith would like to shower her love and devote her life to him, who would validate her being. Left unfulfilled and frustrated, she decides to accept Neville's proposal to be validated through a social convention. She feels this is a self-deceptive decision but she prefers to be "seduced": "there was something wrong with it, she knew, but at the moment she was not interested in finding out what it was."⁵⁷

Consequently, Edith attempts to reach an idealized self by ignoring the real self, by adopting herself to the standards and norms of the society. In her last letter to David she confesses:

"I do not love Mr. Neville, nor does he love me. But he has made me see what I will become if I persist in loving you as I do...He assures me that I will very soon, under his guidance, develop into the sort of acceptable woman whose confidence and stamina and indeed presumption I have always envied. Rather like your wife, in fact."⁵⁸

Edith was always longing for a long, stable, secure relationship with a man who would love her deeply. Unfulfilled by David's love, she decides to escape from her loneliness by accepting Mr. Neville's proposal and so she conforms to the norms of society. However, this desire does not last for a long time when accidentally she sees Mr. Neville, with his night gown, comes out of Jennifer's room. At this moment Edith faces the reality. Brookner describes this moment of awareness very vividly: "And that door, opening and shutting, in her dreams, in her delusive waking moments, had been a real door, the reality and implications of which she had failed to take into account."⁵⁹ Facing the "reality" she is not that "romantic" woman anymore. Now she understands that living with Neville would "lose the only life that I have ever wanted, even though it was never mine to call my own."⁶⁰ Thus, instead of resorting to the safe but conventional and paralyzing values of the patriarchal society, she prefers to accept her own existential loneliness. In the final scene when she writes a telegraph, first she writes "Coming home" but after a moment she thinks that "this was not entirely accurate" so she changes her mind, crosses out the words and writes instead "Returning", which may symbolically reflect her new vision, a return to her lonely world with a stoical acceptance.

57. Ibid, 52.

58. Ibid, 102.

59. Ibid, 103.

60. Ibid, 105.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the narrative technique used by Anita Brookner in her novel *Hotel du Lac* runs in the footsteps of Virginia Woolf. Brookner's eyes see all details and the values they represent in the material world. She captures the facts and the routine details of life, "to represent the unrepresented". As a modernist writer, she attempts to focus on the portrayal of the spiritual world of her characters but unlike her predecessors she does not use some modernist techniques like stream of consciousness. Instead, she effectively captures a freeze-frame which echoes the inner feelings, thoughts, desires, fears and frustrations of her female characters. The sense of disillusionment and frustration is the source of their spiritual paralysis. The world which is created in the novel is a visual one which successfully reflects the frozen, static and paralyzed feeling of the inhabitants of *Hotel du Lac*. They also suffer from alienation which is the result of loss of identity, a loss which is rooted in the anxiety and loss of self-authenticity. However, to represent this inner sense, Brookner prefers the visual representation of characters rather than focusing explicitly on their thoughts. While other female characters adapt themselves to authority, Edith attains a self-recognition through the very details of life. At the end of the novel, she understands marriage as a seemingly social protection that would deprive her of the only life she ever wanted; therefore she chooses to accept her existential loneliness rather than escaping from it.

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