

Euphoric Aura In ‘Under the Net’

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Abstract

19th century is a remarkable century in the history of literary renaissance. Many philosophers have enlightened the people with their intellectual thoughts and by them many theories have been instigated. But women have taken a little part in this revival and the world has been waiting for the women philosophers. At that time a woman with her ‘contingent theory’ has entered the literary world silently and proved herself as a potent philosopher. The woman is Iris Murdoch who has given a great entry with her first novel “Under the Net”. This paper tells the narrative skill of Iris Murdoch and her contingent theory. Though the author has felt it is her immature novel, it is praised by many intellectuals. This paper elucidates the concept of ‘love’, and the difference between ‘truth’ and ‘real’

1. Introduction

A juvenile and immature novel, commented by its author Iris Murdoch, ‘Under the Net’ is a picaresque philosophical work bearing new moral concepts and principles. Through James Donaghue’s (also known as Jake) character Murdoch tries to describe her own identity which leads to a master theory ‘contingency’. Contingency is not a new theory. It has been used by plenteous philosophers in different situations with different approaches. Contingency was applied in the form, plot and incidents of the novel and made it a great existential novel. “Indeed the whole novel may be taken as a gigantic image of concreteness and contingency” (Roxman, Contingency and the Image of the net 67). Contingency is set down in places of London. In Jake’s view he wants reason and he hates contingency. “There are some parts in London which are necessary and others are contingent. Everywhere West Earls Court is contingent, except for a few places long the river. I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason.” (26)

2. Portrayal of Characters and Theme

The Protagonist Jake reflects the views of Murdoch who has told the nature of reality which is always under the net. The title Under the Net replicates many aspects like truth, moral values, ideal thoughts, real situations, individual respect, hypocrisy, happiness etc. According to Cheryl K. Bove (1), Jake is a feckless, failed artist and picaresque hero with little bit laziness translates French novels especially Jean Pierre Breteuil’s novels into English.

The novel starts with the protagonist Jake’s narration about his journey from France to England, about his distant cousin Peter O’Finney who is always called Finn. Finn, a modest and shy person, who always follows the commands of Jake, announces that they have to search for shelter because Jake’s girl friend Magdalen throws them out from her house. They have been living in her house for 18 months for free of rent. As she is going to marry Samuel Starfield (Sacred Sammy), the diamond book maker, she wants Jake’s fourth floor to give to her fiancé immediately. So Jake has left his radiogram and some of his belongings at her apartment and suggests Finn to go to his friend Dave Gellman’s flat. Then Jake goes to

Mrs. Tinkham who has a newspaper shop in the neighborhood of Chorlette Street. She is a kind person and never tells the secrets of her customers to anyone. Even some customers are infuriated by her cryptic nature. One of her customers has once tried to get some information and gets irritated by her surreptitious behaviour, shouts "You are pathologically discreet". (18)

The clear perception of 'truth' is evidently illustrated in the attitudes of Jake, Magdelen, Finn and Mrs. Tinkham. Take the attitude of Magde, she loves Jake and doesn't want to marry Sammy. As Jake doesn't pay any attention on her, she decides to marry Samy. Though Jake likes Magde, but doesn't want to marry her and doesn't want to leave her house either. Finn is a silent person, never reveals his true thoughts. According to **Wittgenstein**: "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something - because it is always before one's eyes) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless THAT fact has at some time struck him. And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful." (**Wittgenstein**, Ludwig Josef Johann (Logical atomist) 1889-1951). Here I feel that Jake is unable to succeed in his relation with others and considers people unreal. But Murdoch opines that it is important for everyone to respect the contingency of other people. Jake cannot take decisions by his own and is provoked by others. Though he knows Magde well but cannot understand her mind or even doesn't try to recognize the change in her appearance. His inattentiveness drives her to take an immediate action of marrying Sammy. Her engagement with Sammy neither gives happiness nor grievance to Jake. So her decision is not a betrayal but common human mentality and a natural consequence. The wavering mind and indecisiveness nature of Jake make him do picaresque events in his life and force him to go from one place to other place and meet people. Jake doesn't know what decision he has to take even in complex and essential situations.

In Mrs. Tinkham's shop he has checked all his manuscripts and he finds one script is missing. It is the translation of Jean-Pierre Breteuil's mediocre novel *Le Rossignol de Bois*. From Tinkham's shop, Jake goes to his philosopher friend Dave's flat, where he observes a crowd of young men talking at once and drinking cups of tea. Dave invites him with a dignified manner but he doesn't agree to share his flat with him. Finn again suggests him to take help from Anna Quentine, a singer to whom Jake once fell in love. While searching for Anna's address, Jake recollects the memories of Anna, whom he adores very much. Generally Jake likes the qualities like "guileless, profound, confident and trustful" (31) in women which are described in the novels of James and Conrad. The women he has known are often inexperienced, inarticulate, credulous and simple and he calls them 'deep'. Though he believes Anna is a 'deep', he loves her because of her mystifying and immeasurable nature. Here with her nature Anna also represents the hidden truth. In Jake's opinion Anna is true and real and her sister Sadie is facetious and unreal.

Anna's sister Sadie is a film artist with brilliant display and dazzling charm, works for Bounty Bellfounder Company. Jake hasn't met Anna for many years. She lives in a small flat at Bayswater Road. He wants to marry Anna, but he knows that Anna never accepts his proposal. To Anna marriage is a communion of souls, but to Jake marriage is an idea of reason, a concept which may regulate but not constitute his life. So he drops his idea to marry her and he has parted away from her. Now he is searching for Anna for help. He has got her address at Riverside Miming Theatre, on Hammersmith Mall, and surprises when he spots her in a prop room. She has given up her singing and tells Jake that singing is not a pure art whereas mime is pure art and theatre is an unadulterated place. When Jake asks her about shelter, she directs him to her sister Sadie.

Jake meets Sadie at Mayfair hairdresser. Sadie is happy and delighted when she sees Jake after a long time and requests him to stay at her flat and save her from a mad lover Hugo Bellfounder, a fireworks manufacturer and a film studio owner who forces her to love him and pesters her on telephone. Jake is surprised on listening to this weird news because he knows Hugo very well and he is his close former friend. Here the real plot comes with the introduction of Hugo Bellfounder as Jake says, "As my acquaintance with Hugo is the central theme of this book, there was little point anticipating it" (60). Jake recollects the moments he has spent with Hugo and tells that his parents are Germans. Bellfounder is not their original name. His father has adopted 'Bellfounder' to their original names and started an armament business with a partner and has given the name Bellfounder-Baermann, Small-arms Ltd. to their company. When Hugo has become heir to this company, he has renovated the armament factory into a rocket factory

and become successful and prosperous business man like his father. But he is always simple and works like a common labourer. His creativity and perspicacity incites him to blend different pyrotechnical styles in his fireworks business. In his opinion fire works are good methods of art which are just like symphony. "Fire works are sui generic. If you must compare them to another art, compare them to music" (61).

Jake has first met Hugo in a cold-cure establishment, a medical research hospital, where he has been forced to share his accommodation with Hugo. As Hugo hasn't spoken with him for two days, Jake felt that his companion was mentally deficient which was proved a wrong notion. When Hugo has started the conversation, Jake instantly notices the high intelligence of him and is captivated by his ideas and analysis. They have exchanged their views on art, politics, literature, religion, history, science, society and sex. Many people call Hugo an 'idealist' but Jake opines that he is a theoretician of a peculiar kind because he has interest in everything, in every theory in an eccentric way. Completely enthralled by Hugo's conversations and wants to spend more time with him, Jake enrolls for a second medical experiment and so does Hugo.

When Hugo knows that Jake is a translator, he has posed myriad questions about translation which once seems the simple thing in the world, turns out to be an act of complex and perplexed one with his doubts. Hugo believes that it is hard to explain the feelings of people exactly in words and questions, how can translators translate the writings of others accurately?

"There is something fishy about describing people's feelings," said Hugo. "All these descriptions are so dramatic."

"What's wrong with that?" I said.

"Only," said Hugo, "that it means that things are falsified from the start. If I say afterwards that I felt such and such, say that I felt 'apprehensive' – well, this just isn't true."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I didn't feel this," said Hugo. "I didn't feel anything of that kind at the time at all. This is just something I say afterwards."

"But suppose I try hard to be accurate," I said.

"One can't be," said Hugo. "The only hope is to avoid saying it. As soon as I start to describe, I'm done for. Try describing anything, our conversation for instance, and see how absolutely instinctively you"

"Touch it up?" I suggested.

"It's deeper than that," said Hugo. "The language just won't let you present it as it really was." (67)

So in Hugo's opinion what a writer writes is not true. It is deceptive and it's very intricate to verbalize the thoughts, feelings and views of human beings precisely and chastely. Influenced by Hugo's ideas and ideals Jake starts recording their discussions and alters them, polishes them to look some more clear and begins to write a book "Silencer" in which Anandine and Tamarus the two characters which represent Hugo and him. "There remained the fact that Anandine was but a broken-down caricature of Hugo". (92) But he never tells about his book to Hugo and feels guilty when he has published that book. So he cancels his rendezvous with Hugo and is departed from him. Dave Gellman, his philosopher friend is impressed by his book and wants to discuss many ideas. But when Jake tries to clarify the views of Hugo, they become dreary and immature. His book is a flop.

Now Jake is thinking about Hugo and doesn't believe Sadie's words that are Hugo is in love with her because Hugo is never very forward with women and Sadie is a notorious liar.. He thinks that may be Sadie is in love with Hugo and tells vice versa. He goes to Magde's house to get back his remaining luggage, his radiogram and his manuscripts and typescripts of his writings. At Magde's house he meets her fiancé Sacred Sammy who receives him in a friendly way and offers him money as he has sacrificed Magde to him. But Jake doesn't take money instead asks him to put that money on a horse race betting. When they have won the race, Sammy promises to send his share to him later.

Next Jake goes to Sadie's flat to join his job as a body guard and Sadie receives him with a warm welcome. When Sadie is out, he watches all the rooms and finds his book "The Silencer" in the book rack. He

observes Anna's name on the cover and assumes that it is Anna Quentine that Hugo is proposing not Sadie. But he is disturbed when he receives a call from Hugo asking Ms.Quentine and cuts his call when he introduces himself to Hugo. Then he notices that he is locked in that house intentionally by Sadie and takes help from Finn and Dave and comes out of the house. These three people next searches for Hugo's house but cannot find him in any room, only hear high-pitched chattering sound of hundreds of birds in one of the rooms. They search all the rooms and finally notice a note which read simply "Gone to the pub". (104)

In search of Hugo they go to neighbourhood pubs and in Skinner's Arms pub they meet Lefty Todd, a leader of the New Independent Socialists, friend to Dave. Lefty and Jake start their chat and at once notice that they both have same ideas about labour party and both are socialists. Lefty encourages Jake to write a political drama about the principle and issues of labour union. The next morning Dave gives a letter to Jake which he has forgot to give him right away. The letter is from Anna and said "I want to see you urgently. Please come to the theatre". (122) Jake rushes to the theatre straight away but Anna has gone already.

From Anna's house Jake goes to Sadie's flat to acquire his copy of Silencer, overhears the conversation between Sadie and Sammy about his recent translation of "Le Rossignol de Bois" which they want to use for their film without taking his authorization. They discuss that Hugo may compete with them for this film so they must approach the producer first and make money. Jake gets angry with their cunning plan and feels pity on Magde for selecting such a cunning person as her husband. He presumes that Magdalen might have given his typescript to Sammy or Sammy might have stolen his script from Magde. So he decides to get his script from Sammy by hook or by crook and goes to Sammy's house at Chelsia with Finn. There he is unable to find his script, he wants to dognap Sammy's film-star dog, an Alsatian named Mr. Mars which is locked in a cage. So he has dog napped Mars to blackmail Sammy for his script. But surprisingly Mars gets affection on Jake, accompanies him and saves him in his adventures.

Jake decides to warn Hugo about Sadie and Sammy's double-crossing plot, goes to his Bounty Belfounder studio, in South London along with Mars. He finds Hugo on a huge set that looked like a Roman Amphitheatre with brick walls, arches, pillars and columns, listening to a scintillating political speech by Lefty Todd. Jake drags Hugo down and starts his story about Sadie, but the sudden arrival of the United Nationalists cause a riot and a huge police squad enter the studio and lead to a mayhem. In this pandemonium Jake is separated from Hugo and escapes from the riot and the police with the help of Mars. He reaches Dave's flat where he is given letters from Sammy and Magde. Sammy has sent a cheque for 600 pounds as he has won in their afternoon of gambling in exchange of Magde. Two telegrams from Magd, one with a job offer in Paris and the other of 30 pounds for travel expenses. As Jake has already read a news item about Anna that she would go to Hollywood through Paris, he wants to go to Paris with that money. Before going to Paris Jake asks Dave to draft a blackmail letter to demand 100 pounds for Mars and keeps Mars with Dave and Finn.

Jake arrives Paris and is having his breakfast in a café, his attention falls on a huge crowd who are waiting for the announcement of the Prix Goncourt, the annual book-writing award. To his astonishment he finds that Jean-pierre Breteuil has won the prize for his latest novel "Nousles Vainqueurs". In his opinion Jean-Pierre Breteuil is not a good writer. It is the mistake of Goncourt Jury "The Goncourt Jury, that constellation of glorious names, might sometimes errs, but they would never make a crass or fantastic mistake" (191). It is unbearable to Jake and he is envious about Breteuil. He doesn't want to translate his new book instead he wants to write his own. "Why should I waste time transcribing his writings instead of producing my own? I would never translate Nous Les Vainqueurs. Never, never, never. (192)

He meets Magdalen in a hotel room and is struck by her grace and refined dress and sophisticated behaviour. Magde tells him about a chance to get three hundred pounds down and a hundred and fifty a month for an indefinite time. A shipping tycoon is ready to put his money in the Anglo-French film company and he is searching for talented people. He wants to picture Breteuil's novels and Breteuil will be on the board of directors, so that Magde selects Jake as an employee in their project. She knows that Jake is in dire need of money and craving for money. But Jake rejects her offer, feels that the job is a "Sinecure" (197). When Jake asks how their company relates to Bounty Belfounder, she tells that their new company would smash and crash the Bellfounder's. Sadie and Sammy also try to get the works of Jean Pierre but in vain. Jean Pierre has accepted to give film rights of all his novels to this new company. So Sammy and

Sadie's plan is failed and Sammy has failed in buying Mr. Mars from Phantasifilms without knowing his real age. It's age is 14 and it won't do adventurous feats anymore and will soon die. Magde again and again requests him to do the job but Jake rejects and is unable to explain why he has declined her offer.

Coming from Magde, Jake is wandering the city for many hours in a bewildered condition, notices that it is fourteenth of July, a Bastille Day on which "the city lets down its tumultuous hair, which the high summer anoints with warmth and perfume" (211). In the evening while he is watching fire works he has seen Anna in the opposite crowd, followed her but hindered by the heavy crowd. He has missed Anna for the second time also. So he comes back from Paris and stays at Dave's flat for several days with Mr. Mars. Finn has taken his share of their betting on Lyrebird and is vanished. Jake searches for a job and has got a job as an orderly at a hospital in the Corelli ward specialized for head-injuries. He enjoys his work very much. At that time Hugo is admitted in that hospital, in the Corelli ward as he is wounded in a political party meeting with a brick by an unknown person. Jake tries to enquire about Hugo but the hospital staff don't allow him to know about Hugo. So Jake enters the room at midnight and starts conversation with Hugo. When Hugo praises his book "The Silencer" and admires his clean ideas, Jake burst out that they are not his ideas but they are Hugo's. Until now Jake presumes that Hugo would get angry if knows about his treachery of copying their conversation. Instead Hugo candidly appreciates for his brilliance in giving a form to their chat.

Next their tête-à-tête turns on Sadie and Anna. Hugo tells that he loves Sadie not Anna, but Anna loves him and Sadie loves Jake. Jake is in love with Anna. Hugo insists that Jake will help him to escape from the hospital. When Hugo and Jake are coming out from the hospital, they are identified by Stitch, a worker in the hospital and Jake understands that he will lose his job. After their escape Jake follows Hugo for some time but Hugo has vanished when they reach Gloucester walk and Jake has missed him again.

3. Conclusion

Jake walks through the London streets thinking about the things that Hugo has discussed with him. Now his memories about Anna are completely changed. Her picture in his mind is faded away, "I had no longer any picture of Anna. She faded like a sorcerer's apparition: and yet somehow her presence remained to me, more substantial than ever before, It seemed as if, for the first time Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself"(268). Hugo is a towering personality in his mind like a monolith. He goes to Hugo's flat and finds that there are no birds only their white droppings. He rummages around the house and drawers and finds his book "The Silencer" on his desk, puts it in his pocket. He also notices some currency notes in the drawer and hesitates to keep them in his pocket. When Lefty is entering Hugo's house, Jake understands that Hugo's house is donated to Lefty's society and he has come to confiscate the building. Jake takes the largest of the bundles of one-pound notes and pushes it inside his coat. He comes out of the building in another way. He receives a note from Finn telling Jake that he has gone back to Ireland. Jake keeps Mars with him by paying 700 pounds to Sammy and tells Tinkham that he will do a part time job and he won't translate others' books but write his own.

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