The New Victorian: From Tradition to Innovation:

A Thematic Study of the Novels of Margaret Drabble

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Summary

The main objectives of this dissertation are to establish the tradition of women's writing to which Drabble belongs and to examine her innovative contribution to this convention. The major themes embodied in her corpus are discussed and presented diachronically.

Initially an attempt is made to establish the historical tradition to which Drabble adheres and to illustrate how the prevailing socio-economic conditions of women's lives inevitably influence their thematic concerns.

Subsequently, Drabble is presented as continuing a tradition which has been established by other women writers conscientised to reflect the fabric and texture of their lives, but she presents both the form and theme of her work from a uniquely individual perspective. Emphasis is placed on Drabble's ability to foreground female protagonists who make choices about their lives: these are essentially the important issues of her earlier novels. Her innovation lies in her voicing these choices.

Drabble's acute sensitivity to contemporary social issues is reflected in her middle novels. She is considered as a strong `voice' on women's issues long before the women's movement of the late sixties and onwards gained momentum, and her scepticism towards the movement is wryly revealed in The Middle Ground. Similarly, her attitude to worsening social conditions and the misuse of patriarchal power is validated in her juxtaposition of `male' versus `female' values (The Ice Age).

Drabble's commentary on the importance of the family within the social structure is discussed and her realisation that family life is full of tensions and difficulties is revealed: emphasis is given to the fact that women fulfil a complex and often burdensome role within this structure: in coping with the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood to dealing with difficult teenagers, ageing parents and tense sibling rivalries, women emerge as strong mediators. Drabble explores her own difficult family relationships to show how this tension is reflected in the lives and oeuvre of other achieving female writers.

Drabble's strong engagement with the canon in her writing and her interesting allusions and intertextual links are examined, using The Radiant Way as a point of departure.

Drabble's growing interest in international affairs is reflected in her later novels, but it is emphasised that she is still aware of social and gender issues (A Natural Curiosity). She is securely entrenched in NW3 but is beginning to question Western values as her narrative shifts between St. John's Wood and Cambodia (The Gates of Ivory). The methods she uses to question these values are surveyed and some observations are made on her changing narrative techniques.

Hence Drabble is established as a strong participant in the tradition of women's writing, both in her treatment of theme and form. The place of women in society, their education and career choices, their experiences of marriage, motherhood and the family are all issues which have traditionally preoccupied women writers, but it is noted that Drabble expressed her views before it was socially `correct' to do so: in this lies her innovation. Her widening interest in environmental, scientific and international affairs reflects her interest in what the world is becoming. Thus the designation, Drabble as a New Victorian accurately reflects her status from a late twentieth-century perspective, in the continuing tradition of women writing the story of their lives.

Opsomming

Die hoofdoel van hierdie verhandeling is om die vroueskryftradisie waartoe Drabble behoort, te bepaal en om haar vernuwende bydrae tot hierdie konvensie te ondersoek. Die vernaamste temas in haar oeuvre wat voorkom word diachronies aangebied en bespreek.

Aanvanklik word gepoog om die historiese tradisie wat Drabble navolg te bepaal en om te illustreer hoe die bestaande sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede van vrouens se lewens, onvermydelik dit waaroor hulle skryf beïnvloed.

Gevolglik word Drabble gesien as voortsetter van 'n tradisie wat deur ander vroueskrywers - wat doelbewus die aard en tekstuur van hulle lewens weergee - begin is, maar sy stel sowel die vorm as die tema van haar werk vannuit 'n unieke perspektief voor. Klem word gelê op Drabble se vermoë om vroulike hoofkarakters wat keuses omtrent hulle lewens maak voorop te stel: hierdie is belangrike kwessies hoofsaaklik in haar vroeëre romans. Haar vernuwende bydrae word gevind in haar verwoording van hierdie keuses.

Drabble se akute sensitiwiteit vir hedendaagse sosiale vraagstukke word weerspieël in haar middelromans. Sy word reeds as invloedryk in terme van vrouekwessies gesien lank voordat die vrouebeweging van die laat sestigerjare en daarna dryfkrag gekry het, en haar skeptisisme oor die beweging word wrang openbaar in The Middle Ground. Op soortgelyke wyse word haar houding teenoor verslegtende sosiale omstandighede en die misbruik van patriargale mag bekragtig deur haar jukstaposisionering van `manlike' teenoor `vroulike' waardes (The Ice Age).

Drabble se kommentaar oor die belangrikheid van die sosiale struktuur word bespreek en haar bewuswording dat die gesinslewe spanning en probleme behels word openbaar: die komplekse en verantwoordelike rol van die vrou binne die gesin word beklemtoon: van die hantering van die huwelik en moederskap tot die hantering van moeilike tieners, ouerwordende ouers en gespanne onderlinge wedywering tussen kinders, word vroue as sterk bemiddelaars binne die gesin uitgebeeld. Navorsing word gedoen oor Drabble se eie gekompliseerde gesinsverhoudinge en

daar word gepoog om aan te dui hoe hierdie spanning gereflekteer word in die lewens en oeuvre van ander presterende vroueskrywers.

Drabble se sterk betrokkenheid by die kanon in haar werk en haar interessante verwysings en intertekstuele skakelings word ondersoek aan die hand van The Radiant Way.

Drabble se toenemende belangstelling in internasionale gebeure word weerspieël in haar latere romans, maar dit word beklemtoon dat sy steeds bewus bly van sosiale en geslags-kwessies (A Natural Curiosity). Sy is veilig verskans in Londen se hoërklas area NW3 maar begin reeds Westerse waardes bevraagteken met die verskuiwing van haar verhaal tussen St. John's Wood en Kambodja (The Gates of Ivory). 'n Oorsig word gegee van die metodes wat sy gebruik om hierdie waardes te bevraagteken en opmerkings word gemaak oor haar veranderende narratiewe tegnieke.

Drabble word dus gesien as 'n eksponent van die vroueskryftradisie in haar hantering van vorm en tema. Die vrou se plek in die samelewing, haar opvoeding en loopbaan keuses, haar belewing van die huwelik, moederskap en die gesin is kwessies wat vroueskrywers tradisioneel besig gehou het, maar daar word aangetoon dat Drabble haar sieninge geopenbaar het voordat dit sosiaal-aanvaarbaar was: vernuwing lê hierin. Haar breër-wordende belangstelling in omgewings, wetenskaplike en internasionale vraagstukke weerspieël haar laat twintigste-eeuse perspektief in die voortgesette tradisie van vroue wat hul lewensverhaal skryf.

PREFACE

Margaret Drabble has played an important role, along with other contemporary women novelists such as Rhys, Lessing, O'Brien, Byatt and Weldon to ensure that the female `voice' and experience, with its long and influential tradition in English fiction continues to be heard and to be effective in sensitizing readers to the problems and experiences of women. Like these novelists, Drabble records and comments on women's feelings about their work, their experience of and reaction to societal expectations and prejudices, their relationships with men, their attitudes to sex, marriage and motherhood, their ability or inability to deal with important and difficult experiences such as divorce, motherhood, approaching middle age and the ways in which they develop mechanisms to cope with what appears to be an increasingly hostile and structureless society.

Drabble's place in the tradition of women's writing is important and innovative. She is eager to remain within the nineteenth-century tradition of women's writing, but is also prepared to extend its boundaries and to forge a new style and form in her later novels. She focuses on the lives of mainly middle-class women: she foregrounds the dilemmas of being educated, having to make career choices and learning to accept the responsibilities of motherhood. Creighton (1985:38) succinctly captures the essence of her approach when she states that `Drabble has been exposing the social-political paucity of traditional avenues of middle-class female self-fulfilment'. All these basic issues are central to Drabble's novels and her female protagonists reflect the day-to-day business of simply being a woman in contemporary society.

Since the nineteen sixties up to the present time there has been a resurgence of women writing, exploring their own feelings and experiences and recording them. Drabble, along with her contemporaries, is an important contributor to this significant development and I shall examine her work as a vital addition to any study of twentieth-century fiction.

What then, makes Drabble unique among these writers? I shall attempt to show that her conscious awareness of the tradition of women's writing, and the concomitant technique she implements give an innovative voice to the modern female experience and establish her in a separate category, viz. that

of the `New Victorian'. This `category' has two main characteristics: Drabble - as the major exponent of this type of writing - has consciously adopted the role of the nineteenth-century realist and has consistently striven to maintain this approach. Secondly, she has, for a very long period of her career at least, rejected pressures of experimentation as she herself states `I don't want to write an experimental novel to be read by people in fifty years who will say, oh well, yes, she foresaw what was coming' (in Bergonzi, 1972:78).

The aim of this study is to balance the development of her oeuvre against the historical tradition of women's writing which she so often and readily acknowledges. I shall explore Drabble's unique treatment of the themes of career, home and family and the influences they exert on women's lives. Also how Drabble is sensitively aware of the influence of landscape on personality: one of her early and dominant motifs is the conflict experienced by her female protagonists when coping with their own family ties, particularly the claustrophobic mother/daughter relationship set against the narrow provincial lower-middle class puritanism which the heroines find both repressive and confining.

In her early novels A Summer Bird-Cage (1963), The Garrick Year (1964), The Millstone (1965), Jerusalem the Golden (1967) and The Waterfall (1969), Drabble sets out to explore the enthusiasm of her young heroines, their thoughts and feelings as they deliberate about what to do with their lives, naïvely recording their innermost thoughts about marriage and learning to make their own decisions. Drabble records their uncertainties and their unerring optimism for life: they are well-educated middle-class girls learning to make decisions about their careers, tentatively embarking on relations with the opposite sex and formulating their attitudes towards marriage, pregnancy and motherhood. Their early experiences are rather faltering and ill-judged, but it this fresh simplicity which makes Drabble's early novels so important to the women of her generation. She captures their feelings and insecurities quite sensitively and openly. She explores the preconceived ideas young girls adopt about marriage and motherhood. She is not afraid to expose the myth of marriage as always being synonomous with happiness and self-fulfilment. Indeed she openly debates the disappointments that marriage can bring and Rosamund Stacey, the heroine of The Millstone, emerges as one of the first independent women of her generation, prepared to

cope with pregnancy and unmarried motherhood independently and unashamedly, something which was still a social taboo.

Drabble's own experiences colour the lives of her heroines but the seventies and early eighties saw Drabble incorporating a closer examination of contemporary social themes into her novels. In The Needle's Eye (1972) she examines the difficulties of divorce, The Realms of Gold (1975) describes the protagonist coping with wider family problems and the onset of middle age, while The Ice Age (1977) foregrounds women's struggle in a man-made world. She confronts social issues as they affect women most effectively in The Middle Ground (1980), in which she comments most convincingly on her attitudes to the progress of feminism.

Her protagonists are now coping with the exigencies of approaching mid-life: marital problems develop, the gradual physical decay of middle-age becomes a reality and family relationships become increasingly complex and problematic. In her later novels Drabble projects a wider canvas and encompasses the ills of an ailing society as a background to the lives of her protagonists. Each of her novels is colourfully textured with literary allusion, reflecting her awareness and appreciation of her rich literary heritage and her consideration of landscape as an important influence on personality. She also shows a fine sensitivity to the social nuances of contemporary English society, tempering her gentle but perceptive criticism with an understated but everpresent element of humour.

For example, in The Radiant Way (1987) and A Natural Curiosity (1989), Drabble presents a wider canvas of female protagonists whose lives interface over a long period of time. Their lives are touched by contemporary events and Drabble reflects extensively on pertinent political, environmental and societal issues affecting England in the late eighties. The Gates of Ivory (1991) shifts perspective away from England and questions First World value systems with Drabble cleverly undercutting preconsidered assumptions about the concept of `civilization'.

Drabble's criticisms and observations about women and society are subtly presented. She touches on important issues but her voice, unlike that of many women of her generation is not strident but often merely a wry commentary on the way we as humans have fashioned our lives, our

relationships and the world we live in. She captures the essence of our human frailty and if she sometimes seems detached and unemotional, this is the type of understatement which often impacts most effectively on her readers. She is quintessentially English in her subtle, dryly humorous, yet penetratingly clear presentation of her own world.

The structure of this dissertation then is as follows: initially, I shall attempt to sketch the historical tradition of women's writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because of Drabble's debt to, and pride in, this historical tradition of women's writing, a tradition she feels strongly linked to and wants to continue.

The pertinent question in this part of the dissertation will be: what is the history of women's writing and how did women react to contemporary societal expectations?

I shall then examine some of the major themes embodied in the oeuvre of Eliot, Woolf and Rhys as I consider their thematic concerns and their contribution to a growing sense of self-awareness by women through their own writing is pertinent in an overall view of the tradition of women's writing. I shall trace how these writers viewed society through the eyes of heroines who were unconventional and questioning of the society to which they belonged: but how often they were helpless and unable to achieve personal happiness as they had no social or economic status to enable them to lead independent and fulfilled lives.

These writers' views issue from a female perspective and illustrate the special challenges women face in a society which often marginalises them, has a distinctly covert attitude to their bodily functions and emotions and discriminates against them educationally, by law and in the workplace.

For example, Eliot illustrates how women, symbolically represented by Dorothea Brooke, are conditioned to expect that marriage is the passport to a fulfilling life, and how these societal expectations cause frustration and anguish in the lives of intelligent women who feel that they want to have independent and professional lives as well. Woolf encapsulates the frustration that women feel when they want to be creative but are burdened by domestic duties and are fulfilling the nurturing role of wife and mother

which inevitably leads to their spending their time making other people's lives comfortable. Rhys's heroines are economically disadvantaged and she describes most poignantly how women can be exploited emotionally if they are not financially independent and empowered to earn their own living. Drabble synthesises the dilemmas facing mainly middle-class educated women from the sixties onwards. She explores their choices and questions the desirability of marriage: reflects on the importance of marriage/career choices and foregrounds the special way women feel about family, middle-age and how they cope with just being women.

I shall then compare the attitudes of a contemporary, such as Lessing, and a family member, her sister, Byatt, to motherhood and sisterhood. Finally, I shall attempt to compare and contrast Drabble with Brookner and Weldon, to illustrate Drabble's special innovativeness as she subtly and cleverly voices the pleasures and disappointments of being woman. Her writing embodies her personal experience but one of her special skills is that of understatement. The reader is presented with a few comments, a picturesque vignette, a personal invitation to find an ending for a particular series of events: Drabble engages the reader in a flirtatious but demanding way. She touches on sensitive issues but her technique is deliberately open-ended and inconclusive, as she deconstructs many of the basic cultural assumptions about women that society and humanity have unwittingly accepted for so long.

The argument will be developed as follows: in the first chapter I shall present an overview of what women were writing about in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concentrating also on the role the women writers achieved within the societal and political constraints imposed upon them. I shall emphasise the changing attitudes that developed within this time-span in the way in which society accepted the role of the middle-class woman writer and how her freedom was gradually eroded. This lack of recognition is a lingering twentieth-century anachronism and one which Drabble and her contemporaries are keen to address. Hence Drabble is part of a continuing tradition but she reflects the preoccupations of her own generation from her own individual perspective.

In Chapter Two the dilemma of being young, female, well-educated and middle-class is explored: her protagonists are given choices and Drabble

records how they make decisions about their careers, sexual relationships, marriage and motherhood. Emphasis will be placed on how the protagonists implement their choices and their resultant emotional responses.

Chapter Three deals with an important Drabblean theme: the effect of the past on the lives of the protagonists. The influence of landscape on personality will be examined and Drabble's puritan and moral stance can be seen as developing from her rather cold, Northern upbringing: a bleakness of landscape and a paucity of interpersonal family warmth and emotion coloured her early years. Her early protagonists struggle to come to terms with the influences of their past but they finally realise that the past cannot be forgotten nor erased: it is an integral part of their individual development.

In Chapter Four Drabble presents her answer to the feminist movement in an unusual, subtle yet bitingly convincing way. In The Ice Age the principal protagonist is male and yet Drabble's main thrust is to contrast the strength of familial ties, the endurance and stability of her female characters against the man-made social chaos, economic depression and environmental squalor that is England in the late seventies.

In The Middle Ground, Kate Armstrong had been in the vanguard of writing about women's issues at the birth of the feminist movement and now her disillusionment brings some balance and a different perspective on the subject of women's condition in the early eighties.

A more in-depth exploration of Drabble's preoccupation with the strength of family ties will be presented in Chapter Five. Drabble's protagonists are never cardboard heroines following the stereotypes of pulp literature: their emotions are intense, often darkly revengeful and cruel and they feel and act accordingly. Particular emphasis will be placed on the complexity of the mother/daughter relationship and the intense closeness and raw feelings of jealousy and revenge that can develop between sisters.

Part of Drabble's link with the tradition of writing is her strong ties with the literature of the past. Her work is interwoven with allusions and intertextual references with what has gone before. In Chapter Six I shall trace Drabble's clever and innovative use of these literary techniques to weave a web of connectedness between the past and the present. I shall emphasise the

widening canvas of Drabble's text as she endeavours to comment on a changing Britain and as she gradually expands her horizons to examine and comment on the international scene.

The international flavour of her work is more closely foregrounded in Chapter Seven where Drabble interweaves her plot between the First and the Third Worlds, undercutting our previously held assumptions about what is `civilized'. Drabble's preoccupation with the condition of women is constant throughout her writing, even though it is not presented in a strongly ideological or forceful way.

Finally, I shall conclude the argument by placing Drabble as a strong innovative voice in the whole historical tradition of women's writing, and indicate areas for further research.

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In this dissertation the following abbreviations to denote Drabble's novels will be used:

SBC: A Summer Bird-Cage (1963)
GY: The Garrick Year (1964)
M: The Millstone (1965)
JG: Jerusalem the Golden (1967)
W: The Waterfall (1969)
NE: The Needle's Eye (1972)
RG: The Realms of Gold (1975)
IA: The Ice Age (1977)
MG: The Middle Ground (1980)
RW: The Radiant Way (1987)
NC: A Natural Curiosity (1989)
GI: The Gates of Ivory (1991)

Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1713).

Chapter One

Establishing the tradition

In this overview of the eighteenth century I intend to focus on women who wrote professionally and earned a living from their novels. Writing for them was a form of work and in common with most women of their time they worked outside the home to earn a living. After the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent rise of the middle-classes, women assumed a more home-centred role as jobs outside the home were reserved for men. Paralleled with the growth of the middle-classes was a subsequent imposition of bourgeois morality, particularly on the emergent middle-classes which dramatically affected what women wrote and how they defined their role in this changing society. In the nineteenth century overview I shall incorporate some discussion of prevailing social conditions for women, particularly those pertaining to the middle-class woman.

Spencer (1989:3) points out that the emergence of the novel and the establishment of the professional woman writer were `two remarkable and interconnected literary events'. Unfortunately the imposition of male ideas on what women should write about and the idea that women should encourage women to be virtuous and conform to the stereotypical view of what is feminine gradually dominated women's writing as the century progressed.

Spencer further contends that three traditions emerged in eighteenth-century women's writing: seduction, protest and reform. In novels dealing with the seduction theme the heroine's purity was attacked and the heroine remained virtuous under seduction as reflected in the novels of Manley and Haywood. To understand the full impact of this tradition it is necessary to trace this change in attitude and how it influenced thematic concerns of eighteenth century writers.

The `seduction' novel elaborates on the theme of the woman whose forbidden feelings overrode her chaste duty with usually tragic results. This thematic concern could be considered an early vehicle for feminism as `the seducer deliberately attacked female purity, and then left his victim at the

mercy of a society which ostracized her for losing her virginity' (Spencer, 1989:112). Women novelists were the first to develop the seduction tale. Delarivière Manley (1663-1724) in The New Atalantis (1709), and Haywood (?1693-1756) in her 1720's novels, established the novel of seduction which later writers drew on.

Thus the seduction was the obvious point where the ideal of love and marriage based on feminine purity broke down. The seducer deliberately attacked feminine purity, and then left his victim at the mercy of a society which ostracized her for losing her virginity. Men were thus represented as untrustworthy, and the seduction novel could make a strong attack on the double standard which demanded chastity of women, but not of men.

The idea of woman as innocent victim, a premise which can itself be challenged, was established through this theme: `Ruin could be portrayed as an inevitable tragic destiny rather than an assailable social wrong' (Spencer, 1989:113). However, these bold `immoral' women novelists could attack prevailing sexual mores more effectively than the respectable early writers of feminist polemic and more trenchantly than the respectable women novelists who succeeded Haywood and Manley, in the middle years of the century.

The theme of protest is further embodied in the life and work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97). She carried on the tradition of protest established earlier by Aphra Behn (1640-89) whom Spencer (1989: 53) describes as `a detached ironic observer, a woman of confidence, independent thought and occupation'. Mary Wollstonecraft challenged the ideas that feminine means modest and passive. In her A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) she boldly challenged women to be individuals and demystified all the supposedly feminine qualities which women should consider as ideally attainable and essential to promote their desirability towards men. Wollstonecraft (in Kramnick, 1978:132) considers the `virtues' such as modesty, gentleness and submission as weaknesses, and rejects the commonly held view that `the sexes ought not to be compared: man was made to reason, woman to feel'.

Miles (1989:234) considers Wollstonecraft `among the first to force the revolution in thought that had not yet learned to call itself feminism'. Wollstonecraft's own life `smacks of a penny dreadful' (Miles, 1989:234)

and her initial feminist zeal was tempered by the tragic events of her own life and a dampening of revolutionary fervour in England. Initially, she was employed as the `companion to a lady', tried to start a school unsuccessfully, travelled in France, but lost respectability after her affair with Gilbert Imlay and the subsequent illegitimate birth of her daughter. Her attempts at suicide and her liaison with Godwin, whom she married when she became pregnant, further damned her in the eyes of the public. However, as Spencer (1989: 133) emphasises `once she had lost her respectability she could explore the problems of female sensibility realistically, in a way diametrically opposed from that of the writers of sentimental fiction'.

The themes which Wollstonecraft explores reflect contemporary woman's `place' most effectively. She emphasises her own personal social and educational deprivation, her inability to find fulfilling work and the sexual double standard that rewarded man for being sexually indulgent while making a whore of a woman for one indiscretion. She saw existing relations between men and women as damaging and exploitive `man taking her body, her mind is left to rust' and scornfully rejected the conventional ideal of female behaviour: `How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes!'

Wollstonecraft is ruthlessly confrontational in her demands for equal opportunities for the sexes in education, work and for equal companionship between males and females and her A Vindication of the Rights of Women is now considered to be an early feminist tract.

In her second novel Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman (1798) Wollstonecraft considers feeling as a necessary ingredient for female liberation and boldly defends her heroine's right to sexual fulfilment. Wollstonecraft was a bold innovator and a strong `voice', prepared to challenge the `status quo'. Unfortunately hers was a lone voice as the idea of femininity paralleled with morality and writers reflecting a common sensibility gradually developed as the eighteenth century progressed. As Showalter (1991:18) cryptically states `Wollstonecraft was not widely read by the Victorians because of the scandal surrounding her life'.[1]

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1 Given their themes and approach, it is fairly obvious why late twentieth-century writers would feel more affinity with earlier eighteenth-century women writers than with nineteenth-century writers, as they had been independent

Thirdly, the theme of reform is strongly reflected in eighteenth century writing and is ably illustrated in the oeuvre of Fanny Burney (1752-1840). The reformed coquette was considered as a model for all feminine behaviour and the novel provided a kind of dramatized conduct book for young women. Such a novel could be written by drawing an exemplary heroine for the reader to imitate: but less flattering to the young female's proverbial vanity was the erring heroine. Her errors could not be too grave, and must not include the great error, unchastity, especially considering the perennial tendency to identify a woman writer's heroine with her creator. So women novelists developed the fallible, but unfallen heroine, who learned from her mistakes and reformed her ways.

This tradition of conformity had a stronger continuous history throughout the eighteenth century rather than the tradition of protest and it led to greater achievements in the novel. Thus the more conformist the writer's message, the more acceptable her novel and the more likelihood of a tradition developing from her work. Conformity was not always undilutedly sycophantic and uncritical. Fanny Burney in Evelina (1778) introduces a shy woman to fashionable society, where she proves herself generally superior to the people of the world, but often mistaken in judgement and actions. Burney's complaints about the woman's helpless position are made in her heroine's letters and what evolves is a satirical novel about a timid heroine who eventually finds happiness from male protection.

Unfortunately, this gradual social change which emerged as the eighteenth century progressed strongly influenced nineteenth century attitudes towards women. These attitudes have lingered into the twentieth century and contemporary women writers still feel compelled to voice the inadequacies and inequalities of the social system as it affects women. For example, Drabble's voice is subtle, ironic and never strident but nevertheless she contributes strongly and adds texture to women's writing dealing with these very issues and attitudes in the late twentieth century.

Legally, women's position did not change throughout the eighteenth century: she was still under the authority of her father or husband but women began to

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thinkers (even though they had few rights pertaining to property or politics): social constraints had not developed into societal expectations.

run businesses independently or to trade under their own names, and they initially regarded writing simply as a means of earning money.

Gradually, women's helplessness was encouraged and even the single woman who had to support her family was losing her economic strength - a spinster was increasingly being perceived as an unmarried woman of no particular occupation. The reason for this was that many of the jobs which had been centred in the home and were traditionally women's occupations (spinning, weaving and the flourishing `cottage industries') were now undertaken by men at workshops away from home. Women were in fact becoming more economically dependent on their husbands, thus making them more socially aware of whom they married. There is a distinct dichotomy between the emergence of a number of professional women writers and the `domestication' of women's writing.

Moers (1986:3) simply but accurately states that `a woman's life is hard in its own way, as woman have always known but men have rarely understood'. What has made women's lives difficult is that women are conditioned to fulfil certain roles which are often emotionally and socially repressive, and it is this awareness of the nature of women's lives which Drabble so clearly foregrounds in her novels.

The social system which middle-class women learned to accept and which nineteenth century women writers rebelled against became firmly established and entrenched as the eighteenth century progressed. The home was becoming isolated and women's restricted options were narrowing insomuch as women were expected to behave in a specially feminine and demure way, and to excel in domestic accomplishments.

Thus, a natural question to ask would be: what sort of lives did nineteenth century women lead?

There was a clear delineation between women of different social classes and certain modes of behaviour were expected within each specific group. Nineteenth century middle-class woman was confined and limited both sexually and socially. The social classes were clearly defined and certain modes of behaviour were expected within each specific group. Pearsall (1983:58) boldly asserts that `the leisure class is a parasite, and its exponents

in the nineteenth century were as distasteful a bunch as one could wish for...'. Thus, within this class there was an acceptance of the adulterous liaison but `the loss of virtue of a young maiden of the leisure class was social death, adultery by a matron of this class could result in every attribute of this class being stripped away...' (Pearsall, 1983:59).

Once again the double standard dominates all moral judgements and Pearsall (1983:64-65) asks the question `What could the young lady of the leisure class do? She could hunt, ride or skate - on ice of course; roller skating was common'. In fact the ladies of the aristocracy and the leisured classes were remarkably ill-educated, as it was not considered important for them to be interested in more than outdoor pursuits and gentle occupations such as sketching and embroidery. Girls of the upper classes would be taught at home by governesses, who were often ill-educated themselves, while their brothers left home, often as young as seven, to be educated at a public boarding school.

Pearsall (1983:64) sums up the role of this class of woman in society as follows `The women of society were condemned to rot in idleness, occasionally rising from their sloth to defend their husbands (men who shoot, or hunt, or play cricket all the year round work as hard for their pleasure as the lower orders do for their daily bread.' Women were often very powerful, but they gained their power by manipulating men in `high places' and `high class' prostitution was not unknown especially if a woman felt she would gain a powerful position in society by offering her physical charms to the highest bidder in the political power game.

At the other end of the social spectrum, the working-class woman never stopped working. It was common for her to work inside and outside the home, often to ensure the mere survival of her dependants. Her formal education would be sketchy and she would have to work in the most unhealthy conditions for far less money than a man. Her occupation would entail long working hours of sweated labour, sewing or hard domestic drudgery to be endured in the most primitive of working environments. Workplaces were often ill lit and poorly provided with even the most basic amenities of hygiene and heating.

Although her leisure time would be severely limited her social mobility would be far greater than that of her middle-class sisters. Often poor girls came in for ridicule as illustrated by Max Beerbohm (in Pearsall, 1983:77) when he remarks: `Such lots of pretty, common girls walking up and down - all brown with the sun and dressed like sailors - casting vulgar glances from heavenly eyes and bubbling out Cockney jargon from perfect lips. You would revel in them but I confess they do not attract me: apart from the fact that I have an ideal - I don't think the lower orders ought to be attractive - it brings beauty into disrepute.'

Men considered women of the working classes to be unfeminine as they did not conform to what the male idea of `feminine' should be. Life for the working class woman was harsh and crude, rape was a common occurrence, and sexual assault and common violence were commonplace. However, sexual repression and all the artificial niceties imposed by middle and upper class society on the behaviour of women did not exist. The working-class woman was thus not hidebound by society's rules and, surprisingly, probably enjoyed her leisure time more than her middle-class sisters.

Thus, although a working-class woman would have limited leisure time her freedom to enjoy this would be far greater than that of a woman from the middle-class. In the urbanised, industrial areas she could enjoy the bawdy delights of music hall humour, indulge in the vicarious pleasures of the `gin palace' and make her own decisions about sexual relationships without fear of censure or social ostracism. The street life of Victorian England was lively and dangerous and many women chose prostitution (with the concomitant risk of contacting a sexual disease) as a more lucrative way of earning a living, rather than being permanently trapped in a menial occupation.

However, the working classes were renowned for their indomitable tenacity and sense of humour in spite of the wretchedness and insecurity of their lives. Theirs was a fight for survival and while they were socially unconfined they were exposed to the harsh realities of an unegalitarian society. This concern with mere survival made them frank and open in their dealings with sex and their relationships with the opposite sex. They were uncomplicated and thus never suffered the artificial constraints imposed on them by society.

It was the ladies of the middle-classes who produced that wonderful `Angel in the House',[2] the perfect wife and mother, securely imprisoned in her own home, contentedly submissive to men, strongly religious and pure in thought and deed, sexually undemanding and content not to work in the real world. As Stubbs (in Beauman, 1983:40) records: `From about the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class women had been forced into the role of the Angel in the House, increasingly debarred from any form of occupation; they became custodians of the moral conscience, the repository of all virtue, and as such were obliged to live apart from the sordid everyday cares of material life.'

Men considered the middle-class women either as children or playthings. It was the era of the submissive woman, described by Pearsall (1983:104) as a `factor that worked against the New Woman and the emancipationist was the submissive instinct in woman'. The Duke of Northumberland boldly and confidently asserted that `man in the beginning was ordained to rule over the woman' (Pearsall, 1983:105) and the supposedly civilized Havelock Ellis maintained that `women, it is true, remain nearer than men to the infantile state: but on the other hand, men approach more nearly than women to the ape-like and senile state' (in Pearsall, 1983:105) and: `Nature has made women more like children in order that they may better understand and care for children, and in the gift of children Nature has given to women a massive and sustained physiological joy to which there is nothing in men's lives to correspond. Nature has done her best to make women healthy and glad, and one has on the whole been content to let men run somewhat wild' (in Pearsall, 1983:106).

Many women were unwilling to eradicate the image of the `submissive woman'. Mrs Lynn Linton records the sentiments of those who did not want to change the `status quo': `Every step made towards identity of habits is a step downwards in refinement and delicacy - wherein lies the essential core of civilization' (in Pearsall, 1983:106). Submission, according to male writers on the subject, seemed to be a remarkably natural female instinct. Ruskin considered `woman to be the helpmeet of man' (in Pearsall, 1983:109). It seems that the male view that submission was good for a woman, undoubtedly meant to male writers, that it was beneficial to man's

2 The concept is borrowed from a series of poems written by Coventry Patmore, entitled 'The Angel in the House' (written between the years 1854-1863) in praise of domestic bliss.

well-being. Female submission was man's right, not a privilege. The Church gave silent consent to this patriarchal order, for in the marriage service a woman promised to `love, honour and obey' her spouse.

The myths surrounding women and sex for the middle classes can be seen as concomitant to the growth of a strong Puritan ethos within the Evangelical Movement. The middle classes evolved the false religious piety and social hypocrisy which is often considered as a reflection of all of Victorian society. This puritanism and `emotional conservatism' is strongly reflected in Eliot and in Drabble, writing a century later. Provincial England which both Eliot and Drabble focus on, produces heroines struggling to escape from the geographical and social bleakness of their environment. This narrow puritanical approach was particularly predominant in the North of England, where the Evangelical movement was extremely popular with the working and lower middle-classes in the nineteenth century and its influence is still being felt a century later.

During the nineteenth century the strictures imposed on middle-class, supposedly respectable women were all decided upon by men, who conveniently considered women the weaker sex but rarely gave them a chance to prove themselves otherwise. Women's imagination was suppressed, legal and economic restraints were imposed and women's mobility was restricted. Certainly some progress was made as the century continued. Cunningham (1978:4) states that `The educational establishment, though fighting a strenuous rearguard action, was giving ground on several fronts' (1978:4). Several colleges of education were established by the middle of the century and well-qualified women teachers were being produced. The standard of secondary education for girls was gradually improving. Girton College was established in 1869 and resistance to women entering the medical profession was gradually being eroded. Towards the end of the century female typists and clerks were entering the labour market and securing posts in the commercial world.

However, legally, women were still struggling for equal rights where marriage and property were concerned. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 meant that divorce was possible under certain conditions, which accepted that a man's adultery could be far more willingly condoned than that of his spouse. The Infants' Custody Act was passed in 1839, granting

non-adulterous wives the privilege of retaining the children of a broken marriage, provided they were under seven years old. The Married Woman's Property Act of 1882 gave women a legal right to own their own property after marriage. Female enfranchisement proved elusive but it was still considered the ultimate panacea for all female oppression, although it was only in the twentieth century that the militant suffragettes succeeded in their cause of finally gaining `Votes for All'.

These political and social developments in the nineteenth century had a significant influence on the type of writing women produced throughout the period. Eliot addressed many issues pertinent to intellectual, thinking women in her articles and she participated in the growing debate in liberal middle class circles concerning women's working conditions, the right of women to work outside the home, women's legal rights, divorce and custody laws and the oppressive double sexual standard.[3]

However, she criticised both the precosity of prodigiously clever women (as evidenced in `Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' published in 1856) and denounced the shallowness of writers of light romantic novels, maintaining that `The average intellect of women is unfairly represented by the mass of feminine literature, and that while the few women who write well are very far above the ordinary intellectual level of their sex, the many women who write ill are very far below it' (Eliot in Pinney, 1963: 323). Her attitude to organised feminism reflects a distinct ambivalence, but she had a strong belief in sexual difference. Women had their own culture and language and a section of experience from which men would always be excluded. Special `feminine' qualities often forced women into maternal and domestic roles which left them little time to develop their own creative ability.

Eliot was definitely instrumental in changing women's role from one of self-sacrifice to one of self awareness. In her attack on evangelicalism Eliot asked the question what it was like to be a woman as an intellectual, a professional writer and a potential novelist. She was a moderate feminist,

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3 When George Eliot's article was published in "The Westminster Review" (1855) entitled "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming", she did not want to reveal her true identity. As Marian Evans her strong statements and controversial opinions might be considered a typically feminine, emotional outburst rather than serious intellectual comment. `The article seems to have produced a strong impression, and that impression would be a little counteracted if the author were known to be a woman...' (Eliot in Pinney, 1963: 218).

wanting women to have equal access to education and to employment opportunities, maintaining that this would benefit society as a whole. Her desired role for women is that they should be partners to their men. In her article `Woman in France' (1854), she comments on Madame de Stael's ability to be a "woman whom men could more than love - whom they could make their friend, confidante and counsellor; the sharer, not of their joys and sorrows only, but of their ideas and aims" (in Pinney, 1963:80).

Thus, Eliot and Drabble focus on common thematic concerns. Eliot encourages women's self-awareness by writing about the lives of heroines whose experience is often decided by the social conditions of birth, rank and class. In Middlemarch she concentrates on `three women with radically different personalities and circumstances - one from the gentry (Dorothea Brooke), one from the rising middle class (Rosamond Vincy), and one from the lower middle class (Mary Garth) - the novel exposes the extent to which all of their marriages, happy or not, require the subordination of the women's aims to those of her husband: in the middling Midlands world of Middlemarch, feminine power is always mediated by masculine representation' (Brady, 1992:159). How women cope with marriage, and motherhood, while striving to attain some sort of individual identity and emotional fulfilment are common themes which dominate both Eliot and Drabble's writing.

For example, Eliot's heroines rarely conform to the Victorian ideal of the middle-class Angel in the House. They experience the same frustrations and sense of confinement. Maggie Tulliver (The Mill on the Floss [1860]) is no blond angel, dutifully quiescent and conformist in behaviour. She is dark-skinned with wild, unruly hair and a wilfully independent nature to match. Maggie's mother comments on her daughter's hair which will not curl `now it was so long and massy' (Eliot, 1961:274) but admits she is `getting fond of her tall, brown girl' (Eliot, 1961:274). We soon learn that Maggie is highly intelligent and sensitive, especially when compared to her pedestrian brother, Tom, but she is constantly frustrated in her search for happiness.

She wants Philip Wakem to think her `rather clever when she came to talk to him' (Eliot, 1961:164). She is a caring person and has a tenderness for deformed things: her love for Tom is intense and fervent and she desperately

seeks some return of affection from him. Eliot emphasises the irony of Tom having such a superior education to Maggie's second-rate one. Contrast their attitudes to learning: Tom `though he has never really applied his mind to any of his lessons, the lessons had left a deposit of vague, fragmentary, ineffectual notions' (Eliot, 1961:174) while Maggie's imagination is stimulated and she is transported to a congenial, welcoming world when she reads books, `in them there were people who were always agreeable or tender, and delighted to do things that make one happy, and who did not show their kindness by finding fault' (Eliot, 1961:219). For Maggie the real world is harsh and frustrating and she desperately wishes `she had been taught real learning and wisdom, such as great men know, she thought she should have held the secrets of life if only she had books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew' (Eliot, 1961:267).

Maggie is a direct contrast to Lucy, the symbol of the Victorian angel, the idealized heroine whose `blond angel-head had pressed itself against Maggie's darker cheek with many kisses and some tears' (Eliot, 1961:227). Maggie remains emotionally unfulfilled and cannot find true happiness in a normal love relationship. Her attraction to Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest's feelings of love for her are both doomed to disaster: she cannot have a normal marriage and the reconciliation between Tom and Maggie, ironically, just precedes their death.

Maggie Tulliver rails against domestic duties: to her, sewing is a punishment, a dutiful chore which she undertakes as a martyr to make money when the family needs financial assistance. Maggie wrestles with her sewing as much as she does with her emotions and her mother hopes that domestic duties will calm Maggie and change her `wild' personality. Certainly Mrs Tulliver becomes much more affectionate towards her wayward daughter when she sees her head bent over a piece of sewing: she is becoming more conventionally `feminine' and is acting in the 'proper' way a daughter should. Maggie was expected to be her father's servant much more than Tom. Thus, both Dorothea and Maggie are unconventional heroines. Maggie is not the dutiful daughter: her feeling of rebellion is one shared by many at the age of fifteen. Simone de Beauvoir (1987:140) identifies strongly with Maggie's rebellion:

> About this time I read a novel which seemed to translate my spiritual exile into words. Maggie Tulliver, like myself, was torn between

> others and herself: I recognised myself in her ... Through the heroine I identified myself with the author; one day other adolescents would bathe with their tears a novel in which I would tell my own sad story.

Similarly, Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch (1871-2) returns from her disastrous wedding journey and feels totally imprisoned at Lowick Manor, `the room was chill, colourless, a narrow landscape with the shrunken furniture, the never read books...' (Eliot, 1968:307). Dorothea enters into that hallowed masculine world she so desires when she marries Casaubon. He will be her passport to the world of knowledge and intellectual experience: unfortunately her blind idealism and her inability to listen to the advice of those around her leave Dorothea tied to an old bigot who is hardly the `Pascal' she has fondly imagined him to be.

Dorothea conforms to the ideal of `The Angel in the House': she is a virtuous wife, initially submissive and dutiful for `I should learn everything then... It would be my duty to study that I might help him in his great works' (Eliot, 1968:51). What bitter disillusionment awaits her: Dorothea is totally compliant, `Marriage is a state of higher duties. I never thought of it as mere personal ease' (Eliot, 1968:64). Casaubon warns Dorothea that she might find the wedding journey to Rome lonely and encourages Celia to accompany them. Thus we are not surprised to see Dorothea `sobbing bitterly' (Eliot, 1968:224) in Rome. Deserted by her husband she soon realises how she is being deprived of basic emotional fulfilment which she hoped marriage would provide: `if he would have held her hands between his and listened with the delight and tenderness and understanding to all the little histories which made up her experience, and would have given her the same sort of intimacy in return, so that the past life of each could be included in their mutual knowledge and affection' (Eliot, 1968: 230).

Casaubon is emotionally and intellectually sterile, depriving Dorothea of everything she wanted from marriage and we know their relationship is doomed to failure. By caricaturing Casaubon, Eliot accentuates Dorothea's dilemma, and encapsulates all the pitfalls of an ill-considered relationship: one from which there is no escape for Dorothea. Dorothea is desperate not to be surrounded by middle-class trivia and she poignantly states `they want me to be a great deal on horseback, and have the garden altered and new conservatories to fill up my days. I thought you could understand that one's mind has other wants' (Eliot, 1968:399).

Rosamond Vincy's rebellion is more overt, but like Maggie and Dorothea she is subject to the same educational system, a monotonous provincial life and has to choose a husband to enable her to escape from stifling boredom. Eliot deftly criticises Rosamond's education: `She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon's school, the chief school in the country, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female - even to extras such as the getting in and out of a carriage. Mrs Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an example: no pupil she said exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional' (Eliot, 1968:123). Uglow (1987) correctly points out that the type of power which ill-educated women like Rosamond Vincy exerted over their husbands was potentially dangerous.

Rosamond chooses marriage to Lydgate, hoping for financial and social success as his wife. She is soon disillusioned and her petulance and shallowness obtrude upon the awareness of a harassed and overworked Lydgate. She berates his chosen profession - `I often wish you had not been a medical man' (Eliot, 1968:497) and even her father reacts vehemently to her marriage` ... what have you had such an education for, if you are to go and marry a poor man? It's a cruel thing for a father to see' (Eliot, 1968:388). Soon Lydgate learns to `pet her resignedly' (Eliot, 1968:498) and their marriage is for both of them unfulfilling. Rosamond determines her own fate and is responsible for losing her baby in spite of Lydgate, the doctor's, advice. Later she can only remark `if she had known how Lydgate would have behaved she would never have married him' (Eliot, 1968:642).

Rosamond is like a tropical bird encased in a sterile cage: she considers the rooms in her house at Bride Street as no more than small, mean cages. She feels she is living in more of a prison than a home. Later when Rosamond has informed Ladislaw of the conditions of Casaubon's will we are presented with a vision of Rosamond `looking out of the window wearily. She was oppressed by ennui, and by that dissatisfaction which in women's minds is continually turning into a trivial jealousy...' (Eliot, 1968:642). Her feelings of entrapment are as real as those of Dorothea and Maggie.

It is Mary Garth, a product of a poorer background, but who is intelligent and determined, who has a happy marriage. She has the strength of

character to take control of her own life and to influence Fred Vincy on a suitable choice of career before she marries him. Mary has a sensible mother and some education: her outlook on life is essentially practical and like Maggie Tulliver she does not conform to the Victorian ideal of a blond angel as she is dark and plain-looking. Mary's common sense approach and the education she has acquired guarantee her some power to manoeuvre. Maggie, Dorothea and Rosamond could not wield this influence.

Eliot's heroines experience the same disillusionment if they enter the marriage relationship purely for selfish purposes. Gwendolen Harleth (Daniel Deronda, 1876) marries Grandcourt as she is poor and needs financial assistance. She is sharp but her education has been sketchy and she soon realises that women only have themselves to sell. She was about to become a governess to earn an income and she is saved from this by Grandcourt's offer. She is soon aware of how confined her life has become as `We women cannot go in search of adventures - to find out the North and West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us' (Eliot, 1988:171). As Uglow (1987:230) observes, Gwendolen is in danger of thinking that a vegetable existence at the mercy of male gardeners is a `natural state' and women are totally dependent on their husbands for emotional, financial and intellectual support and she remarks on the irony of Gwendolen's marriage as, `the most outwardly conventional step (which) she takes, should be - as she knows so well - such a foolhardy and virtually immoral act'.

Drabble's heroines also become disillusioned with marriage but for different reasons. Drabble adopts a questioning attitude towards the institution of marriage: is it really what women want? Drabble in A Summer Birdcage (1963) explores the desirability and acceptability of marriage for her protagonist, Sarah, while deftly casting a sideways glance at the marriage of Sarah's sister, Louise. Emma Evans experiences the entrapment and disappointment of an early marriage (Emma in The Garrick Year): while Rosamund in The Millstone chooses the role of independent motherhood. Drabble highlights the choices women have in the late twentieth century but still questions the validity of marriage as a suitable vehicle to provide women with fulfilment and happiness.

Thus, Eliot's heroines are represented as bereft of the chance for happiness in their marriage relationships if they are ill-educated and financially dependent on their husbands. These disadvantages were especially experienced by middle-class women and Eliot emphasises their plight. Eliot praises Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women because it is `eminently serious' and `severely moral'. In `Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1856) she expounds on the same theme when she attacks the superficial effect of a half-measure of education which will be deleterious rather than advantageous to a woman's progress.

She also discusses the confining perceptions of womanhood: girls can have `masculine interests' (Maggie Tulliver) and some like Dorothea want to be more than just wives and mothers. Dorothea is described thus: `Here and there a cygnet is raised uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream on fellowship with its own oary-footed kind' (Eliot, 1968:26).

Eliot maintains that men bolster the sanctification of drawing room idleness because it ensures their continued power and removes the threat of competition. Marriage means confinement and dependence on a husband and thus emotional happiness is generally elusive, often because the heroines have an unrealistic and idealized picture of how a marriage should be.

Thus preconceived ideas about marriage are imposed on the heroines by a narrow, middle-class provincial society, afraid to face reality and content to hide behind a false veil of bigotry and cant. Eliot encapsulates, in a subtly satirical way, the dilemmas of middle-class women in the mid-nineteenth century. However, the emergence of the `New Woman' in the 1890 's heralded a decade of controversy, encompassing all questions of moral and social behaviour. Woman's position in this debate was central and vital as more women were now well educated and the questions of what work they could do and what social and professional status they could attain in the workplace had to be addressed.

New freedoms of dress and social mobility encouraged women to discuss female sexual matters openly and to expose the double sexual standard. Middle-class women were now bold enough to write about a subject which had previously been taboo. Venereal disease was rampant in Victorian

England, for although middle-class women were supposed to be faithful to their husbands they were expected to remain almost innocent about sexual matters and there was no social pressure on Victorian husbands to curb their sexual instincts. Women now wrote about the need for effective contraception, the need to limit the size of a family (six children was the middle-class average), the advisability of divorce if the husband committed adultery and generally criticised the institution of marriage.

Women also questioned the desirability of devoting their lives to their children's upbringing and being solely confined to the home. As Cunningham (1978:39) states `for a brief period the emancipation of women and the emancipation of the English novel advanced together'.

What Eliot succeeded in achieving was to focus attention on and foreground the lives of nineteenth-century women.[4] In following this tradition a century later, Drabble touches on sensitive social and personal issues appertaining to women in a similarly penetrating and apposite way.

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4 It is important to note that Thomas Hardy who foregrounded women's powerlessness in a male-dominated society where marriage was concerned, was severely castigated by critics after Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) and Jude the Obscure (1895) were published. Tess of the d'Urbervilles was condemned for its `immorality' and `pessimism' and The Pall Mall Gazette considered Jude the Obscure as `dirt, drivel and damnation'.
Hardy depicts Tess (Tess of the d'Urbervilles) as a precursor of The New Woman, a victim of the Victorian double standard, but Hardy chooses to expose this double standard in a dramatic and convincing way. No longer is the hypocrisy of a woman's situation hidden: Tess's dilemma is openly revealed and there is definite authorial support for her plight. Tess's honesty in her dealings with the opposite sex precludes her downfall: Tess, unaware of the accepted `double sexual standard', cannot relate her feelings honestly to either Alec or Angel and she becomes a victim of circumstance as she realises women cannot have the same choices as men. As `the fallen woman' she dies for a murder she has committed not as an act of self-sacrifice.
Sue Bridehead (Jude the Obscure) adopts a much stronger feminist stance. The central theme of the novel is Hardy's cynicism embodied in the failed marriages of Arabella and Sue to Phillotson. Sue Bridehead is portrayed as an intelligent heroine, often displaying more acumen than the men in her life (both Phillotson and Jude): she makes one unhappy marriage and is nervous of further commitment. For her marriage is a different type of entrapment from that which was experienced by Eliot's heroines. For Sue, marriage is a commitment that will stifle her individuality, full of inherent dangers for her as an individual. She has power of choice as she is well-educated, capable of earning her own living and she can compete intellectually with any man she chooses to marry.
Sue epitomises the woman with choices. Marriage is not always what one expects it to be. Also divorce is freely debated in Jude the Obscure and is considered a viable option to an unhappy marriage. Thus Hardy addresses vital issues pertaining to women's place, sexual attitudes and women's role in marriage and his novels were bitterly attacked by the patriarchy of the day.

Gradually, as social and political change took place this change was reflected in what women wrote and discussed. Nineteenth century views on `women's place' lingered into the twentieth century. Ironically, it was women's role as `custodian of the nation's morality' which precluded them from obtaining voting rights, even after they had been granted divorce, education and property rights.

Britain's strong male patriarchy were unwilling to extend their privileges to women who had the supposed sacred task of preserving the morals of the nation, even from their supposedly weak physical condition. Many women in fact upheld the non-voting rights of women as women were supposedly `morally superior to men, and in duty bound to exercise an elevating influence over them': this premise was becoming more difficult to uphold as women were becoming `working girls' and were realising that marriage meant a loss of independence while the example of women such as Florence Nightingale and her band of trusty followers battling against all odds in the Crimean War, hardly supported the view that women were especially physically weak and had to be protected from all hardship.

Initially, women writers were reluctant to become involved in the struggle for suffrage but the powerful thrust of the movement was difficult to ignore. As Showalter (1991:218) points out `under the charismatic leadership of the Pankhursts, the suffrage campaign became an integral part of the female consciousness'. The Women Writers Suffrage League, produced many political articles, pamphlets and even novels to support the Cause. Elizabeth Robins, the dynamic president of the League the movement who wrote `Votes for Women' (1907) was `the most influential piece of literary propaganda to come out of the suffrage movement' (Showalter, 1991:218).

Women writers became a conspicuous part of the campaign and Robins was perceptive enough to plant the seed of what women were going to examine in the years to come: in other words women must become aware of their own special needs and reflect the condition of being women through their own writing. This is the tradition to which Drabble belongs, a tradition which was to flourish and grow in the twentieth century ... `the suffrage campaign needed a new literature of female psychology to raise the middle-class

woman's consciousness about her life' (Showalter, 1991:224). This echoes this relevant statement that:

> No one who understands the feminist movement or who knows the soul of a real new woman would make the mistake of supposing that the modern woman is fighting for the vote for education, and for economic freedom, because she wants to be a man. The idea is the invention of masculine intelligence. Woman is fighting today, as she has all the way up through the ages, for the freedom to be a woman (Hamman in Showalter, 1991:243).

What Hamman is insisting on is the right for women not to be threatening to men but to be accorded social and political equality with them, to be released from societal constraints and allowed the freedom to assert their own identity. As Miles (1989:243) so aptly states `The rights that women had won through the long century and more of struggle were essentially rights of men. Women had no option but to batter their way into that age-old fortress of male privilege, and storm the citadel where masculine supremacy still held out. But those who saw it as a final victory were deceived'.

Miles (1989:243) foresees the next battleground. `To be a woman what was that? ... Wearily but without complaint, the world army of women shouldered arms and marched forward again.' This question is seminal to the writing of twentieth century women writers and is embodied in the oeuvre of Drabble and her contemporaries, for they further the tradition of engendering women's self-awareness and consciousness. Before examining Drabble's answer to this question it is relevant to return to the writing of Virginia Woolf to provide another perspective on this issue.

Woolf begins this journey to self-awareness by addressing crucial emotional and social issues concerning women and writing in the twentieth century. She is aware of the tradition to which she belongs:

> For the road was cut many years ago by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot - many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth and regulating my steps (Woolf, 1979: 285).

Rose (1978) points out that Woolf's family background, her incestuous relationship with her half-brother and her dominant father influenced her conception of gender roles. Because of her experiences she came to expect

men to be egotistical and women intuitive and sympathetic. Her early experiences with the domineering men in her family made her frigid and withdrawn for most of her life, her health remained poor and she received little formal education. Her brothers went to Cambridge, but she considered her lack of a formal university education as a challenge rather than a complete disadvantage.

In fact, Showalter (1991:300) comments on the increasing number of women writers who gained university degrees as the century progressed. Fifty percent of women novelists born between 1900 and 1920 were university educated: of those born after 1920 most had degrees. She correctly states that `different women writers were no longer likely to venerate masculine knowledge, like Dorothea Casaubon nor reject it, like Lily Briscoe' (1991:300).

However, Woolf used her female experience when visiting Cambridge to record a woman's thoughts on entering the hallowed portals of this patriarchal establishment. A visit to the university library is tantamount to entering some hallowed and sacred institution, yet it remained a frustrating and hazardous experience for a woman in 1929:

> Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle I was a woman. His was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholar are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me (Woolf, 1977:7).

Thus, in the early decades of the century women in some institutes of learning or in the work place were still faced with tremendous disadvantages because of their sex. Woolf voices these inequalities and frustrations in her major novels. What should be seen as an era of tremendous advance for middle and upper class women is shown by Woolf to be very confined and limiting. She emphasises the factors which influence a woman's progress - she must have leisure, money and a room of her own: this room is a symbol of psychological and physical freedom: it signifies that the occupant is unfettered by domestic demands and financial stringency. Mary Beton (in A Room of One's Own [1929]) prosaically concludes `it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry (1977:100). Also because of the very nature of her life, a woman can find very little to write about `Often nothing tangible remains of a woman's day. The food that has been cooked is eaten; the children that

have been nursed have gone out into the world ... what is the salient point for the novelist to seize upon?' (Woolf, 1977:49-50). The metaphor of the room is a plea for a woman to have faith in her own identity and her individual creative powers.

Through her main female characters Woolf projects her feelings as a woman and as a writer. Often her protagonists are portrayed as living in an enclosed and stifling atmosphere where trivial and time consuming demands are made upon them. The backdrop of the First World War exacerbates the underlying tension of much of Woolf's work. Although Gilbert and Gubar maintain that `for many women the war was a liberating experience in their lives: many joined the work force for the first time and released their passionate energies' (1988:318) thus, shedding many of the mythical mental illnesses that women had previously suffered from confinement, Woolf's writing reflects the claustrophobic lives many women led during this period.

Woolf's first novel, The Voyage Out (1915) reflects Woolf's search for a personal identity in spite of her limited experience, a search which is painful and masochistic and which deeply influences and inhibits her ability to experience intimacy in marriage. Her words to Violet Dickinson after accepting Leonard Woolf's proposal are ominous. `But won't it be awful if ... my character, which promised so well, finally rots in marriage?' (in Rose, 1978:74).

Rachel's voyage is Woolf's early and rather faltering attempt to explore beyond the bounds of social conformity. The experience of the voyage and the symbolic privacy she gains in the villa when her Aunt Helen promises her `a room cut off from the rest of the house, large, private - a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary' illustrate that already the room is becoming a symbol of independence, yet isolation. Rachel has the typical middle-class attitude towards sex; women must tolerate men's sexual advances and `in a ladylike fashion tolerate to satisfy the insatiable desires of men. Men are creatures of lust who pursue: women have no desires but must submit' (1988a:56). Through her meeting with Richard Dalloway Rachel becomes aware of her own sexuality and feelings as a woman. The novel ends precipitously with Rachel's death and she never gets to experience life's adventures.

Against the backdrop of her own lack of self-confidence and feeling of personal worth, Woolf spoke for all women and she was loud in her condemnation of woman as `Angel in the House', the Victorian Angel so much written about by male authors. In `Professions for Women' (1931) (1979) Woolf describes this creature, and how she had to do battle with her and kill her before she could write: `she was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily ... she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others' (Woolf, 1979:59) and the `Angel in the House' has a negative effect on the woman writer because she persuades her that `You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess you have a mind of your own. Above all be pure' (1979:59).

Woolf saw it as her mission to 'kill' the 'Angel in the House' before she can write:

> I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in the court of law would be that I acted in self defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing (1979: 59).

Thus Woolf had to reject all the feelings which in her society would have been considered `feminine attributes' before she could write creatively.

Both Mrs Dalloway (Mrs Dalloway 1925) and Mrs Ramsay (To the Lighthouse 1927) have sons killed in the War. There are strong anti-feminist sentiments expressed by the dominant male figures in Woolf's novels. Charles Tansley blatantly states that `women can't paint, women can't write' (Woolf, 1988c:48). Yet Tansley is portrayed as a mediocre academic, without much finesse, charm or intelligence. Similarly Mr Ramsay is a weak non-achiever, having made most of his philosophical contribution before the age of twenty five. Throughout the narrative of To The Lighthouse (1927) the patriarchal view of what men expect from women dominates and it is this domination which reflects society's expectations from women and Woolf's general dissatisfaction with the `status quo'.

Mrs Ramsay's narration of Augustus Carmichael's lack of achievement and his inability to be considered a great philosopher can be attributed to his `unfortunate marriage'. Charles Tansley is heartened by her support for Carmichael as it reinforces the generally held view about `the greatness of man's intellect, even in its decay, the subjection of all wives ... to their husband's labours, she made him feel better pleased with himself than he had done yet ' (Woolf, 1988c:15). Tansley's self satisfaction in his maleness and his unqualified egotism reveal the basic superiority that, according to Woolf, men considered their inalienable right from birth.

By contrast, Mrs Ramsay is portrayed as strong, caring and a good manager, far more dependable as a decision maker than her husband. Through the intricacies of the stream of consciousness and interior monologue Woolf sensitively explores the frustrations and the lack of independent expression experienced by her main female protagonists. Mrs Ramsay in her role as the `Angel in the House' is relieved when everyone goes to bed as her family's emotional and domestic needs have been fulfilled by her `for this reason, it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed. For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of - to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone' (Woolf, 1988c:60). Woolf emphasises that the performance of trivial domestic tasks by women enables the other characters to lead fulfilling lives in comfortable circumstances.

Close attention to inner consciousness is also sustained with particular subtlety in the works of Jean Rhys. Although her early novels were first published in the nineteen thirties she did not write anything in the forties and fifties where a post-war generation of writers was trying to absorb the bruising effects of five years of war. Thus, like Eliot, Woolf and Drabble, Rhys has a special innovative voice, unique for her time in emphasising the emotional barrenness of her protagonists' lives and even though she started writing in the nineteen thirties her novels only became popular in the nineteen sixties.

Why did this happen? Social change was effected after the War, the Welfare State came into being and a more equal distribution of the nation's wealth

was undertaken. People expected and wanted change and the `angry' young writers of the fifties who were mostly men, were concerned with class and social mobility. Relationships with women were often recorded from the male point of view, registering an unwillingess to get too seriously involved and an inbuilt fear of their girlfriends becoming pregnant.

Doris Lessing remarked in 1957 that `We are all of us, directly or indirectly, caught up in a great whirlwind of change' (in Stevenson, 1987:123) and this social and political maelstrom after the War was expected to revolutionise the English social scene. It did change class attitudes to a certain extent and state benefits to the sick and unemployed were introduced, but politically there was no great revolution. However, it was only in the sixties that `new explorations of female consciousness and the changing, often increasingly emancipated, position of women in society were emerging' (Stevenson, 1987:149).

Thus Rhys's work became a relevant contribution to sensitizing readers to women's experiences. Sage (1992:47) considers Rhys as `the post war writer as ghost' because of her disappearance from the literary scene in 1939 and her re-emergence from the fifties onwards. It has been suggested that her earlier works had vanished `because they were ahead of their age both in spirit and style' and her innovative themes were more suited to post-war revolt.

Rhys is thus an unwitting contributor to the feminist cause as all she seems to be is the lone outsider accepting a certain set of circumstances. She herself comments `I swear that looking out of the port-hole that early morning in Southampton, looking at the dirty grey water, I knew for an instant all that would happen to me' (1979:168). As Sage (1992:48) so aptly comments `It was in the world of dandyism and despair and ragged rebellion that she (Rhys) found her distinctive voice'. Rhys's sensitive exploration of her female protagonists' inner consciousness and what seems to be a personally felt involvement in the fate of her heroines give an added poignancy to the text.

Rhys's heroines exist in a hostile patriarchal world, vulnerable to men's demands and financially dependent on them for support. Although women are supposedly emancipated, free-thinking and in control of their minds and

bodies they can easily sink into a morass of non-achievement, hopelessness and despair when they allow their emotions to rule their lives and expect the men they become involved with sexually to reciprocate with mutual feelings of `love', caring and tenderness. Often her heroines use their bodies to bring material comfort to their lives: men desire them without love or feel guilty at desiring them no longer.

What is common to her protagonists is their vulnerability and naiveté in coping with their relationships with men. Young Anna Morgan (Voyage in the Dark) (1935) depends on Walter Jones's support and naively thinks emotion and feeling are reciprocal and are a natural product of mutual physical pleasure. Rhys injects a personal poignancy into the narrative, combining modernist techniques with a deeply felt emotion. Anna Morgan's despair is conveyed through the use of the first person, revealing her innermost feelings, doubts and anxieties about love and sex in a heartrendingly emotional way. She recalls her actual sexual experiences: `I would think about when he made love to me and walk up and down thinking about it; and that I hated the looking-glass in his room - it made me look so thin and pale ...' (Rhys, 1984:38).

Rhys captures her heroine's feeling of helplessness with her plight: `My God this is a funny way to live. My God how did this happen?' (Rhys, 1984:72). Memories of childhood mingle with present reality: the image of a happy childhood spent in the heat of the tropics contrasts with the cold barrenness of her present environment of ill-furnished rooms, demanding, grasping landladies where her only refuge is a darkened room and alcohol becomes an escape from reality to oblivion.

Anna Morgan resorts to alcohol as a convenient crutch after her rejection by Walter. Her entrapment is as ensnaring as it was for Eliot's heroines. The world is a terrifyingly alien place if a woman cannot earn her own living successfully and independently. If she is forced to rely on men to provide emotional and financial support, she is soon to become disillusioned and suffer the effects of abandonment and eventually the desperation of utter aloneness.

Rhys's heroines experience different hardships depending on their age and experience. Marya Zelli (Quartet) (1928) is ensnared by Heidler's supposed

kindness when she is left alone and penniless while her husband is in prison. She becomes increasingly frightened when she realises Lois's mutual complicity and her increasing involvement in the menage-à-trois. `You see, I'm afraid the trouble with me is that I'm not hard enough, I'm a thin -skinned sort of person and I've been frightened to death these past few days. I don't at all mean physically frightened ...' (Rhys, 1984:162).

Marya feels helpless `She had made an utter mess of her love affair, and that was that. She had made an utter mess of her existence. And that was that too! But of course it wasn't a love affair. It was a fight. A ruthless, merciless three cornered fight' (Rhys, 1984:162). Her only weapons are her own emotions of anger and despair. Heidler uses her `for the express purpose of being made love to' (Rhys, 1984:204). Marya openly reveals her affair with Heidler and Stephen's brutal retaliation terrorises her and he becomes the symbol of everything in her life that has baffled and tortured her. She does not want to be left alone but what ensues sadly silences her forever and it is Stephen who reflects that `women seemed to him loathsome, horrible - soft and disgusting weights suspended round the necks of men, dragging them downwards' (Rhys, 1984:248). This view of women is commonly held by many of the male characters portrayed by Rhys. Women are dependent, useless, almost blood-sucking creatures, far too dependent on men and useless when left to fend for themselves.

Rhys boldly penetrates her heroines' inner emotions and vulnerabilities: their hopeless sexual relationships are openly described, emphasising their inability to make lasting connections. Her ageing heroines face greater problems and unhappiness.

Julia Martin (After leaving Mr Mackenzie) (1931) is older and more disillusioned, as life has treated her harshly. The narrative is presented from her point of view and Rhys sensitively evokes her desperate loneliness and pathetic search for emotional support. Age and weariness seem to have assaulted Julia most cruelly. Rhys confronts the dilemmas of the older woman, losing her looks and facing life without the emotional and financial support of a man.

Julia utters the embarrassing, almost child-like plea `You mustn't leave me. Don't leave me. You must stay with me. Please ...' (Rhys, 1984:334),

which underlines that for Julia happiness or even some semblance of sanity becomes elusive and when her embarrassingly emotional scene in the restaurant fails to move Horsefield we find Julia totally alone, proudly defiant, but with all her inner resources exhausted. Her meeting with Mackenzie when she asks him for financial help results in her final humiliation.

Similarly, Sasha Jensen (Good Morning Midnight) (1939) is portrayed as the supreme victim: both her marriage and her baby are dead and she seeks `ambiguous consolation' in a relationship with a gigolo. Stevenson (1987:150) aptly comments on Rhys's narrative style in this novel `her narrative also alternates between present-tense transcription of immediate thought or experience, and recording of disorderly memories, sometimes in the present tense, sometimes in the past'.

Woolf and Rhys sensitively explore and foreground what it is like to be female and their preoccupations are echoed in Drabble's work from a late twentieth-century perspective. She successfully breaks the silence of women writing about their bodies, their emotions and their personal feelings about men, marriage and motherhood and she is bold in her assertions that women's lives are fraught with frustration, personal disappointment and their early idealism is soon dampened into a resigned acceptance of what life usually offers a woman.

Drabble also cleverly deconstructs societal assumptions about how love and certainly marriage should be for a woman. She finds great fulfilment in being a mother and this is reflected particularly in her earlier novels. Her male characters are often fleetingly sketched into the narrative: to her female protagonists they are often a source of anguish and unhappiness. The emotional distance she creates between the sexes perhaps reflects her own wariness and determination that women should be both emotionally and financially independent.

Her writing is similar to that of Byatt and Brookner and a definite contrast to the more boldly satirical style of Weldon. It is against this long and continuing tradition of women's writing that Drabble's work must be read and her innovation judged.

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society

(de Beauvoir, The Second Sex: 1949).

'Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden: the birds that are without, despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out

(Webster, The White Devil: c.1609).

For man without woman there is no heaven in the sky or on earth. Without woman there would be no sun, no moon, no agriculture and no fire

(Arab Proverb).

Chapter Two

Into the bird-cage

Drabble soon gained a wide readership in the early sixties after the publication of her first novels. Thematically, these works dealt with issues pertinent to the female condition. Drabble vividly recorded the simple emotions and feelings of what it was like to be female. This in itself was an innovation as she stimulated female self-awareness before the feminist movement of that decade had really been initiated. She explored the difficulties of being well-educated, but still having to cope with being a housewife and mother, thereby presenting a different set of problems to her readers as the previous generation of middle-class women had not been nearly so well educated.

Some impressions of what women feel about motherhood are first recorded in this chapter before a discussion of Drabble's early novels is undertaken. Thematically the texts deal with the female protagonists's search for self-fulfilment as experienced by Sarah Bennett in A Summer Birdcage (SBC), Emma Evans in A Garrick Year (GY), Rosamund Stacey in The Millstone (M) and Jane Gray in The Waterfall (W).

By writing about women's everyday experiences Drabble gave `women's work' both meaning and credibility. She writes about motherhood from first hand experience and does not dismiss the task of rearing children as unimportant. She is ambivalent about sexual relations, sceptical about marriage and she clearly states: `I don't know why one gets married' (in Cooper-Clark, 1980:74), but she has always been very positive about motherhood and she has real experience of the frustration and joy of being a mother, as evidenced by these statements: `I see motherhood in such positive terms that I feel almost embarrassed to state it. I think it's the greatest joy in the world but it is also a very personal thing. I just happen to like it' (Drabble in Cooper-Clark 1980:74). `I certainly feel the mother-child relationship is a great salvation and is an image of unselfish love, which is very hard to get in an adult relationship, I think, if not impossible' (Drabble in Milton, 1979-80:569). `Having children gives you an access to an enormous common store of otherness about other people. This is how I learned that other people really existed' (Drabble in Preussner,

1979-80:575). As Creighton (1985:24) states: `Drabble's credible portrayals of the mother-child bond have earned her the title, not always flatteringly meant, "novelist of maternity" and have drawn female readers to her work.'

These perceptions about motherhood are often antithetical to what her contemporaries were writing about the subject in the sixties and seventies. Many female writers were questioning the naturalness of being a mother and exploding the nineteenth century middle class myth, of the submissive female who was only feminine if she fulfilled her role as a dutiful wife and mother. For example, in a recent article `A Woman's Place: Motherhood and Domesticity in Literature' Ryan (1991:27) traces the historical reasons and cultural assumptions which developed and led women to believe that they would be ultimately fulfilled and happy once they gave birth and became mothers. She posits that `the experience of joyful motherhood (motherhood as creative experience) is not a common theme in fiction. Possibly, because of conditioning by the male literary collective, women have hesitated to write about their experience as mothers, seeing it (falsely) as "not worth writing about" or as a subject unfit for literature'.

Similarly, Rich (1991:275) writes as follows about the stereotypical assumptions about motherhood: `we are conditioned to think of Renoir's blooming women with rosy children at their knees ...We have, in our long history, accepted the stresses of the institution as if they were a law of nature'. She further postulates that the care and nurture of children should be a `common human battle' not the sole responsibility of `mothers' but she realises that for this to happen, the institution of motherhood must be destroyed. She records her own personal feeling of awe and the overwhelming responsibility that attacked her when she first became a mother and relates `Nothing could have prepared me for the realization that I was a mother, one of those givens, when I knew I was still in a state of uncreation myself ... Nothing, to be sure, had prepared me for the intensity of relationship already existing between me and a creature I had carried in my body and now held in my arms and fed from my breasts' (1991:36).

Rich quotes from Lessing's A Proper Marriage (1970:111) to reinforce her argument:

> When her mother had gone, Martha cupped her hands protestingly over her stomach, and murmured to the creature within it that nothing would deform it, freedom would be its gift. She, Martha, the free spirit, would protect the creature from her, Martha, the maternal force; the maternal Martha, that enemy, would not be allowed to enter the picture.

Rich (1991:236) observes that Lessing's heroine, `Who had felt devoured by her own mother, splits herself - or tries to - when she realises she, too, is to become a mother'.[1]

As Rich (1991:237) persuasively states `Thus women who identify themselves primarily as mothers may seem both threatening and repellent to those who do not, or who feel unequal to the mother-role as defined by Chopin. Lily Briscoe, too rejects this role: she does not want to be Mrs. Ramsay, and her discovery of this is crucial for her'.

While Drabble in her early novels celebrates the joys of motherhood, feminists in the latter part of the twentieth century reacted against compulsory domesticity and motherhood for women. Both Betty Friedan (The Feminine Mystique, 1963) and Germaine Greer (The Female Eunuch, 1970 [1981]) explore the unhappiness of American women trapped in a web of isolation where their lives were totally dedicated to housework and motherhood. In the preface to The Mother Knot (1976) Lazarre states that 'it is rare to read, whether in literature or social science, about the experience of motherhood as described by the mothers themselves'.

She further states that women have to a large degree been overly influenced by the ubiquitous Western myth of placid fulfilling maternity. She describes graphically how terrified she felt when she was in labour:

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1 Two early texts which reflect the protagonists' inability to accept the bonds and responsibilities of motherhood are Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) and Chopin's The Awakening (1899). Gilman relates the story of a woman's mental breakdown because of the confined and inactive nature of her unfulfilling life, a narrative which is wrenched out of the circumstances of Gilman's own life. She herself had argued that `A woman should be able to have marriage and motherhood, and do her work in the world also' (Gilman, 1935: 83). Gilman's confrontational approach to the `sexual politics of the male-female, husband-wife relationship' (Hedges in Gilman, 1992: 39) was innovative for her time and her work was followed by Chopin's The Awakening which also explored the protagonist's frustrations at existing in a claustrophobic cocoon of unending confinement: ironically both narratives end in self-destruction for the heroines.

> Several of my friends had told me they were sure I would have an easy labour. I was so maternal, a veritable Earth Mother. It was my very nature to bear children, they said, and I believed them. We were all still locked into that vicious lie that if a woman is really a woman, she will bear children gracefully; if she is ultimately feminine, she will mysteriously know how to be a good mother. Even after nine months of a pregnancy which suggested that either the myth was untrue or I was a colossal failure, I still believed the lie (Lazarre, 1976:27).

Lazarre boldly voices her frustrations and doubts about the fulfilment one is supposed to feel as a mother. As an intelligent well-educated woman she finds motherhood alienating and frustrating. She expounds on the difficulties of being a middle-class mother and remarks on how women take on added responsibilities at this period of their lives while the role of father did not demand so many sacrifices.

Rosamund Stacey's (M) experience of motherhood is completely different and reflects Drabble's openness and engagement with the subject of childbirth and the subsequent responsibilities of child-rearing. This is in itself an innovation and has helped women to realise the bonds of a common experience. Drabble, through Rosamund, wants women to face the challenge of successful, and in this case, single parenthood and a satisfying career. Drabble is quick to defend the rights of independent women but readily asserts that, `None of her novels is about feminism. Feminism for her, she maintains, is not so much a subject as a sine qua non, an atmosphere that her characters breathe without having to think about consciously' (Firchow, 1966:94).

Thus, Drabble's early novels are innovative as they combine the protagonist's quest for self-fulfilment with an open celebration of motherhood. Her attitudes are generally antithetical to feminist writing about motherhood which dwells on motherhood as a confusing and often alienating experience.

Drabble's heroines must decide what to do with their lives, being caught in `the bird-cage of female identity' (Creighton, 1985:38). In this chapter I shall attempt to trace the female protagonist's search for self-fulfilment as experienced by Sarah Bennett in A Summer Bird-Cage[2] (1963), Emma

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2 Sadler (1986:10) defines ASBC as Sarah's `run for independence' and indeed the title is from John Webster's The White Devil (c.1612). Moreover Creighton (1985: 115 ) furthers this comparison by citing that Drabble has said about her frequent bird-images: `The spirit of a person is like a bird trapped in his body.

Evans in The Garrick Year (1964), Rosamund Stacey The Millstone (1965) and Jane Gray in The Waterfall (1969).

The allusion to domestic traps and snares is immediately obvious in the first three titles of the novels, the bird-cage of female entrapment, the burdensome millstone of the unwanted child, the forced removal of Emma Evans away from her familiar urban environment where her life had meaning to the stretch of imprisonment in Hereford: The Garrick Year has connotations of a prison sentence for her personally as she follows her husband to advance his career and leaves exciting career opportunities behind in London. Each of these novels explores options and the difficulties the protagonists experience in making choices is highlighted: there is a constant tension between each individual's aspirations and societal expectations. The novels are a collective voice against stereotyping women's role in society but the stance is not aggressively feminist, merely a bold affirmation of woman's identity.

Drabble acknowledges her early indebtedness to de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) [1988]. `This seemed to me to be wonderful material and so important to me as a person. It was material that nobody had used which I could use and nobody had ever used it as far as I would use it' (Drabble in Firchow, 1974:102-21). De Beauvoir's influence on Drabble is emphasised by Rose (1980:132), who clearly delineates the preoccupations of The Second Sex, which Drabble herself calls: `the preoccupations of being a woman' in a man's world. The basic assertion is that `one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1988:249). De Beauvoir describes `how woman undergoes her apprenticeship, how she experiences her situation, in what kind of universe she is confined to a sphere created and ordained for her by men', and as Rose correctly states `Drabble's early novels resound with this discovery'. Drabble herself maintains that `in my earlier novels I wrote about the situation of being a woman - being stuck with a baby, or having an illegitimate baby or being stuck with a marriage where you couldn't have a job' (Drabble in Poland, 1975:255-267).

The cage as the body is definitely a platonic notion (in Hardin, 1973:287). Also Creighton quotes Moers's (1978:243-251) argument that the caged bird is pervasive throughout women's literature as `a metaphor that truly deserves the adjective female.'

De Beauvoir emphasises how in Western culture woman is defined in relation to `man' and men compel her to assume the status of `the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1988:16). In patriarchy, `humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but relative to him... He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1988; 28). De Beauvoir asks the question: Can a woman in this situation become `an autonomous and transcendent subject' (de Beauvoir, 1988:278). It is important to note at the outset of this chapter that Drabble is definitely exploring some of the practical implications of The Second Sex in her early novels.

Accepting Drabble's debt to de Beauvoir, Shurbutt (1989:290) rightly maintains that through characters like Rosamund (M) and Jane (W), Drabble is coming to terms with the modern woman accepting her femaleness, her otherness. Drabble's message is `let us rejoice in our otherness, our "differentness" from men'. Drabble realises there is a great price women must pay in being relegated to `the other' but her novels foreground the condition of being female and she rejoices in this.

On being asked whether she had been presenting a particular predicament or type of person when she wrote her first novel, Drabble (in Firchow, 1974:102-21) maintained: `Not really, no. Though in fact, when I look at it, I can now see what the predicament was. I was in Cambridge last week and some girls in their last year came up to me and said, is it really so awful when one leaves?'. It seems clear, in retrospect, that what Drabble was doing in her early novels was `using' the wonderful material she found in The Second Sex to try to understand the predicament girls face when they leave the `womb' of college - how and on whose terms to enter the adult world.

Her first three novels are written in the first person, injecting a lively immediacy into the text. The fresh personal note further emphasises the almost naïve searching quality of the protagonists in their record of their early adult experiences. However, Creighton (1985:30) makes an important observation about Drabble's novels as she maintains they are `considerably more crafted than their surface lucidity might at first suggest' while Fox-Genovese (in Creighton, 1985:35) criticizes her for being `culturally aware to the point of trendiness' and calls her skilful metaphors and allusions a `literary veneer'. In my consideration of the novels I shall attempt to

verify Creighton's argument that Drabble ably penetrates the nature of women's lives through her lively, intelligent and percipient commentary. Creighton also considers that Drabble's openendedness is a strength as she leaves the reader to work out solutions for their own lives. She rightly sees her irresolution as a strength in her writing with The Waterfall (1969) being the most complex of her early novels.

I shall work from this basic premise to illustrate Drabble's achievement as an innovative writer. In her early novels she breaks the silence of women writing about the problems, both physical and psychological, of being female and records her protagonists' reaction to the experience of motherhood.

In A Summer Bird-Cage Drabble encapsulates the dilemma of young, well-educated Sarah Bennett with a `shiny, useless new degree' (SBC:7), `over-educated and lacking a sense of vocation' (SBC:8) deciding what to do with her life. Sarah's back-ground is comfortably middle-class: she is a product of a more egalitarian post-war society where university education for girls was encouraged and part of a normal social pattern. The question which faced Sarah, and obviously Drabble herself, was what she should do with her life once she had followed the normal path of school, university and had then emerged into the reality of the world.

Sarah's sister, Louise is a direct contrast both in attitude and achievement to Sarah but the development of their relationship is an important theme of the novel. Louise, `an absolute knock-out beauty' (SBC:9), follows the conventional path of university and then marriage to Stephen who is highly eligible and upwardly mobile, both socially and financially. Ironically, happiness eludes Louise and her honeymoon in Rome has tragic echoes of Dorothea Brooke's wedding journey a century before, described so poignantly in Middlemarch. Sarah almost voices the imminent disaster of her sister's marriage: `Men are all right, they are defined and enclosed, but we, in order to live must be open and raw to all comers. What happens otherwise is worse than what happens normally, the embroidery and the children and the sagging mind. I felt doomed to defeat. I felt all women were doomed. Louise thought she wasn't but she was. It would get her in the end, some version of it, simply because she was born to defend and depend instead of to attack' (SBC:29).

Louise's unhappy marriage and affair with John Connell are not what Sarah wants from life. The employment she undertakes is menial and ritualistically dull and unimaginative `Gill was working at Swan and Edgars and I was busy filing things at the BBC' (SBC:66). She knows she does not want to marry for the same reasons as Louise: no matter how she craved attention from Louise when she was younger and envied her her beauty and self-possession, Sarah is determined not to make the same mistakes as her sister. She knows that marriage is not necessarily everything she wants from life and states this in no uncertain terms: `The days are over, thank God, when a woman justifies her existence by marrying' (SBC:74).

However, Sarah's pithy and truthful comment `You can't be a sexy don. It's all right for men, being learned and attractive, but for a woman it's a mistake. It detracts from the essential seriousness of the business' (SBC:82) embodies the dichotomy that women feel when their educational attainments and their feminine aspirations are in conflict. Social conditioning still influences young girls to feel that it is impossible for a woman to be clever and sexually attractive: cleverness is still perceived as `unfeminine': a lingering nineteenth century anachronism. In an interview with Creighton (1980) Drabble maintains that Sarah's words record a very real situation: women who are dons `put on protective clothing and went about their work very, very quietly. It was as though you couldn't do both'. Cassandra, (an Oxford don), in A.S Byatt's The Game (1967) affects an individualistic, idiosyncratic mode of dress: `She wore,at night, sensibly, she considered, in draughty corridors, a long black woollen evening skirt over which she wore a long-sleeved black jersey with a cowl neck. She affected cuffed and pointed black velvet slippers. These clothes gave her a certain monastic, anachronistic grace' (Byatt, 1983:19). Byatt enhances the portrait of Cassandra by contrasting the sharpness and clear delineation of her features with the elaborateness of her style of dress and the exaggerated embellishment of her jewellery.

Drabble also points to Sarah's strong maternal urge. Sarah recalls the incident in the book shop as `a very strange experience' when a young child `reached out her little hands and started to pat my legs, and to feel up inside my skirt, along my thighs... I cannot say how strange and primitive those hands felt. My legs seemed to stir to life under them: they began to heave

out of their usual careful torpor and to burn under me with an awful warning' (SBC:168-169).

Similarly, when Louise and Sarah gaze at Hester's baby lying angelically in his carry-cot, they are mesmerised by his perfection and sheer physical beauty: to them he is both `an angel' and `adorable' (SBC:178). They both experience a common bond and need for maternal fulfilment.

Myer (1974) emphasises Sarah's strong puritan conscience: she is dutiful and Drabble points to a moral in the different behaviour of Sarah and Louise. Louise is presented as the one who, at the beginning of the novel, seems to have it all, a socially acceptable marriage affording outward material wealth and security, combined with the thrill and romance of a passionate affair. Sarah is aware of her sister's behaviour and personality, she knows she is materialistic and committed to her own comfort. She perhaps thinks Sarah can have everything as she is not critical of her behaviour but has always aspired to be like her. However, the humorous incident where Stephen discovers John and Louise in the bath together and `turns her out without a penny, naked under her dressing gown' (Myer, 1974:33) conveys a serious moral message. Louise is unsuccessful in manipulating Stephen and cementing her relationship with John. She ends up living with John, while Sarah still hopes to marry Francis.

Louise's experiences have proved salutary for Sarah. Her aimlessness and unformulated views and ideas which she felt at the beginning of the novel are now being moulded into a definite individual standpoint. Her role as observer and unwitting bystander in Louise's disastrous relationships have served as a lesson to Sarah on how not to conduct her life. SBC is a blueprint for what is to follow. Sarah in her fresh and frank manner, openly evaluates the relationships around her. Gill and Tony are separated after Gill's abortion. Stephanie and Michael marry straight after university and their relationship is predictably conventional. Sarah must now make her choice, what sort of marriage does she want if she wants one at all?

In The Garrick Year definite choices have been made: Emma Evans is married with two children and faces the unhappy prospect of uprooting herself and her family to Hereford where her self-centred husband, David, is to perform in the theatre there under Wyndham Farrar. As readers we are

soon aware of Emma's dilemma, for the first person narration vividly realises her problems and hesitancy at having to follow David and his career rather than stay in London and take up the offer of the post of a part-time news announcer. Emma would like to have a successful career, a worthwhile marriage and she also cares deeply about her two children, Flora and Joseph. David is a difficult, egotistical husband, determined to fulfil his own ambitions, and is unaware of Emma's emotional needs or unfulfilled career expectations. His insensitivity exacerbates Emma's inability to dedicate herself to his career and to welcome the subsequent upheaval to another part of the country, away from her potential career and source of individual growth.

Consequently, Emma's sojourn in Hereford is a time of emotional upheaval and self-exploration. She embarks on an affair with Wyndham Farrar, mainly because he is prepared to communicate with her and David succumbs to the charms of Sophy Brent. Thus Emma has many experiences telescoped into the period of a year and has to make major decisions about her future in this short time.

It is as if Emma has become a wife and a mother before finding herself. The pattern of her life is typical to many women: they become wives and mothers before really knowing what they really want from life. She is the product of a comfortable middle-class background, the daughter of a Cambridge don, and she had never lived anywhere `less than beautiful' (GY:30). Emma from the privileged background is hard on herself, has a strong sense of duty and believes in using money sparingly. David, whose original social niche was far less comfortable is extravagant and feckless and has far less of a `sense of family' and of what parental responsibility entails than Emma.

Although Emma expected to be a career woman, she `has done nothing at all' with her life (GY:10). Marriage to David has proved to be a sobering and trying experience. Emma defines it most realistically in this way: `I could hardly believe that marriage was going to deprive me of this too. It had already deprived me of so many things which I had childishly overvalued: my independence, my income, my twenty two inch waist, my sleep, most of my friends who had deserted on account of David's insults, a whole string of finite things and many more indefinite attributes like hope and expectation' (GY: 10).

Emma's married life seems fraught with unfulfilled expectations and disappointment and she leaves for Hereford, not because she personally wants to, but, because of her strong sense of duty towards her children and to David as their father. Emma completely submerges her individual desire to reassert her career by doing what she feels is morally correct in her dual role as David's wife and Flora and Joseph's mother. She justifies accompanying David to Hereford by realising that she does not want be left alone with the children, and she does not want `to separate the children from their father', nor did she want David to be `alone in Hereford ... because I knew that he too would be lonely' (GY:20). Emma knows her responsibilities as a wife and mother, two roles which she desperately wants to fulfil successfully, but she wishes to maintain her identity as Emma Evans and it is this personal drama which will be enacted in Hereford. Ironically, her road to self-realisation is played out against a back-drop of the theatre and its continuing dramas. There is a sense of unreality about Emma's experiences in this period.

Drabble's comments on Emma's character recorded in an interview with Creighton (1980:22) provide an interesting perspective: `Emma's a different case, because she's doing much more of a show in the novel. She's displaying herself; she's not telling the truth most of the time. She's much more of a performer. No, I wouldn't take her word about anything. She's saying it for effect most of the time'. Like the glitter, gloss and artificiality of the theatrical world she is part of for a few months Emma lives in the tinsel world of her affair with Wyndham Farrar, but why is she so unsuccessful in role playing as a lover rather than a wife and mother?

Emma displays a typically Drabblean indifference and ambivalence towards sex, but she enjoys being a mother. Emma comments on her reaction to Flora's birth, which incidentally, she blamed on `David's carelessness' and, `I was appalled by the filthy mess of the pregnancy and birth, and for the last two months before she was born I could hardly speak to him for misery' (GY:27). However, after Flora's birth Emma becomes devoted and almost besotted with her daughter, every time she sees her she is filled with `delighted and amazed relief' (GY:27). Flora becomes a unifying factor in their marriage and they `fell once more into each other's arms'.

Later, when Emma is leaving for the reception and says good-bye to Flora, she remarks on her deep attachment to her daughter `When I am puzzling about the location of my heart, I have only to look at Flora to discover what seems at times to be the whole of it. Though at other times it seems to be elsewhere' (GY:45). Perhaps because Emma herself had been a nanny's child, her mother had been to her `an exotic, miserable woman who had lived from time to time in sanatoria, and from time to time in bed upstairs at home' (GY:53). Her mother's alcoholism has distanced Emma from her but has made her determined to form close bonds with her own children and to feel intensely guilty if she was less than perfect as a mother. As Emma so poignantly states on her return from the reception when Joseph was yelling his head off in Pascal's arms: `My children are always making me suffer emotions that have no other sanction than their mere factual existence' (GY:54).

However, like other Drabble heroines, Emma's solipsism can overtake her maternal feelings. She is eager to wean Joseph so that her body can return to normality and she states adamantly `I had had enough of maternity. I was sucked dry' (GY:63).

Where does the trouble lie? Is it with what men demand from women or is it what society expects women to sacrifice once they are wives and mothers? Drabble relates strongly to Emma when she comments on the boredom which small children bring: `Only those with small children can appreciate how little and how much they occupy the mind and the day' (GY:120).

Two events reconcile David and Emma: the incident of Flora's near drowning and when Emma is trapped by Wyndham's car. Ironically, the sexual consummation of Emma and Wyndham's relationship is mechanical and not something which Emma particularly enjoys and she is quick to become absorbed once more in the world of domestic trivia. David feels remorseful and apologises for his neglect of Emma and his affair with Sophy Brent. Both realise they have to make adult choices. Unlike Julian, who had so much in common with Emma and resorts to suicide, Emma knows she is different. `I used to be like Julian myself, but now I have two children, and you will not find me at the bottom of any river. I have grown in the earth I am terrestrial' (GY:170).

What Emma has to sacrifice is her attraction to people such as Sophy Brent and Wyndham Farrar. Initially their world is very attractive to her, `For love, and bread and butter, and company I depend. On the cheap, the louche, the tawdry, the shiny, the glistening caratless shammy selling line' (GY:111).

Emma finds Mary Scott's world dull in comparison to Sophy Brent's artificial world of grease-paint and glamour: Mary and Emma have reversed roles and Emma has travelled away from fulfilling her typically middle-class aspirations. Emma herself admits that `I tried to trace back in myself the streak of flippant gloss that had ended up with my exposure, my positive attraction towards' (GY:81).

Emma has to realise that her true values are rooted in the middle class to which she belongs. Her horror at Flora's exposure to danger and her brush with death presage a new reality for Emma. Her new maturity is displayed in her attitude to literature which has changed and matured. She rebelled quite early against having to read Tennyson when she was at school. She is determined to feel `revulsion from what she most liked' (GY:81). What follows is a rebellion against what was expected of her conventionally and this leads Emma to new experiences but eventually she knows that marriage, even to David, and the fulfilment of motherhood are what she actually wants. Now she revels in Wordsworth's poetry and is grateful for its enlightenment and emotional stimulation. She berates herself for having lived in ignorance for so long: `Time and maternity can so force and violate a person that it can hardly remember what it was' (GY:171).

The final picnic becomes a symbol of family unity and reconciliation for David and Emma. The presence of the snake does not unduly perturb her and the novel ends on a note of hope for both Emma and her family. Whatever dangers lie ahead, Emma feels confident and strong enough to handle them.

Emma has thus shed her earlier dissatisfaction and restlessness. Her sojourn in Hereford has been a growing experience both for her and for David, frightening, but finally emotionally rewarding. Drabble has embodied in the heroine's quest for self-fulfilment the themes of rebellion and sexual

ambivalence and has re-affirmed her faith in the the family unit as an important social structure.

Like Emma, Rosamund, the heroine in The Millstone is entranced by motherhood, even though she has a successful academic career of her own. Rosamund is on a Bunyanesque journey through `a moral landscape...The geography of the locality took on a ... fearful moral significance; it became a map of my weaknesses and my strengths, a landscape full of petty sloughs and pitfalls, like the one which Bunyan traversed' (M:33). Drabble, in the introduction to the 1970 edition of M, says the title refers to Christ's words: `Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believes in me, it were better that a millstone were handed about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea' (Matt.18:6).

In attempting to explain her intention she said: `I don't know what I intended actually, but I think it was kind of a double reference. The child was both a millstone and also a salvation, because once it became obvious to Rosamund that she couldn't suffer any more harm from the child the millstone was lifted from her' (Drabble in Hardin, 1973b:280).

Drabble also remarks to Creighton (in Rose, 1985:24-25) about Rosamund that `even she knows she is diffident beyond all bounds of normal behaviour ... She's very much in the trap of being her parent's child and unable psychologically to become herself'.

Thus Rosamund takes sole responsibility for her daughter to assert her independence. Like Emma, Rosamund suffers from sexual irresolution which influences her relationships with men. She takes neither Joe nor Roger seriously and likes to manipulate them, using them as she desires but not becoming involved with either of them. She is curiously naive about men and sexual relations and admits the thought of sex really frightens her. Like Emma she is afraid of becoming involved in a physical relationship. Octavia becomes the centre of her life, never George, the child's father. In fact George is portrayed as unthreatening and somewhat `camp'. He is described as `an unassertive man' (M:25) and Rosamund never reveals his paternity to him: even when Octavia is ill and she meets him at the pharmacist's, she chooses to remain aloof and does not involve George in her life.

Her attempt at an abortion is a farce and Rosamund realises how much she wants to be a mother for `I was the kind of person who had always had a secret yearning for maternal fulfilment' (M:42) and yet she still feels that `The thought of a baby leaves me absolutely stone cold'(M:42).

Rosamund is coming to terms with having the baby but remaining alone and still having her `independence threatened' (M:39). Pregnancy reveals a new world to Rosamund, one which she never knew existed, the world of hospital clinics and doctors' waiting rooms, a world which seems alien and frightening, one which provokes feelings of tension rather than confidence. Drabble realistically portrays the inadequacies of Britain's National Health Service through Rosamund's naïve eyes: the overcrowded waiting rooms, the drab surroundings, the anonymity and cold indifference of the staff. Rosamund reflects on the inadequacies of the system with shocked disbelief. Drabble subtly criticises how pregnant women are treated by the medical profession: this is the reality of what it is like, being young, pregnant and alone in the nineteen sixties.

Like Emma, Rosamund is a survivor, even more so as she is fiercely independent and ritualistically disposes of Joe and Roger and soon realises that she does not need George in her life. She does not find her academic commitments much of a burden (she is busy writing a thesis on Elizabethan sonnets). So far she has lived solipsistically but Rosamund was born with a middle-class conscience and sense of duty - an inbuilt puritanism common to both Sarah (SBC) and Emma.

Now she has to allow for another person in her life. Rosamund's first experience of motherhood is both a shock and a revelation to her. Like Emma's experience in Hereford, Rosamund's nine months' gestation period brings her to terms with the real world - `I was trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life and I was going to have to learn how to live inside it' (M:58). Rosamund comes to terms with her pregnancy: her academic work progresses well and she is suddenly aware of a world of children around her. As Sarah and Louise become aware of the physical warmth and presence of children, so Rosamund gradually forges physical links with them, especially at the clinic where she not only notices the inadequacies of the National Health System but also the type of woman who was pregnant. A small child stands on her foot, the mother's face is

expressionless, Rosamund is left to look after the baby and eventually `a sense of the infant crept through me, its small warmness, its wide soft cheeks, and above all its quiet, snuffy breathing. I held it tighter and closed my arms around it' (M:58). Rosamund is experiencing emotions previously foreign to her.

For Rosamund, child-birth is a physically fulfilling and emotionally satisfying experience: her daughter, a `pathetic bundle' is handed to her `in a small grey bloodstained blanket' (M:102) and Rosamund feels love for another human-being for the first time in her life. To Rosamund, her daughter is physically perfect. Joe Hurt is contemptuously off-handed about her achievement but Rosamund boldly states: `I'm one of those Bernard Shaw women who wants children but no husband' (M:106).

The trivial nature of the fabric of most women's lives shocks Rosamund as the conversation of the other women in the hospital centres around the comparative efficiency of various types of soap-powder, each woman expressing her personal preference seriously and thoughtfully! Drabble exploits the humour of the situation, gently mocking the women's preoccupation with such a trivial subject.

However, Rosamund is fascinated by her child's beauty and perfection: `I was continually amazed by the way in which I could watch for hours nothing but the small movements of her hands, and the fleeting expressions of her face' (M:114). Octavia's operation binds Rosamund to her daughter and she feels `dread on someone else's behalf' (M:120). Her involvement with her daughter is total.

Rosamund does not believe in fatalism: she is an existentialist at heart. Fate does not rule her life. `The moving accident is not my trade? It's not mine either' (M:125). The philosophy and fatalism of Hardy's Life's Little Ironies is not for her. She learns to deal with problems and difficulties independently and competently. Soon the baby dominates Rosamund's life and takes precedence over her studies and her preoccupation with her own interests. Because she is on her own and is so fiercely independent, Rosamund is a nervous and over-protective mother. She herself admits: `All the normal preoccupations of motherhood were in me hideously enlarged, and I dreamed of them at nights' (M:142). Her hair has turned

grey and there is now `a hopeless distance' between George and Rosamund, a distance which Rosamund does not try to change as she is unwilling to inform George that he is a father and she does not want to solicit any help from him. George is a shadowy, unsubstantial figure and Rosamund wants him to remain this way: she has no room in her life for him.

Most women readers believe that by remaining single Rosamund has achieved the `desirable feminine synthesis Sarah Bennett aspired to: she has established her independence, while through motherhood she has affirmed both her flesh and her bonds with humanity' (Rose [Cronan], 1980:21). Hardin (1973:273-295) asserts that `as a result of Rosamund's commitment to her pregnancy and subsequently to Octavia, she achieves a true synthesis both within herself and with the outside world' and Virginia Beards (1973:35-47) celebrates M as marking a growth in the author's feminist consciousness because `Rosamund successfully defines herself in relation to values other than the male-superiority/female dependency ones of patriarchy' and Rose (1985:21) cannot consider her as a feminist heroine.

In my opinion Beards and Rose are inaccurate in their assumptions for Drabble is not intentionally writing a feminist tract. What she achieves is to assert her protagonist's independence and right to choose: to have control over her body and what she wants to do with her life.

The main theme of The Waterfall (W) is Jane's search for sexual fulfilment. Dominating the text is Drabble's ambivalence and unwillingness to provide definite solutions which is transferred to the narrative structure of the novel. As Creighton (1985:56) states `about fifty pages into the text, however, readers are forced to pull back and see the story as a fictional construction of a first-person narrator. Later, they are playfully reminded that both the "she" and the "I" are fictions of an elusive real author' (Creighton in Rose, 1985:106). The narrative alternates between the third and the first person points of view and deflects away from the solipsism common to Drabble's earlier protagonists and focuses on Jane Gray, an unreliable narrator.

Jane herself admits there are gaps and omissions in her narration: `Lies, lies, it's all lies, a pack of lies' (W:84). Creighton rightly states that Jane herself feels ambivalent and guilty about her affair with James, but predominantly The Waterfall incorporates the reader's sceptical voice - Jane reads and

criticises her own story - though that voice may not completely satisfy readers, nor necessarily coincide with their views.

In The Waterfall one is immediately aware of a mood of helplessness which pervades the action. Jane Gray has none of the exuberance nor ebullience of Sarah or Emma, nor has she Rosamund's positive attitude to dealing with life's problems and difficulties.

Jane is enclosed in a small world of desperation: her first words are fatalistic and pessimistic `If I were drowning I couldn't reach out a hand to save myself, so unwilling am I to set myself up against fate' (W:7). Creighton (in Rose, 1985:106) visualises Jane's house as `a metaphor of her `body' and of her` mental space'. Jane is entombed, waiting for the worst to happen and when Malcolm leaves her she is unmoved, she is totally submissive to the weight of pregnancy. She herself is locked in an ice-age of inactivity waiting for her child to be born. Outside the weather is cold and snow begins to fall. For Jane it is as if time is in suspension, and in this period of timelessness she learns to cope with each experience silently and almost stoically.

The images of snow and blood dominate, all is calm and still, Jane is withdrawn and unemotional and seems to be distanced from her body. The images of blood, sweat and dampness permeate Jane's experience of child-birth and she feels in harmony with the weather outside and she is subdued `in a vast, warm lull, an expectancy, a hesitation, a suspension and remission of trial' (W:9). The snow falls and Jane's blood flows. Hers is a world of passivity and agoraphobia. Into Jane's private world intrudes James: she is unwilling to accept him at first, she wants to continue reading and to remain in her own private sanctuary. James joins Jane in her fantasy world and helps her to regain her equilibrium after the trauma of childbirth. To Jane this third childbirth experience is neither exciting nor satisfying because to her the `blood of childbirth' is merely `a premonition of old age, slowness and helplessness' (W:21). James tries to bring Jane back to reality but to Jane `Why does one do anything? So much of life seems unnecessary' (W:26)).

James joins Jane in her womb-like world (it is as if she and the baby seemed to have changed places), tending her, becoming absorbed in her, and

this absorption changes into absorption for each other as they are both cocooned in the hot-house atmosphere of their own private world, a breeding place for their emotions and individual solipsism. Jane starts `becoming addicted to the sight of him' and the feeling is mutual as James urgently wishes to join her in her bed `I want to be in that bed' (W:32).

At the beginning of the novel Jane is helpless: the image of drowning and being unable to help herself dominates. Similarly, James's outpouring of feeling for her is like a suicidal dive into deep water: the image of the water closing over their heads symbolises their emotional immersion and verbal declaration of their mutual love.

It is James who craves Jane's total involvement with him - in return he offers to be her servant, she is his prisoner and he will wait on her. It is easy for Jane to succumb to such emotional pressure and soon they both sink into their own private world of comfort and mutual affirmation. They lie in bed separately, `separated by her condition more safely than by Tristram's sword, or that wooden board that the early Quakers of New England would lay as a partition between their beds, in the first weeks of marriage, to prevent too much surprisal' (W:39).

Jane is distant and cold: this coldness permeates her strange relationship with her mother. She spends her life lying to her and this she continues to do about Malcolm's whereabouts: there is no warmth between them. Similarly, Jane reflects on her sex life which is a `total disaster', because of her own inability to reconcile the practical and emotional aspects of the matter. Silence enshrouds her existence and she and James finally consummate their relationship : `she lay there, drowned in a willing sea' (W:45). Her coldness and lack of sexual expertise seem to have been disseminated and her fears about the sexual act have miraculously dissolved.

It is at this point in the narrative that the illusion is shattered by the first-person narrator's interjection: `It won't, of course, do: as an account, I mean of what took place' (W:47) and `it's obvious that I haven't told the truth'. Jane is recounting her life in fictitious form and by doing so she is endeavouring to give it form and meaning. Alexander (1989:19) succinctly delineates how Drabble has combined `lucidity' with an awareness of the complexity of experience and the difficulty of recording it adequately. She

competently expounds on the different voices in the alternating sections of first and third person narration. She sees the third-person as a

> detached, fairly flat and factual account of events. The first-person narrative is more varied; as well as recording events, it contains a quantity of information about the heroine's background, and presents extensive reflection on her attitudes and situation. Whereas the third-person voice tells the story in chronological order: Jane in the first person looks back on her past actions, in the light of subsequent knowledge, thus adding an extra perspective. Thus the third person narrative is subordinated to the first-person narrative. It is an attempt made by Jane to tell parts of her story, and she establishes in her first-person narration that what she had been writing in the third person is not altogether a true record of what has happened.

Thus before James comes into her life Jane reaches a `pathological state of withdrawal from her real self and the real world' (Creighton, 1985:108). Only when she consummates her relationship with James can Jane feel maternal towards Bianca: `Blood is blood, and it is not good enough to say that children are for the motherly' (W:48). Because of the emotional deprivation she experienced as a child (a common Drabblean theme) Jane seeks fulfilment from James. She maintains that `I could have devoured in him his whole past and made it mine' (W:62). She seeks Puritan redemption for her sins and she knows `my nature was not large or generous or secure enough to permit me: so what could I do but seek in abnegation, in denial, in renunciation, that elusive quality. The hair shirt, the sackcloth' (W:52). Jane is plagued by guilt about her affair.

This passivity, Jane's painfully depressive side, the fear of complete abandonment that goes with extreme passivity is clearly something which preoccupies Drabble. However, with James, Jane gains confidence as she knows: `I am always so ill at ease in my body, so estranged from it, unable to take it calmly: destructive I am...(W:61). Yet she is confident in her love for James: `I loved James because he was what I never had...' Jane lay there `drowned or stranded, waiting for him, waiting to die and drown there, in the oceans of our flowing bodies, in the white sea of that strange familiar bed' (W:67). He gives her all the sexual and emotional satisfaction she has been unable to experience with Malcolm who had `left her there each time, abandoned, forsaken, desolate, until mutely, in silent pride, she died and

pushed him from her, into a cold and stony death. Cruel they had been to each other' (W:70).

Jane, the poet, measures her achievement by the death of Keats, remarking that she was `older now than Keats was when he died' (W:78). Like Sarah and Emma before her, Jane has always thought `babies too boring even to look at' (W:80) but James cares for her in a way that Malcolm could not and like Charlotte Bronte, Jane loves her man with a claustrophobic passion: the two of them are locked together in their own private world.

However, Jane feels guilty about her relationship with him and its perfection in comparison to her awkward, unsatisfying relationship with Malcolm. Malcolm's social background is different from Jane's as he belongs to that lower middle-class world which to Jane, reared in the `Jane Austen world of distinctions of refinement and vulgarity' seems `arid and unlovely in the extreme', a life with none of the `warm virtues', pretentious and socially hollow (W: 93). The net-curtained windows symbolise the primness and pretentiousness of this particular social class. Jane considers Malcolm's past as impoverished, where human relations are concerned, permeated by a `lifeless chill' (W:93). Malcolm, like Jane, is an exile from his environment and like her, as Jane unequivocally states,` cold to the marrow' (W:94). Jane went into marriage ignorant about relationships and even about her own body.

She comments on the strangeness of the institution of marriage: `It is a curious business, marriage. Nobody seems to pay enough attention to its immense significance' (W:98). Jane feels that she has walked `towards unknown disaster of unforeseeable proportions' and childbirth is `an event so terrifying that a stoic calm was the only way of enduring its universal trials' (W:98).

For marriage to Malcolm has been lonely and sexually unfulfilling and Jane even wonders whether he has homosexual tendencies. Marriage for Jane becomes a journey to solitude and introspection: Malcolm and Jane do not grow closer but become more distanced within their marriage. On the birth of their child Jane experiences `a cycle of resentment and non-acceptance' (W:103), but like Emma learnt to accept and handle the child confidently. Jane does not live through her children but `felt split between the anxious

intelligent woman and the healthy and efficient mother - or less split than divided' (W:104). She `didn't feel lack of identity, really. I felt an unacceptable excess' (W:104). On the birth of Bianca she feels a cohesion of flesh and mind.

While Malcolm's career flourishes Jane begins to `sink into solitude as if though it were my natural element' (W:107). All that kept them together has been the wish to escape from their previous environment. Jane seeks solace in her poetry, `grief and words were to me inseparably connected' (W:109) and so is writing fluently and copiously when Bianca is born, knowing that Malcolm has left her because of her poor standard of house-keeping typified by her `staring at the wall' and her `too evident frigidity' (W:110). After Malcolm hits her (she is seven months pregnant), he goes to live with a new woman. Their marriage had been a lie and as Jane remarks, `How easy it is to betray the texture of a life' (W:113).

Lucy is now introduced into the narrative and the closeness of the relationship between the two cousins is emphasised: this consanguinity will be seriously threatened by James and Jane's adultery. Creighton (1985:58) considers that in some ways Lucy functions as the mother that Jane's mother failed to be, but only in being a desirable image of female selfhood, not in providing nurturing acceptance and love. Lucy is rather, as Jane recognises, a `schizoid double' (W:210), where Jane frigidly closes her body and opts out of the game of sexual selection, finding it the most savage game in the world.

James has perfected the card-trick (`the waterfall') and he is a perfect sexual match for Jane whose waterfall of emotions overflows in satisfied orgasm: `she was his offspring, as he, lying there between her legs, had been hers' (W:151). Jane is totally involved: `It was James I wanted: nothing else would do' (W:153). She compares herself to heroines from literature, will she go mad like Sue Bridehead or `drown myself in an effort to reclaim lost renunciations, like Maggie Tulliver' (W:153). Jane questions woman's sexual role, her involvement in a sexual relationship and what folly it can bring, as Jane so sadly remarks `I worry about the sexual doom of womanhood. Its sad inheritance' (W:154).

Jane lacks confidence and is agoraphobic: she is swept along on a tide of irrational, wildly subjective feelings of emotion. When she hears that James is going away to Italy she reacts passionately that `It was the lack of nearness that hurt me. The lack of proximity. It was so pure, my passion for him. Dazzling. White'. (W:156). This purposeful passion belies Jane's fear of unfamiliar places and her lack of confidence when facing the realities of the world. Jane remarks: `I was afraid of strain, afraid of transport, afraid of unfamiliar places' (W:159).

Jane has unreal expectations of James and he becomes the perfect foil for her fantasies. Her unrealistic idealization of James alienates her from Malcolm even more: `I hardened my heart to him and the years we had endured together. I hardened my heart: a crime for which there is no forgiveness. I dismissed his appeal: I extended him no credit' (W:173).

What develops from Jane's feeling of rejection for Malcolm is `real sexual jealousy, a real anger at the thought that Malcolm had managed to escape me to live with another woman' (W:175). Jane desperately wants to accompany James to Norway and just as intensely feels she wants Malcolm to be removed from her life completely. She is ambivalent about him, she does not want him intruding into the enclosed world she is sharing with James, yet she feels jealous of his relationship with another woman. Malcolm telephones her often, shouts at her and is persistent with his calls. All Jane wants is to cling to James and she threatens both divorce and suicide because she is so desperate to erase Malcolm from her life.

Jane is ignorant about James's true personality and their relationship is based on unrealistic assumptions. When Lucy 'phones and reveals James's financial position, Jane is unwilling to accept this weakness in him. She prefers `the bright side of the moon' and she does not want Lucy `to tilt the heavens for me and show me the dark and the craterous reverse, I knew it was there; but I did not want to see it' (W:179).

Malcolm's dramatic discovery of them sleeping together and his subsequent action of shattering the window leaves Jane unmoved: she and James stoically cover the gap with cardboard and start their journey together. What then is the real significance of the journey? Jane escapes from her domestic environment: she and James are `cocooned' together and are ecstatically

happy. After the accident, James is alive, though badly injured: Jane is afraid he has lost the sight of one eye and `he would live like Gloucester, like Rochester, to drag blindly on, perhaps' (W:189).

Jane's comments about James's physical condition are both flippant and dismissive. She seems more concerned with herself and what would happen to her if James should die. She feels she `would never learn to live again if he died' and in her own words `that my survival depended upon his, and that if he failed it would be a judgement on me for flinching from the thought of his ugly injuries' (W:190). Gradually, Jane realises the difficulty of her position especially as she has to inform Lucy of James's condition. Jane knows that `I had no claim to him except the claim of loving him' (W:195). The accident is the turning point of their relationship. The transitoriness, the dream-like quality of their affair, becomes a reality.

Time is in suspension for Jane: again she is in an enclosed and unreal world. She stays in a hotel to be near James. Unfortunately she feels that all she is doing is `waiting for James to die' (W:200). James has made her accept responsibility and action. Gradually, guilt assails Jane: she is convinced that James and Malcolm have died for her and that she is the survivor (W:200). Through a series of rhetorical questions Jane works through the pattern of her relationship with James. She questions her attraction to him and considers her emotions and reasons for their mutual attraction as shallow and meaningless. `Such a shallow, transient, selfish affair, their so-styled love had been' (W:204). The accident has awakened Jane to reality and she is now filled with guilt and remorse.

Jane glosses over the seven years of her marriage to Malcolm `who had patiently endured her afflictions' who `had endured her and paid for her, in cash and sorrow' (W:204). He has done very little for her, for `they had met in the shallow stretches of ordinary weakness, and what he had given her had been no miracle, no unique revelation but a gift so commonplace that it hardly required acknowledgement' (W:206). Jane again removes herself from any feeling of self-involvement, she is going to let `Malcolm do what he wanted with her' (W:206).

In fact, Lucy seeks solace from Jane and reveals the sort of marriage she and James have had - a relationship of `dreadful, endless, exhausting conflict'

(W:212) with James demanding babies and all of Lucy's attention as he was, not only insanely jealous, but also, possessive and demanding. The reality is that Jane does not know James: she has moulded him into the perfect lover and companion that she wants him to be. Malcolm wants Jane to return to him and Lucy visits James, who is slowly regaining consciousness, even though he still does not recognise anybody.

Jane realises the extent of their relationship and confesses that `We were happy in that hospital. Such imprisonment suited our natures. Dialogues in a sick room, in claustrophobic proximity. Dependence, confinement, solicitude' (W:223). As they have been content to be together after Jane's confinement, so they are happy to experience ultimate and total togetherness in the confines of a hospital room.

However, Jane knows her relationship with him is ending and he will be returning to his wife very soon - Jane returns to her own home and finds a letter from Malcolm asking her for a divorce.

Jane informs her readers that she has lied to them. Poor, helpless Jane, abandoned, afraid, timid, frigid, bereft. She should not be blamed for her actions: `an unhappy childhood, an unsatisfactory marriage, my own laziness' (W:227). Jane confesses that `I am sad, I am mad, so I have to have what I want. I cannot be blamed, I said. Let me off lightly. Again Drabble presents Jane as being in the hands of fate. People and events could not change, `they were predetermined, unalterable, helpless in the hands of destiny' (W:227).

She has lied about her schizophrenia and agoraphobia, and Drabble teases the reader with her presentation of Jane's character and actions. James has made her what she is and in the final outcome, Malcolm does not divorce her. The ending of the novel is as inconclusive as Jane's own life. Drabble toys with her readers where the conclusion of her novel is concerned, for there is no conclusion.

`A death would have been the answer but nobody dies. Perhaps I should have killed James in the car, and that would have made a neat, a possible ending,a feminine ending' (W:230-231). Critics have wrestled with an interpretation of the ending. Drabble explores the idea of James being

maimed in the same way that Rochester was. Jane cold-heartedly works out how much she has gained from her experience with James, maintaining that in truly moral terms they should have died. However, her indecision is inartistic and immoral and she can only point to the good poetry she wrote while James was in hospital as the sole constructive result of her experience. Her affair with James continues and their arrival at the waterfall symbolises another stage in the development of their relationship - how would the narrative end? Neither with James's death nor his impotence but with Jane's discovery that she would have died of thrombosis if she had not stopped taking `those pills' when James lay unconscious and motionless.

Drabble teases the reader with her presentation of Jane's character and actions. Who is the real Jane? What does she desire and what does she achieve? Is she totally shallow, self-centred and grasping? Like Louise, (SBC) Jane realises she cannot have it all. For Jane the outcome is rather more serious as she struggles with the realities of life and emerges from her solipsistic, flippant and trivial dreamworld to face the demands of being both a woman and a mother.

How then do these early protagonists cope with the `bird-cage' of their lives as women? Rose [Cronan] (1980: 69) postulates an interesting thesis stating that as Drabble's protagonists develop there is a realisation, especially with Jane Gray, `that the real cages are the ones we construct ourselves'. So women must go beyond the bounds of social and physical constraint and take responsibility for their own lives. Drabble, in writing the story of her young protagonists, illustrates the duality they experience in marriage and motherhood. Their initial youthful and idealistic enthusiam is soon dampened into a more calm resignation and acceptance of the realities of their lives.

We are not free from our past, we are never free of the claims of others, and we ought not wish to be. Existential thought, and emphasis on the acte gratuité, has always seemed to me a very inadequate way of looking at life. We are all part of a long inheritance, a human community in which we must play our proper part

(Drabble in `The Author Comments': 1975).

Chapter Three

Interwoven landscapes

Drabble's preoccupations changed as she progressed from her earlier personalised novels to the work of her middle years, which is concerned with mature protagonists facing the challenge of middle-age and living in a world beset by social problems. Stovel (1982:3) aptly describes Drabble's progression as moving from `a personal goal to a communal ideal'. Closely related to this is Drabble's concern with the influence of the past on the present: she is exploring new ground and her heroines are facing new challenges. Mannheimer (1975:26-27) correctly asserts that `Drabble's novels all centre around crises of identity undergone by the main characters. These crises often take the form of an adjustment to new feminine roles occasioned by love, marriage or childbirth but it would be wrong to say that her books are primarily fictional versions of the liberal bourgeois debate on the Woman question. Her concern is instead with the problems of a general, moral or psychological nature, and describes the heroine's quest for identity as a coming to terms with one's past as well as finding a balance between one's need for personal integrity and a sense of responsibility for others'.

Journeys predominate in Jerusalem the Golden (JG) and The Realms of Gold (RG), journeys which catapult the protagonists from the past to what seems to them to be a more hopeful and optimistic future. This chapter will focus on how the past has influenced the present in the lives of the main protagonists in Jerusalem the Golden (JG), The Needle's Eye (NE) and The Realms of Gold (RG). The dominant theme in these novels is the protagonists' attempts to discard the past in order to attain upward social and educational mobility and to escape the harsh emotional coldness of their childhood which seems inextricably linked to the harsh bleakness of the Northern landscape.

Clara Maugham (JG) and Frances Wingate (RG) both lead very different lives, but no matter how much they wish to escape their origins the past remains a dominant influence on them. Drabble accentuates this theme, possibly to emphasise the struggle she had to escape her mother's

influence before she could assert her own identity confidently and independently and she incorporates the idea of 'intentional fallacy' to publicise this common feeling and emotion:

> Thus any information or surmise we may have about the author's intention cannot in itself determine the work's meaning or value, since it still has to be verified against the work itself (in Baldick, 1990:110).

Drabble admits that she found her childhood deeply depressing because of her mother's behaviour, and she definitely sought other `mother figures' throughout her life (Hardin, 1973b:273)

There is a similar link between Simon Camish and Rose Vassilou (NE). Both struggle to discard what has gone before to make life different for themselves, but after suffering some hard emotional and physical blows they realise that they cannot change themselves entirely and their past lives have affected what they are.

Clara Maugham (JG) and Simon Camish (NE) both struggle to escape from their lower middle-class upbringing in the North of England. Drabble was born in the North and maintains that the Northern landscape produces a unique type of individual - according to her `They're all depressive. They're all sour and it's something either in the water or the chemicals or in the environment that is hostile to human happiness. I'm no scientist, but I do feel that there's something in these things that certain environments are more conducive to good qualities than other environments' (in Hardin, 1973b:288). Drabble's convictions about the Northern character are embodied in both Mrs Maugham (JG) and Mrs Camish (NE). They are harsh, undemonstrative women, unwilling to change their attitudes and firmly convinced that as life has been difficult for them it should not be any easier for their children. Their inflexibility alienates their families and a cold distance develops between mother, daughter and son.

Both Clara (RG) and Simon (NE) rebel against the narrow provincialism of their past and are critical of their mothers' influence on them. Clara finds her environment claustrophobic and unbearably confining as her life at home is boring and unexciting. Mrs Maugham, unable to accept her

own talents, stifles her own development in deference to her environment, and thus she prolongs her bitterness and becomes condemnatory of her daughter's intellectual abilities `she must have got them from him' (JG:27). This is a reference to her husband who was killed in a road accident when Clara was sixteen. Mrs Maugham is also totally dismissive about her own academic achievements `she had now turned ferociously against them' (JG:28). She had been a staunch chapel-goer but has dropped any pretence to faith: however, the narrow moral view and `disapprovals' are still there (JG:29). Mrs Maugham adheres to `fixed and rigid rules' (JG:44) which is reflected in the narrowness of her behaviour and her inability to accept her daughter's intelligence and physical attraction.

Perhaps because of this, Clara is very interested in attracting attention from the opposite sex. Hence Clara's relationship with her mother is strained and difficult: `perhaps a better daughter might have found a way to soften such a mother' (JG:58).

Clara has distinct feelings of disbelief when she first escapes from Northam: Northam station becomes a magical place of beauty and Clara feels `a terror at the singular nature of her escape' (JG:60). Previously, Clara had absorbed herself in the world of the `figurative' to counteract the drab realism of her surroundings. In the hymn Jerusalem the Golden Clara is inspired into `a state of rapt and ferocious ambition and desire', to her this hymn conveyed `a terrestrial paradise, where beautiful people in beautiful houses, spoke of beautiful things' (JG:31). Everything which surrounds her has a low church appeal and provides a moral lesson. In the book of fables The Golden Windows, the boy sees a house whose windows were all gold: he could not find it but soon realised the house was his own and the gold was merely a reflection of the sun.

Clara is to embark on her search for a golden world, a world away from Northam and her first visit to Paris `set in her a taste for such journeys that she was never to lose' (JG:60). Clara is reaching out to the image of Jerusalem the Golden and the golden window: to the pleasures and temptations of the real world. In Paris her relationships with the opposite sex are becoming more lively and varied and Clara is reacting to the new excitement in an enthusiastic way. For Clara life is there to be

experienced and enjoyed, anything bordering on the forbidden becomes instantly pleasurable.

Clara wins a State scholarship to Queen's College, London and she regards her physical escape as complete, especially when she finds herself part of the noisy, friendly, outgoing Denham household which exudes warmth and hospitality. Certainly their optimistic and relaxed approach to life reflects Drabble's concern with how landscape affects temperament. Clelia's appearance seems to typify a bold assertiveness in comparison to Clara's whose `own outfit, though quite becoming and unexceptionable, lacked verve' (JG:19). Clelia is the catalyst for Clara's personal growth and she now realises that she can actually verbalise her own thoughts and voice her own opinions. She retaliates when Clelia is rude to her and it seems that away from the emotional and geographical barrenness of the North, Clara is finally growing in spirit and confidence.

Clara, like Sarah Bennett (SBC), is undecided about what to do with her life and she lacks self-motivation in spite of her intelligence and education. She also finds it difficult to break away from her mother's influence even though she considers her mother to be `no more than a dreadful past sorrow, endured and survived' (JG:82). She still feels a strong obligation to return home at the beginning of every term and she arrives at Northam station feeling again the strange mixture of guilt, hate and sorrow which always enveloped her at this time. Her mother's house becomes a trap where `the bizarre and the involved are richly satisfied' (JG:83). It is to Clelia that Clara turns for advice about her mother: she explains the dual burden of guilt and duty which she bears and she conveys her mother's feelings for her realistically: `she wants me home, though she doesn't like me and she could never admit that she might need me' (JG:86).

The world away from Northam is unashamedly appealing to Clara and she is a prime candidate for disregarding her past and absorbing herself in a new and more exciting world. However, the puritan values of the North cannot be so easily erased, even though she is magnetically attracted to both the Denham family and their house: to her the originality of the house's design and its large, sprawling garden `curiously cluttered with urns, a bench, a dislocated piece of mosaic resting on its end and a

functionless fountain' contrast dramatically with `the square, flat patch that extended beyond her mother's house at home' as well as `the grudgingly mown grass and the dutifully weeded herbaceous borders' (JG:105). Drabble's contrasting epithets applied to the different gardens reflect the different temperament of the owners. To her the Denham garden `seemed to have no walls' (JG:106) and their noisy household, though difficult to adjust to, is a pleasant contrast to `silent pockets of isolated, self-contained, repellent activity' (JG:107), an accurate description of her mother's house.

The lack of order and boundaries in the Denham landscape reflects in their relaxed life-style and ability to communicate with each other. For Clara, the Denhams `led her literally into areas that she had never visited before' (JG:111). As a contrast to the lively social interaction of the Denhams, Clara's family finds it difficult to communicate and they resort to watching television together, an indictment of their relationship with each other. This is a direct contrast to the Denham household `where conversation had flourished, where there seemed to be no end to current and interesting talk' (JG:126) and as soon as Clara met Gabriel `he was what she wanted' (JG:111). His instant physical appeal completes Clara's magical relationship with the Denhams. He is her passport to a different and fascinating, almost wicked and forbidden world. Northam, with all it symbolises, is becoming a distant memory. Drabble questions whether it is `a problem which affects almost all girls, and men too - that one has to escape from one's own family and find substitute families or substitute patterns of living' (Hardin, 1973:278). She suggests that perhaps this explains in part Clara Maugham's need for`a brightly peopled world, thick with starry inhabitants, where there was no ending, no parting, but an eternal vast incessant rearrangement' (JG:224). She maintains that Clara is looking for just patterns of living in other people. `Clara Maugham is certainly looking for another pattern of life she can go to, and in the book I have ambivalent feelings myself about whether she's found a good one. Clearly not. She's found something that suits her. She's going to turn into something fearsome, I think. I rather dread her future' (in Hardin, 1973:278). Drabble certainly considers Clara to be her most `unsympathetic heroine' (in Rozencwajg, 1979:335).

Clara reveals her self-absorbed ambitious feelings when she records her reactions to Gabriel. She finds his latent homosexuality fascinating and anything different seems to attract her as `she liked any promise of the eternal, devious possibilities of the human passions - Houses were not houses, gardens were not gardens: plants grew along picture rails, stone tables stood in the garden, and Gabriel with his three children was much loved by a man called (and how shortly and with what respectful honour) Matthew' (JG:121). The desire to challenge moral standards which have been harshly imposed on her is taken to extremes by Clara: she and Gabriel come together, each having an emotional void to fill at that particular time. Phillippa and Gabriel are supposedly ill-suited to each other: their sex-life is `messy and almost non-existent' (JG:142). Gabriel and Clara are strongly attracted to each other and the consummation of their love is passionate and exciting. Their meeting in a hotel in Paris is clandestine and unconventional: an illicit assignation which Clara enjoys. Added to this is the suggestion of Gabriel's possible homosexuality and his incestuous relationship with his sister, Clelia. Gabriel himself states `Do you think I used to be in love with Clelia? I think I probably was' (JG:170). Phillippa has sensed the element of self-adoration existent in the Denham family. She is more realistic about them `she thinks we are all self-indulgent, self-erected saints, that we do it all ourselves, that this marvellous world we think we live in is just an image that we impose upon the rest. She hates it, she calls it vanity' (JG:170).

No wonder Phillippa is jealous and unhappy about the abnormal self-indulgent relationship Gabriel and Clelia have when she has to accept that to Gabriel `Clelia's nature is perfection, she is made up of every virtue, and moreover I have never heard her speak a dull word in her life. I could spend the rest of my life with Clelia; I miss her' (JG:171). Phillippa can see that the Denhams are not the perfect, happy family. Is Gabriel merely weak, self-indulgent and amoral? There are hidden complexities and obvious tensions within their relationships. Irregularities and psychological problems emerge which Clara was not prepared to imagine could possibly exist.

Has Clara, in real terms, escaped to a golden world? Like the boy in the story she is faced with a decision. Which is the real golden world and is

it attainable? Has she really gained her `terrestial paradise, where beautiful people in beautiful houses spoke of beautiful things' (JG:32). When she leaves Gabriel in Paris her departure seems so much less fraught with apprehension than her previous journeys for `It all seemed very simple. It seemed too simple. She wondered why journeys had always seemed so significant before, so fraught with possible disaster. She felt strangely clear and light: weightless almost' (JG:187). Clara can indulge herself in Paris but the grim world of Northam beckons her when she receives news of her mother's illness on her arrival in England.

When Clara enters her mother's room it is as if she is baring her soul and confronting herself, stripped bare of the outward veneer she had adopted when leaving Northam. Her feelings are sensitively recorded, as `she felt as she stood there, that she was facing the room for the first time, no longer averting her own eyes from her own shame before it, no longer blind with vicarious grief, no longer clouded by the menace of her own lack of love' (JG:195). After she has read her mother's diaries of the events of her life, simply recorded in school exercise books and revelatory of her inner thoughts, `she was glad to have found her place of birth, she was glad that she had however miserably pre-existed, she felt, for the first time, the satisfaction of her true descent' (JG:197).

However, when she finally sees her mother in hospital she is appalled at the physical deterioration that has taken place. She is obviously extremely ill but she still cannot offer Clara any warm greeting or words of appreciation. She merely berates her daughter for not coming sooner and acts the martyr throughout the whole visit.

There is no truth in their relationship just as there is no truth in Mrs. Maugham's assumption that she would leave the hospital in three weeks' time. Clara is emotionally bereft and is pleased when Gabriel 'phones her at home. Both admit to using each other to fulfil their own selfish needs. Just as Emma Evans and Wyndham Farrar have an affair in The Garrick Year and James and Jane in The Waterfall, so Gabriel and Clara admit they had their affair to fulfil their own selfish aims: Gabriel `as a means of escape' (JG:204) and Clara `as a means of self-advancement' (JG:204).

Clara's journey away from home is the start of a new future without her mother. Her mother's death is a certainty. She knows she will survive the `guilt and convenience and grief of her mother's death, she would survive because she had willed herself to survive, because she did not have it in her to die' (JG: 206). Clara has found her golden world away from home: she is confident about her future even if it consists of shallow social conquests. Drabble herself disapproves of Clara looking to the future as her ideal world as she feels she has failed to recognise the importance of past family origins. She condemns Clara very strongly, and considers her as the least likeable of her heroines. `I very much mistrust her. She's the worst side of one's nature' (in Le Franc, 1969:20).

Myer (1974:180) accurately maintains that The Needle's Eye is about `money, responsibility and human ties'. Sadler (1986:53) aptly describes it as `surviving the human situation, choosing among flawed alternatives and being privileged'. Simon Camish (NE) has a similar background to Clara Maugham (JG), and he feels he has worked hard all his life to overcome his `social inadequacy' (NE:131). His roots are also in the North, his father had been disabled and his `driving neurotic, refined mother had worked very hard, had insisted on his rights and had pushed him into Grammar school and then Oxford University. Her burning ambition had been for him and as a result `the two major decisions of his life, his career and his marriage, had both been made through default, through guilt, through a desire to appease and placate, brought on by a lack of spontaneous love' (NE:132).

Although Mrs Camish had been a grammar school girl herself she had not managed to escape her environment and soon had been burdened with a disabled husband and a son to support. Later she had taken up writing and had been moderately successful in using the hardship of her life to earn a worthwhile income. Both Mrs Maugham and Mrs Camish sacrifice a great deal for their children but in doing so they show their resentment for what they have sacrificed and cannot love their offspring unconditionally. Simon blames his mother for his commitment to a marriage which would offer him the financial backing to maintain a good standard of living suited to his profession as a lawyer.

When Simon compares his own marriage to that of Rose and Christopher, he observes many similarities. He and Christopher had both supposedly married for money. Although Simon knows he did not marry Julie directly for financial gain, it was Julie's spontaneous enjoyment of life and her ready `warmth, gaiety, vitality and family feeling' (NE:65) which Simon found so attractive. He knew her home was vulgar but because his mother disapproved so strongly of the Phillips he was determined to like them even more. In fact `he had grown to fit his surroundings, he had become able to maintain them, though he could never initially have afforded them' (NE:139). He marries Julie Philips whose father, a rich entrepreneur, had made most of his money through the mail-order business. Simon despises Mr Philips' mode of operation but nevertheless enjoys the material benefits of his success.

Rose Vassilou has a different view of her past but it has affected her deeply and permanently. Drabble maintains that `Rose Vassilou works through her values as opposed to those of her parents at considerable cost to herself' (Hardin, 1973b:278). Rose says at one point `But I'm determined not to make the mistake of most revolutions, I won't revert to what it was I was fighting not to be' (NE:98). Rose is from a privileged upper-class background, her father is a rich property developer and building contractor, and her mother `had lived for generations in rural dignity, a product of class and money' (NE:76).

Drabble (in Hardin, 1973:280) maintains that Rose's idea of domesticity is romanticised into a nice cosy working-class image of sitting in your own house minding your own business and being completely unaspiring. Her view is that wealth had destroyed her mother - a logical assumption. If her mother hadn't been so utterly idle, she might not have been so completely bored. So Rose psychologically sees her salvation in getting rid of the money and having something to do. She makes herself busy doing the ironing and so forth. What's more, she says, `I do them all with love. getting up, drawing the curtains, shopping, going to bed...'. Drabble further maintains that she conceives of Rose `She's a girl who hungers and thirsts after righteousness and how difficult it is to be righteous, particularly when you've got small children' (Hardin, 1973:285).

Also Rose had rebelled against her privileged past to become engaged, without her parents' consent, to Christopher Vassilou. After her threat to marry without her parents' permission, she is made a ward-of-court and Christopher is forbidden to see her. She undertakes not to see Vassilou and the wardship is lifted: nevertheless she is sent abroad for several months. Upon her return, at the age of twenty one, she is met by Vassilou and marries him, whereupon her father disinherits her. Rose then donates her trust funds rather precipitately to an African charity.

Her charitable gesture does not improve the state of her marriage, which has been gradually deteriorating into a series of confrontations and she is granted a divorce on `the grounds of cruelty, with the usual complaints of physical violence (medical evidence produced, neighbours' evidence, and a permanent scar on Rose's wrist) abusive language, violent and unreasonable demands, incessant and unmotivated jealousy' (NE:77). Rose is presented as the physically battered and emotionally exhausted product of a failed marriage. She is the helpless ingénue, unworldly and unable to cope with the real world `uneducated and completely untrained in any useful sense' (NE:62). Another aspect of her past which exacerbates Rose's guilt about being born wealthy is that when she was a child her nanny, Noreen, made her feel guilty about her family's money and how wicked it was to be so rich. Rose particularly recalls a sermon about `it being easier for camels to get through needles' eyes than for rich people to get into the kingdom of heaven' (NE:85). This type of moralising remains with Rose as she grows into adulthood and it colours her view of life: this basic feeling of guilt never leaves her and is evidenced by her total lack of self-confidence in her own abilities, as she so poignantly but truthfully reflects about herself `I am weak, she was so shockingly weak and trusting and shallow, spilling herself like that to any stranger who did not firmly enough drive away: she was simply incapable and had always been so, of behaving in a rational and considered manner' (NE:56).

Thus, though Simon and Rose come from diametrically opposed social backgrounds, each bears the burden of guilt from his/her past. Both are at an extremely unhappy stage in their lives and in each other they find mutual support and comfort. When they meet at Diana and Nick's dinner party, Simon is moved to tenderness by Rose's appearance as she `carried

with her an air of sadness, of lack of certainty, that to resent it would not have been an act of self-defence but an act of aggression, of violent approach' (NE:24), even her hand reflects `a fine mesh of wrinkles, that had about them no suggestion of age, or of loosening of the skin: they were of the surface, like small scratches' (NE:26). Simon and Rose are powerfully attracted to each other, but Drabble does not foreground a strong, developing physical relationship. As she mentions in an interview with Nancy Hardin (1973b:273-295) `I think Rose is a better person than I am. But I'm not sure at all that's simply because I desexed her slightly'. Both have strong, moral and puritanical views of life. Simon is still imbued with a strong sense of duty. Once, tired from losing a case and with a headache he does not want to go anywhere, but he carries on to Rose's house `...duty bound him. He was incapable of breaking an arrangement' (NE:96).

Similarly, Rose is very hard on herself, sacrificing her inheritance and ultimately her marriage to absolve herself from the guilt of wealth and privilege. One has an image of her sitting hunched and cold, sewing the zip of her nine-year old purse to save money. Her meanness seems pathological and self-inflicted, her living conditions depressing and poverty-stricken.

Simon gives Rose emotional support and also intercedes positively between Rose and Christopher, acting as the catalyst which reunites them. He listens sympathetically to the history of Rose's marriage and her subsequent divorce. He is professionally cool towards Rose, which he blames himself for, `attempting warmth, to no avail' (NE:52) for that was the nature of his temperament.

When he meets Christopher at a party, he is willing to leave with him to discuss the children's future. After listening to Christopher's side of the story, he has to abandon the idea that Christopher had married Rose for her money. According to Christopher `she undermined me...she undermined me, she has done from the beginning, she had no trust in me, she panicked as soon as she married me, she only did it to give herself a real fright, and then she couldn't face it when I turned out all right, when I was loyal to her, I'm telling you, she could have taken anything in me

except my efforts at good behaviour, and I did try, I nearly killed myself trying, I ruined myself for her' (NE:253).

Simon listens to Christopher just as patiently as he had listened to Rose, and he handles the case in a non-judgemental way. According to Christopher, Rose was obstinate when it came to mutual decision-making about which school the children should attend and Christopher thinks she is mad as all her ideas of goodness have unbalanced her mentally: he even feels that she might do something totally unreasonable and take the children to a leper colony or embark on some other equally unrealistic escapade. To Simon, Christopher reveals that people in marriage `sometimes [they] get each other wrong and find out all about it. But they don't stop caring' (NE:255). He feels that Rose had no right to divorce him and she does not deserve to be happy.

When Rose receives the affidavit from Christopher about custody of the children she feels like abandoning the case and Simon has to convince her she is in the right where the law is concerned, as Christopher is committing a crime, not she. Rose loses control and expresses her hidden anxieties about her abilities to be a mother. She is wrenching herself apart with her anxieties about her children and the guilt she feels about her unsuccessful marriage `...I've written myself off. I must learn to give up, I must learn to give up. It's so hard but there is no other way. He is their father, after all, and I know it, I know that he's sane and I'm mad, so what else can I say, what else can I do? I'm leaving, I'm leaving the country' (NE:279).

However, Rose is not easily pacified and her anguish evokes a picture of Christian martyrdom, with Simon as the wise apostle saving her from a fateful punishment. Rose is assailed by inborn guilt, lack of confidence and a basic inability to face life as a challenge rather than a punishment. She goes to extremes by reacting hysterically, pulling out her hair in desperation, not through anger but through sheer unhappiness and physical exhaustion. Simon tries to pacify her and after their interview has been concluded Rose walks through the streets, feeling totally wretched and almost suicidal. Her head is aching and she cries out

> If someone had taken a hatchet and split my skull... I could not suffer more. I feel the blood running in my brain,

from this internal wound. My brain is wet with blood. It pours through where my mind is, I bleed, I bleed, I bleed. Let them not tell me we are material beings, it is in the spirit that we know pain, it is in my head, my spirit it is there, I feel it. I am cut in two by the axe. 'I bleed' she said 'I will live through it,' she said as her feet followed one another on the wet pavement (NE:285).

Rose relies heavily on her religious past to support her through her present desperate situation. She recalls her previous visions, which take on a religious significance and she pleads with God to provide some answers. She sees herself in a prophetic, visionary role, projecting herself into the desert searching for a sign from God as the Old Testament prophets did long ago.

Similarly, Simon feels that he has failed Rose in some way, for `she had shown some form of trust and he had betrayed it' (NE:289). Like Rose, his sensitivities are finely tuned and even though he had a vision of them getting married as they are alike and well-suited to each other, he does the morally correct thing; he visits Christopher and suggests that he and Rose should be reconciled. Christopher is unenthusiastic, but Simon warns him it is the only way he will see his children. Christopher disregards Simon's advice and he sends Rose a telegram informing her that he is leaving the country with the children. He does in fact take the children to Bryanston, Rose's country home, and there an injunction is served on him to prevent him from taking the children out of the country.

Simon drives Rose down to her parents' house and the picnic which they all embark on, even though it starts with a dispute, soon changes into a reconciliatory gathering. The meeting of the opposing parties augurs well for a happier future. Soon after this Christopher returns home but Simon still watches over Rose protectively, for `He saw Rose's hair turn paler and tarnish, like old metal. He watched. He watched like a hawk, for signs of cracking, signs of ruin, for signs of decay. He needed her, he needed her more than ever ...' all he can ascertain is that `If she bled she bled internally' (NE:388).

Both Rose and Simon are involved in unsatisfactory relationships, unions which would not have materialised had they not been trying to escape the influences of their past. Both realise their mutual unhappiness and their inability to slough off built-in feelings of guilt. Hence a strong sense of

duty and an overactive conscience rule their lives. Rose almost typifies a Christian martyr and Simon can be seen as a prophet guiding and helping her along the stony path of life.

In contrast Frances Wingate (RG) has discarded her provincial origins quite easily to achieve professional success, her work as an archaeologist projecting her into the search for a golden world in the desert, which she discovers at Tizouk. Her lover, Karel Schmidt, is a historian and together they are aware of the influences of the past on the present in their academic research `The pursuit of archaeology she said to herself like the pursuit of history, is for such as myself and Karel a fruitless attempt to prove the possibility of the future through the past. We seek a Utopia in the past, a possible if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede infinitely, for there never was a golden world, there never was anything but toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness' (RG:120).

Even though she is presented as the fulfilled earth mother, with a well-adjusted crew of children who survive quite happily while she is away from home, Frances herself begins to feel a creeping sense of unfulfilment and individual physical decay. The realities of the present are difficult to accept, after the glories of her past achievements, a `golden' period in her life, when she attained professional recognition and tremendous emotional fulfilment from the birth and nurturing of her children. Alone in her hotel room she is now experiencing great emotional and physical anguish. She is without her lover, she has been drinking too much to deaden the pain of an intensely abscessed tooth and the present is abysmal.

She wants to look forward with optimism but feels:

> she had been quiet for too long, living in the past and on her laurels for too long. Time for some new excursion. She would be home soon, there might be *something new waiting in the post. No wonder* she got morbid and depressed late at night; it was years since she had really got moving. It was there, something must be waiting, something must be waiting. But she must imagine it well. She must get it right. She had too much force to be able to afford even minor errors (RG:35).

Frances is becoming aware of her own mortality: her skin is ageing fast and her hair is going grey, even though she is only in her mid-thirties. She is becoming aware of the onslaughts of time on her body. Her professional life is still remarkably flourishing and successful: she delivers her lecture and when Hunter remarks on its success Frances can only admit `on one not very important level she needed reassurance so much that even reassurance of this dubious nature was welcome' (RG:49). The loathsome tooth is extracted and she is reunited at home with her family. The presence of her tooth and Karel's together in the drawer of her bedside table makes her feel sad: two useless objects symbolising to Frances what has become of their relationship `had she been offended, over the years, by the fact that he had not even spoken of leaving Joy for her' (RG:81). It is while she is ill that Frances returns to her immediate family for support. She would have to make new connections' (RG:81).

Two important Drabblean themes are embodied in Frances's search for mental and physical renewal, and the importance of familial ties and the significant effect landscape has on one's temperament.

However, there are dark secrets in the Ollerenshaw family. Hugh is an alcoholic, and Frances's gradual retreat into her past is linked with her preoccupation about landscape and environment. Frances considers that in England, landscape has a considerable effect on individual temperament. Of the landscape from which she originated in the East Midlands, Frances maintains that `I've often thought that there must be something in the soil there, in the very earth and water, that sours the nature. I often think in our family we've got some hereditary deficiency. Or excess I wouldn't know which. Like fluoride. And that, combined with the flatness of the landscape, was what did it' (RG:99). Frances further postulates that `there must be something positively poisoning the

whole of South Yorkshire and the Midlands, or they wouldn't all be so bloody miserable up there and live in such appalling conditions. One day they'll work out what it is, and give everyone a pill to counteract it. Meanwhile, we've all got to accommodate ourselves to it as best we can' (RG: 100). She considers her father in particular to be `A bad case of the Midlands' (RG:100).

Her father is a complete introvert and depressive, her brother, Hugh, an alcoholic, her sister committed suicide and her nephew Stephen is suffering from some unaccountable psychological disease. Frances has to go into hospital for a breast operation; there are constant pointers in the text to the physical decay which inevitably accompanies the onset of mid-life, another constant Drabblean preoccupation. Frances wants to know `...where she began and the family ended' (RG:101). With these thoughts in mind she decides to visit Tockley, a place from her past where hopefully she would `Visit all the old places and find what it was that was worrying her. Maybe it was nothing. Maybe the old blackbird would flap off on its dirty old wings if she went to catch it' (RG:103).

Frances's visit to Eel cottage proves to be an enlightening experience. On her arrival there she anxiously searches for `her ditch', a place filled with newts that had inspired her father to become an eminent biologist and thus lift the family `from rural obscurity to professional renown' (Stovel, 1982:3). Thus her father had ambitions to leave his humble surroundings and seek a better world away from the Midlands and the simple rural existence of his past. Frances now deliberates on the circumspection of her grandparents' lives. They had not reacted visibly to her father's success and they coped with her mother's superiority by pretending it did not exist. Frances renews an old acquaintance in the village, observes the way of life of the present inhabitants of Tockley, visits the museum to renew her links with the past and then deliberates on the work that she and Karel attempt to do which is a `fruitless attempt to prove the possibility of the future through the past' (RG:124).

Also linking with the past is Frances's cousin, David Ollerenshaw, a geologist whom Frances is to meet up with in Adra and Janet Bird, a distant cousin whose way of life is diametrically opposed to that of

Frances. She is married to an emotional bully and her suburban existence is confined and limiting.

Ironically, just before she departs for Adra the family discusses Stephen's reading of Freud's, Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Stephen is preoccupied with the idea that there was a possibility that all instincts were struggling to restore an earlier state of things, and that an earlier state being inanimate, all living things strove for death?' (RG:194). Frances deliberates on the power that her past held for her while Hugh maintains that the post-romantic view of death is admiration rather than horror at its existence.

When Frances leaves for Adra she is bored and disconsolate, the depression she felt on her previous lecture tour is still with her: travelling no longer appeals to her and she knows the conference will be tedious. Through Joe Ayida, the Minister of Culture of Adra, she glimpses what it must be like to have lost one's past, and to stand on the verge of reclaiming it, something which Frances herself was about to do. She felt that all she had to look forward to were `dull little pleasures' and all that she had in life was her work, her feelings become almost suicidal and she feels she must `make an end of it' (RG:231).

She is amazed to meet David Ollerenshaw in Adra and even more surprised when he reveals that his origins were in Tockley, and it is obvious to both of them that there is a distinct family resemblance between them. Frances reacts emotionally to this meeting: she wants a family, she does not want to be alone, especially as she feels she is ageing so fast. What worries her is her separation from Karel more than her supposed rapid physical decay, as she knows that her physical irregularities do not worry him.

On the following day all of Frances's past is presented to her at breakfast: events have occurred which will sculpt and mould her future. Six telegrams announce a dramatic, tragic and sometimes confusing series of events. What was in `The Sunday Examiner' that was so important? What was wrong with her mother? What had happened to Stephen? Aunt Con's death will make her feel guilty, even though she had not known of her existence. Her death will change both the lives of Frances Wingate

and Janet Bird. She is asked to be interviewed on television because of the tragic nature of Aunt Con's death and eventually she and Frances are destined to meet. The nature of her Aunt Con's death makes Frances feel guilty and somehow neglectful, even though she had not even known of her existence. The death of Stephen and his daughter exacerbates the nightmarish sequence of events.

Frances comes to Tockley for the funeral and she wonders whether May's cottage might be the ideal place for her to settle, for when she sees it she is amazed by its beauty and `it had a feeling of home' (RG:305). The relics of the Ollerenshaw past which Frances examines are poor in contrast to the prosperous findings at Tizouk. The letters describing Aunt Con's secret past are poignant and sad: after delving into the Ollerenshaw past, Frances is determined to make the cottage part of her present and eventually her future and indeed Frances and Karel recommit themselves to each other at Eel cottage, a nostalgic part of Frances's past.

At Stephen's funeral, the coroner accepts the doctor's explanation that Stephen, `overburdened with his studies and the care of the child, had become depressed ... and he took the child's life because he feared for her future' (RG: 347). In Stephen's own words, written in his final letter `It was better to be dead than alive: this was the knowledge that came to him. It seemed to descend on him personally' (RG:349).

Thus, although Karel and Frances's reunion is `cemented in death and tears' (RG:355) their relationship becomes permanent. Frances purchases May's Cottage from her father and this artefact of the family's past becomes the place for Frances to begin her hopeful future. Janet Bird still visits her, but she remains loyal to Mark and will not reveal much about her marriage to Frances. David remains somewhat of an enigma, forming a strong friendship with Karel which Frances envies as `each was her own discovery' (RG:358). Indeed through her exploration of the past as an archaeologist and her search for familial roots and connections, Frances has secured for herself with Karel the future that she really wants. By unearthing her past which has not always been a pleasurable experience and becoming aware of the `darkness' of her family's heritage Frances still wants to identify with everything about her past. For all their

eccentricities, foibles and mental instability she feels a strong connection with the members of her family.

Clara, Simon, Rose and Frances grapple with the demands of the past, pitted against the realities of the present and the uncertainties and hopes for the future. Clara feels she can discard her past quite easily, because the future will always be better: her self-absorption predominates and she is easily influenced by outward appearances. Rose and Simon cannot escape their childhood influences to control their present or future happiness. Frances realises that the past, no matter how depressing and confining it was has had a significant and integral influence on the present and will have on the future.

Three important Drabblean themes emerge in these novels: the importance of the past and familial influences on one's individual development (post-war trends were that people often left the `alien north' to seek their `fortunes' in the more affluent South): escape from family was often paralleled with a rejection of the Northern landscape with its geographical bleakness and concomitant lack of emotional warmth in the people of that area: escaping from this environment and the strong past familial ties do not naturally lead to unadulterated happiness for the protagonists. Their social and personal adjustments are often tortuous and painful, making it difficult for them to form successful relationships and the influence of the past on present circumstances cannot easily be discounted. Also the uncomfortable reality of approaching middle-age and the resulting physical discomforts are openly discussed by the protagonists.

Fortunately, Drabble's perceptions are not totally pessimistic and she deals with her themes with ironic humour and a skilful and subtle awareness of our common human weaknesses.

The world is too much with us: late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers:
For this for everything, we are out of tune

(Wordsworth: Miscellaneous Sonnets, 1815).

Chapter 4

Challenging patriarchy

The important issue to be considered in this chapter is how Drabble alters her perspective in The Ice Age (IA) and The Middle Ground (MG) as she deals with wider social issues, but colours her observations with a subtext which is strongly critical of male hegemony (IA), and which deconstructs the ideological assumptions of feminism (MG). The main themes that Drabble develops through these texts and will be discussed in this chapter are the worthiness of new versus old value systems: the importance of home and family life in any social system and the different roles which each gender adopts in creating, preserving or destroying social structures. What also will be emphasised is Drabble's unique ability to examine something so acceptably familiar and to question its power base. We accept male entrepreneurs becoming powerful and making decisions about the structures of our world. Drabble questions their credibility and sees this power as a destructive rather than a constructive force in the way in which society functions(IA).

Similarly, in The Middle Ground Drabble makes some unfashionable (for that time), but pertinent comments on the progress of the feminist movement. She herself had written books about the condition of women long before `feminism' emerged as a strong movement in the late nineteen sixties. Drabble's special skill at placing things in perspective will be examined as she describes the dichotomy of Kate Armstrong's life: she has a successful career but is less than successful in the management of her personal life. Again Drabble's ability to distance herself from the emotional moment, the instant enthusiasm is evidenced as she deconstructs much of feminist ideology in her attempt to write the truth about contemporary women's lives. Hence her sensitivity to social and gender issues will be discussed as she centres her narrative around a failed male entrepreneur (Anthony Keating: IA) and a disillusioned female journalist (Kate Armstrong: MG), who writes about women's issues.

The title of the first text to be considered, The Ice Age, is already indicative of the personal unhappiness and political turmoil against which the novel is set. The chilling metaphor embodied in the title of the novel

evokes in the reader expectations of barrenness and emptiness. Drabble explains the title as being `shorthand for economic depression, where everything is frozen, including wages' (in Gussow, 1977:40). However, she does not want The Ice Age to be read by outsiders as a portrait of England going into decline but rather she wishes `to place England's problems in some larger context' (in Milton, 1978:49). Hansen (in Rose 1985:152) maintains that `many critics have maintained a puzzled distance from this chilling book' and Rose (1985:152) herself considers that many of the female characters in the novel `accept and accede to the male point of view'. Fox-Genovese (1979:234-248) sees the culmination of Drabble's `increasingly harsh repudiation of female being', as a disquieting element which is being introduced into her work and she further considers it as an unambiguous refusal on her part to deal with `the womanliness with which she no longer chooses to identify'. Creighton (1985:99) asserts that `the central issues of free will and determinism, chance and destiny remain unresolved'.

Thus critics have generally been dismissive about the novel and perhaps have not given enough attention to its subtext (especially Rose and Fox-Genovese) which concerns the contrast between male and female values. What is presented is a strong dichotomy between old and new value systems, and this is manifested through the different social groupings, life-style, and the lives of characters who are socially and economically mobile. Against a backdrop of personal unhappiness and political turmoil, man is helpless against fate and circumstances. Drabble broadens her canvas to include a chilling indictment of the economic climate in Britain, but within the fabric of the novel she is strongly aware of the contrast between male and female values. For her the female characters have to deal with the chaos men have made of the world. They support the strength of family and moral worth but they are embattled against alien principles and a destructive value system.

Drabble's earlier female protagonists are solipsistic and self-reflexive, unaffected by contemporary economic and political issues. Even Frances Wingate (RG), sophisticated traveller and successful professional, is introspective and self-searching: she is interested in her own individual health and happiness. Drabble now presents a grim montage of England: a depressing canvas on which the characters can paint the portraits of their

lives. The world is an alien place as `over the country depression lay like fog' (IA:62) and `a huge icy fist with large cold fingers, was squeezing and chilling the people of Britain, that great and puissant nation, slowing down their blood, locking them into mobility, fixing them in a solid stasis, like fish in a frozen river' (IA:63). The images are suggestive of a debilitating coldness and inertia sweeping the nation. The affluence of the sixties has changed to the austerity and economic decline of the seventies.

Drabble dwells on the ills of the nation and expounds, through Alison and Kitty, the main thesis of the novel. To them the family and community are important and traditional values should be preserved. Both face tremendous challenges and hardships in their lives: Alison has no strong familial ties as she and her sister, Rosemary, do not have a close relationship and she struggles to communicate with her elder daughter, Jane. Alison and Anthony's relationship seems to be fraught with constant tension and mutual unfulfilment. Neither wants complete commitment.

Throughout the novel Alison functions as a commentator on English society, its economy, its struggle to maintain its pride as a nation; all the great things which England has typified in the past are being eroded and Anthony and Len are contributing to this supposed new order which to Alison is merely destructive and unproductive.

Generally, critics are quick to seize on Drabble's concentration on the rise and fall of the male protagonist, Anthony Keating, the self-made man who has to come to terms with his own failure. Sadler aptly summarises Anthony's dilemma. He has to decide `what to do after success turns into failure' (Sadler, 1986:101). Little is said of the importance of Alison who is one of Drabble's most poignant female characters. Throughout the novel Anthony's values and Alison's are in conflict. She in no way accepts and accedes to the male point of view, as Rose purports, but subtly and constantly criticises and undermines everything which Anthony thinks is of value. As a parallel to her criticism of Anthony there is her continual commentary on the state of the nation: a nation and environment which Len and Anthony support and have helped to build. Len and Anthony have supposedly contributed to a new order, a new England with modern buildings and unprecedented technological advances: however, their entrepreneurial adventures and dangerous gambles have ended in

their financial and moral downfall. Their so called new and vital sense of enterprise was no more than self-aggrandizement and a selfish desire to make a quick profit.

Alison is an important commentator on the actions of both Anthony and Len. She is a lonely, marginalised figure: physically, she is extremely attractive with a frail and haunting beauty: `She was dark with one of those pale, oval, sad, soft, expressive faces that are typically English as the English rose: refined, delicate, slightly but not uneasily withdrawn' (IA:37). Her moral values are sound but her insurmountable dilemma is that she is helpless against circumstances: nowhere is the metaphor of imprisonment applied more poignantly and significantly than to the circumstances of Alison's life. She is the only one who is given no mental or physical parole.

The metaphor of imprisonment permeates the novel. Anthony is imprisoned at High Rook, recovering from a heart attack: he feels confined and helpless, deliberating on the reasons for his failure in the property market. He has become accustomed to being `a restless Londoner' (IA:39) and he hates being trapped either mentally or physically. He humorously recalls an early moment of realisation of self-knowledge when he unwittingly locked himself in the lavatory of a seaside hotel in Normandy: all he feels is `deep inert boredom' (IA:40). Mental freedom is as important as physical space. Len Wincobank and Jane Murray are physically imprisoned: Len for fraudulent deals in the property market and Jane because she was involved in a car accident where two people were killed: she is waiting to be charged in a Walachian prison. Alison is trapped by her responsibility towards her handicapped child, Molly, and Kitty Friedmann is confined in hospital recovering from the amputation of her foot. She and her husband, Max had been involved in an IRA bombing incident in a London restaurant, where, ironically, they had been celebrating their ruby wedding, and Max had been killed. Kitty is thus trapped by circumstances over which she has no control and is unwittingly a pawn and prisoner in the wider network of international politics.

Kitty Friedmann and Alison Murray symbolise the preservation of family, order and community in a harsh world as opposed to the search for

individual power which Len and Anthony embark upon. Anthony considers as his finest achievement the purchase of a gasometer, abandoned by the gas board and to him radiant with significance: it gives him `the most profound joy' (IA:32). To him it has great aesthetic appeal and a haunting beauty and `it would take upon itself the delicate palest blue against a slate dark background. It was a work of art' (IA:32). To Anthony the gasometer has more personal significance than the cathedral he gazed at outside his window when he was a child. The cathedral symbolises the world that Anthony has left behind: his conversion is of a different sort and he is not to change until he is on the road to Krusograd prison. Only then can he admit that `I might as well accept that I belong to the world that has gone, reared in the shelter of a cathedral built to a faith that I have sometimes wished I could share, educated in ideals of public service which I have sometimes wished I could fulfil, a child of a lost empire' (IA:259). Meanwhile he discards the world of the `liberal intellectual' for that of the capitalist entrepreneur.

When Anthony interviews Len Wincobank, a property tycoon, for a television programme, he is attracted to Wincobank's different and dynamic world. Suddenly, Anthony knows which career direction to take. In partnership with Peters they buy their first site and launch themselves onto the property market and for Anthony this new venture is both exciting and rewarding. London now becomes a `dense and lively forest of possibilities' (IA:31). Soon Anthony identifies totally with the contemporary world and its values and he considers himself `a modern man, an operator, at one with the spirit of the age' (IA:34).

This dichotomy between old and new value systems is portrayed through the life-styles of different characters portrayed in the novel. Within the ambit of Anthony's past people like Linton Hancox and Mike Morgan are almost caricatured and considered as having values and skills which are no longer acceptable to a new technological and more enterprising age.

Also there is a strong intertextual link between Shakespeare's patriotic words in Richard II when John of Gaunt expounds on England as `this precious isle set in a silver sea', compared to England in the seventies which has lost all of its greatness. Now England is like a fortress preparing to be invaded by destructive forces such as `the noxious oily

tides of fatigue and contempt that washed insistently against her shores' (IA:215). The glory and greatness of the island power is a remnant of the past.

Anthony is now learning to cope with the reality of losing the empire that he and Len have built and destroyed: they are suffering from the effects of their combined hubris and immorality. The novel has important comments to make about a society in moral and economic transition. The failure of Anthony and Len reflects Drabble's critical attitude to their values, which are ephemeral and without substance. Added to Anthony's personal failure is a general mood of pessimism which is permeating the nation, as `there was no rational explanation for the sense of alarm, panic and despondency which seemed to flow loose in the atmosphere of England. There was no common cause for all those terrible things. Or if there was Anthony had not yet grasped it' (IA:12). Kitty Friedmann aptly sums up the feeling of the age when she writes to Anthony that `these are terrible times we live in' (IA:10) as she agonises, recovering in hospital and mourning the death of her husband, Max.

Anthony is looking back `on a terrible year, a terrible world' (IA:18). Even London is portrayed as diseased and decaying: the drinking water is contaminated compared to the pure, free flowing stream of water of the country. England is portrayed as old-fashioned and out of date. Len Wincobank, in Scratby prison, muses on his past and considers England as `shabby, lazy, unambitious, complacently high-minded when it so chose' (IA:52).

Perhaps Drabble hopes for a more caring and less materialistic society: one whose values are based, in contrast to what is implied by the title The Ice Age, on humanitarianism and old-fashioned trust. Alison and Kitty echo this message and Drabble channels the main thrust of her thesis through these two characters. Kitty remains resilient through the support of her family. Alison has no strong familial ties to give her support and she battles to maintain the relationships she has. Alison and Kitty have to face tremendous difficulties and hardships but they do not lose their traditional values when dealing with difficult and unpredictable tragedies which are part of their lives. They are unlike Anthony and Len who are

swept along on a whirlwind of change and an initial wave of euphoric financial success.

Thus, two of the most important issues which dominate Drabble's oeuvre recur strongly in this novel. Firstly, for Drabble the unwritten and unvoiced power of women's values as opposed to those of the empowered patriarchal system is displayed through the ironic contrast between the value system of Anthony and Len and Alison and Kitty. Secondly, Kitty's world centres around the security of home and family, a powerful Drabblean motif. Emma Evans (GY), Rose Vassilou (NE), Kate Armstrong (MG), and Liz Headleand (RW) all celebrate the community of family and consider it an important element in their lives. There is a strong intertextual link between Drabble's `celebration' of family through `the party' as there is in Woolf's Mrs Dalloway. Kitty, Kate and Liz acknowledge family and friendships in this way.

For Kitty the world is becoming an increasingly alien place and she withdraws more and more into her familiar world of home and family to feel secure. Similarly Alison becomes a spokesman for the preservation of standards and voices her fears for the future. For Alison `felt herself to be one of the last generation to remember what the good had been: it would all be forgotten. She would not like to trust her future to people like Jane' (IA:93). Alison's daughter is moody, difficult and to Alison seems to be uncaring towards her retarded sister Molly. Unfortunately, to Alison, she is merely a product of her times `reared in an age and an environment, where black comedy was considered chic, where defects, long tenderly exempt from mockery, had become legitimate targets, where clever young men cracked jokes about the blind, the deaf, the limbless, the speechless: she was a child of the times' (IA:97).

Through Jane, Drabble again criticises contemporary society:the expectation of respect and a sense of common values between generations no longer exists. Drabble is reflecting the `youthful rebellion' which typifies the post-war generation. Alison is left to bear guilt in her familial relationships: she feels guilty because she is so much more attractive than her sister Rosemary, and she withdraws from the world once she has given birth to a retarded daughter, Molly. This is the burden she has to bear for the rest of her life: it almost seems to be a payment for

her beauty and for Rosemary's cancer. Similarly, she has to bear the guilt of Jane's resentment towards Molly and the double burden of her reticence for she did not chastise Jane enough for being rude to Molly. To Alison, Jane is part of a new and selfish generation, totally self-absorbed and uncaring.

Interwoven with Alison's record of her present, personal unhappiness are her observations about England and its declining economic situation. Once she is in Walachia to see Jane, she can comment on England from an outsider's point of view. The days of England's power as an empire builder are long past and people outside England have turned on the nation in the past few years. `England was a safe mangey old lion now: anyone could tweak her tail. Malice and justice united, to persecute the once so prosperous, once so arrogant, once so powerful of nations, the nation on whose empire the sun has never set. Powerless, teased, angry, impotent, the old country muttered and protested and let itself be mocked. England in its death throes, worn out, clapped out, occasionally lashing out' (IA:93).

Similarly, during her visit to Northam, Alison[1] becomes an observer and commentator on the decay of urban society. To Alison the houses seem uninhabitable and all the dereliction is totally alien and hostile. Garbage lies all around, pollution permeates the atmosphere, the so-called new development of Northam is ill-designed and ugly. Her feelings echo those of other protagonists where part of their quest for self-fulfilment entails a complete escape from the harsh Northern landscape of their childhood. Drabble again accentuates the alien nature of the North of England, as like Clara Maugham (JG:1967) she felt the need to escape from its bleakness. Alison feels as if she is occupying Len and Anthony's world: this is where their energies have been directed, to construct a `new' but to her inferior world. Both the concrete tunnel and the dying dog seem to symbolise this inhumane and uncaring nature of our contemporary environment.

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1 Like Evelyn Stennett in MG who records her disgust at the decaying refuse and the ugliness of her surroundings as she is trapped in a traffic jam on her way to Finsbury Park. Similarly, when Alison arrives at Northam station she remarks on the vast accumulations of rubbish dumped there and she feels that `the spirit had gone out of the country'(IA: 166).

Through Alison, Drabble subtly conveys her social manifesto. Her plea is for a caring society, one where those who are physically or mentally handicapped can be helped by the state. Society is uncaring and dominated by the Len Wincobanks of this world. As Alison aptly remarks, `She could not understand society. She could not understand how normal people, with their eyes and their ears, and their limbs all functioning, could refuse to the less well-endowed, a largesse, a sumptuous recompense' (IA:154). Alison feels `If Britain went down, she would go with it. At least it had tried' (IA:93).

When Alison and Kitty meet at Kitty's house in St John's Wood, a comfortable upper middle class suburb, Alison is immediately aware of the encompassing warmth and effusive spirit of Kitty's extended family. The importance of the ensuing vignette contrasts the insecurity Alison feels with Kitty's ability to gain strength from her strong support system, echoing a strong Drabblean premise that there is strength in the family. If family ties are broken then there are unpleasant and unhappy repercussions for the individuals concerned.

This family meeting, inconsequential though it may seem, embodies the importance of the ordinary, trivial occurrences of everyday life. However, this is the essence of Drabble's authorial distance and ironic comment. Alison is strongly aware of each individual's personal imprisonment at that particular time: as she lies in Kitty's bath, she `thought of Jane in prison: of poor Anthony, imprisoned with Molly in his remote eyrie. Kitty had chosen the non-self: she, herself, had chosen a non-self: Anthony and Len had been themselves. Was that something to do with the difference between men and women? Surely not' (IA:157).

Kitty, even though she has lost Max, still has a strong family support system and she feels secure in their love and attention, while Alison's family is divided and unhappy, leaving her permanently anxious, physically ill and depressed.

Anthony and Alison are reunited but Alison is suffering from deep-seated depression, while Anthony is learning to accept his financial failure. He admits that `he, like the nation, was living beyond his means, on borrowed time and borrowed money, and he as the nation ought to be,

was perfectly prepared to accept a lower standard of living, to live quietly, and work harder' (IA:175). To Alison the state of England exacerbates her unhappiness. As she has been away she can regard England differently and she is appalled at what she sees. She considers Anthony no better than an escapist and Len Wincobank as corrupt. The country is filthy and developers have destroyed the beauty of old England in the name of modern development. She does not like where she has been, for in Krusograd `They don't have bail or proper trials, or Tampax or anything civilized. But then it probably never was very nice there and it used to be nice here' (IA:176).

Alison craves close family ties: she knows what she wants but her unhappiness with her sister Rosemary, her inability to communicate with her daughter Jane, the instability she feels with her relationship with Anthony leave her feeling guilty and helpless. Life has dealt her a heavy blow when it comes to relationships. Her first marriage has been a failure and she is now burdened with Molly.

A new note, still ironic and ambivalent, creeps into the novel when the discovery of North Sea Oil is brought into the fictive world of Drabble's characters: could this be the start of a better economic future for Britain? Anthony wonders what the implications will be for him and for the country. Would Britain remain rooted in the past or did this mean the start of a new, more dynamic future for the country's economy? Also what was in it for Anthony himself? Would he be `A man of the past, the present, the future' (IA:201). Now he is galvanised into action; he sells his house and the Riverside scheme and knows that he will emerge financially unscathed from the transaction. However, his behaviour becomes aberrant and he seems bent on self-destruction. Alison can more easily sympathise with the wild and feckless Anthony than the cold, calculating financier and entrepreneur. She tries to bring some semblance of order to his affairs and is horrified when Giles Peters wants to invest again.

It is Maureen who benefits most from her relationship with Len. Neither she nor Len conforms to society's rules but their rebelliousness works for them: Maureen succumbs to the charms of her architect and Len resorts to violence and breaks a prisoner's nose. Maureen is glad to be relieved of

the responsibility both of Len and his property. She feels there is hope for Anthony as he is not as deeply embroiled as Len and she feels their relationship could survive through it. Maureen's needs are simple and she tries to be with people who will give her emotional and physical satisfaction. She has, in a way, used Len and is now independent and ready to move on to the next relationship. He has given her independence and confidence and she can now undertake a course in business management purposefully and confidently.

At an allusive level one can suggest that Wordsworth's philosophy of `spots of sorrow spots of joy' permeates the next phase of Alison and Anthony's relationship. After two months of heavy drinking Anthony wants to be released from his partnership and there follows a quiet period when Alison and Anthony follow their own quiet pursuits. Alison philosophises on this period of her life: `Time, she came to think, is not consequential: it occurs simultaneously, and distributed through it in meaningless chronology are spots of sorrow, spots of joy. We combine them as we will, as we can best bear them. We make our own ordering. An undue concentration of sorrow is due to bad selection, or undue fortitude, and calm before the storm is chosen by the spirit, for its own sustenance. Or as a warning, like the pink sky before the darkness; who can say?' (IA:241).

Alison's philosophy is pessimistic and fatalistic: this happiness cannot last and of course it does not. The subsequent John le Carré sequence of events is an unusual Drabblean innovation. Drabble herself maintains in an interview with Barbara Milton (1978:49):

> For quite a long time I thought I would have a reasonably happy or peaceful ending and then it just didn't seem plausible. The property market had quieted down but trouble had just broken out somewhere else instead. While I was writing it, I had a Lebanese friend staying with me who was a lecturer at the University of Beirut. He left Beirut because of the civil war. I thought his descriptions were very curious. He didn't seem too alarmed by the violence and at the same time seemed worried about his job and when he'd be able to do back. I see this as perfectly reasonable, but the job seemed such an irrelevant thing compared to the fact that he was lucky to be alive. It was talking to him that made me feel I ought to put England's problems in some larger context.

Anthony's experiences in Krusograd seem to be an attempt to bring Anthony `to heel', as subsequent events are dramatic and overwhelming. He feels he has no control over his fate and it is when he is totally helpless that Anthony finds God again. Clegg himself, because of his preferred sexual proclivities, seems to Anthony to be a corrupt product of the old `Oxford' school. Anthony feels that nothing has taken the place of Empire. His generation tried to change everything but has replaced it with nothing new. He maintains that `Nothing had changed. Where was the new classless enterprising future of Great Britain? In jail with Len Wincobank, mortgaged to the hilt with North Sea Oil' (IA: 253) and Anthony himself feels that he is `nothing but weed on the tide of history' (IA:253).

Symbolically, it is on his approach to the prison where Jane is incarcerated that Anthony feels `I do not know how a man can do without God' (IA:258). Anthony, away from his accustomed environment, has come to terms with the sort of existential life he has led in the past and it is ironic that he should end up imprisoned but amazingly accepting of his fate. At Plesti he had grown introspective and resigned to his imprisonment. The pheasant dying at the opening of the novel gains sympathy from Anthony. At the end of his second year in prison he sees a rare bird, a wall creeper, which to Anthony is a symbol of hope. Drabble has frequently presented the spirit as a bird: `The spirit of a person is like a bird trapped in his body. The cage is the body -definitely a Platonic notion. Definitely dualistic' (Drabble in Milton, 1978:50). Anthony has gained self-knowledge. He is reading the philosophy of Boethius which embodies the idea that Boethius `undertook to justify the ways of God to men, to explore philosophically the mysteries of the divine will as it is manifested in the order, and apparent disorder of temporal events' (IA:260). Anthony has learned to submit gracefully to his fate and the curtailment of his freedom as a result of undeserved imprisonment, by reminding himself that whatever happens to the individual has been willed by God and is for the good of the whole.

Anthony and England have survived, though each has to undergo individual challenges and hardships. Through suffering physical imprisonment Anthony has gained a mental peace and freedom. It is the fate of Alison which is the most ambivalent and unenviable: for Alison's

imprisonment continues. Motherhood for her will be constantly and achingly demanding.

Sadler (1986) considers this ending weak while Rose (1985) would like to see a more definite critique of patriarchy through Drabble's female characters. I maintain that Alison, Kitty and to a lesser extent, Maureen represent the main thesis of the novel which is a plea for the continuity of community and family. Kitty will remain resilient as she has a strong family to support her: Maureen is clever enough to manufacture her own future contentment but Alison, although she has strong values and is always in the background criticising the patriarchal system so poorly mismanaged by Anthony and Len, cannot find happiness for herself. However, Alison's imprisonment is much more long-term than Anthony's can ever be. Perhaps she is the symbol of womanhood and what women have to bear within the confines of patriarchy. Drabble's mood is bitter and unrelenting in IA and through her female characters she accentuates the struggle women have to maintain their humanitarian values in a male dominated world.

While Alison (IA) is portrayed as a marginalised figure, evoking our sympathy but not really our respect or admiration as she is largely ineffectual in the novel, Kate Armstrong dominates the text of The Middle Ground (1980) and we are both amused and impressed by her strong personality and her wry sense of humour. In MG Drabble focuses her attention more clearly on women's issues in the eighties. Feminist writers were perhaps expecting Drabble to write a more boldly feminist tract at this critical time in the history of feminism, but Drabble chooses her own individual way of upholding women's opinions and attitudes in the framework of a hostile world. She deconstructs feminist ideology in a wry and understated way and what emerges is a strong validation of a woman's right to withold her individuality, given the exigencies of a rather uncompromising and difficult world.

In the concluding paragraph of her critical study The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures (1980:129) Rose applauds Drabble's `feminist vision' and wants her to recognize that `having one's cake and eating it too is a barmecide feast' (1980:129). Rose (1980:129) wants Drabble to produce in her next novel `an unequivocally feminist blueprint'

(1980:129). In fact MG is an antithesis of what Rose requested as in this novel Drabble satirises the whole feminist movement and expresses women's disenchantment with the progress of the feminist cause in an oblique but incisive way. Drabble herself comments on the content of the novel as follows:

> It's about the state of London rather than the state of Britain. It's very much a London novel. It's also about feminism slightly and it's about maintaining the middle ground - which is just what Britain is quite good at doing - not being pushed around into political or sexist extremism, yet not rejecting new light. I think feminism is a new light and my character is struggling with her feeling both that it is a new light and that it is being betrayed in some fashion. It's more about being female than The Ice Age (1977) was. It's got no plot; it's very much a texture novel. Because London life is so immediate and rapidly changing I wanted to write about the texture of it (Drabble in Todd, 1985:176-177).

The following should be read as a reflection on the contemporary sociocultural background and Drabble's novelistic response to it. In MG the world is seen through the eyes of Kate Armstrong, a feminist journalist, who herself is coming to terms with the demands of mid-life, a failed marriage, an unplanned pregnancy from an extra-marital affair and a feeling that she is at the crossroads of her life: leading to where and to what? Why is Kate's disillusionment so predominant? For Kate there is a distinct dichotomy between the reality of women's lives and the sort of articles she writes about them. Kate's disenchantment with her own particular set of circumstances exacerbates her disillusionment at having to write about women.

In fact, Drabble reflects the dissension that has been growing within the ranks of the feminist movement at the beginning of the eighties. From the late nineteen-sixties the women's movement had grown in influence and charisma. What were the reasons for the growth of the feminist movement? In England women over the age of thirty had been able to vote from 1918 and in 1928 universal suffrage was finally introduced. Women were soon to realise that in a man's world women were often paid very little money for menial and supposedly `female' work. The nineteenth century idea of women being the weaker sex but being finer and nobler morally than men was still prevalent. Freud asks the question `What does a woman want?' (Freud in Jones, 1953-1957:11,468) but

never asked her what she wanted, merely told her what she should want. As Figes (1970:142) states, `The more strongly patriarchal a society, the more there will be a tendency for a mystique of womanhood, for women to be regarded as something of an enigma'. So nineteenth century paradigms lingered and women were soon to realise that the vote did not necessarily mean economic freedom. It was the practical demands of the two World Wars that had forced many women out of the kitchen into the workplace.

After the Second World War, however, there was a great shift towards the family as security: the family was idealised, the hearth and home became a man's refuge against the exigencies of a harsh, cruel world. In practical terms there just weren't that many jobs available to women and daycare facilities for children, which had been provided for the children of working mothers during the War, were now no longer financed by the State. The message to most women was that they must return to the domestic and supposedly feminine role which was rightfully theirs.

In America there was a post-war economic boom forging the ideal of `The American Dream' with low home loans available and people moving to the suburbs. Women were often uprooted several times and had to live in strange places to follow the development of their husbands' careers. In the middle-classes, male and female roles were usually distinctly stereotyped with the man as the breadwinner and the woman as his support both domestically and professionally. This stereotypical role-playing did not suit everyone. Some men must have found the stress of striving for promotion and bearing the financial burden of the family too onerous, while total domestic dedication, which often meant leading an isolated and confined life certainly frustrated many women. In The Feminine Mystique (1963), Friedan relates her sense of frustration at being a total housewife and mother, born to serve her family without having any real identity of her own. Women around the world empathised with Friedan's dilemma: her whole premise was based on the fact that woman's energy was subsumed in domestic tasks and her message generated a great deal of emotional reaction from men and women everywhere.

The general mood of the nineteen-sixties was one of protest: women joined the ranks of marchers in an attempt to gain equal rights in the workplace and the home and the movement spread from America to Europe. Criticism was directed at the `women's libbers' as they soon came to be known for their methods of protest were often too strident and overtly antagonistic towards men, for most women. Many found their methods of attention-seeking and protest too extreme. However, these were merely the outward signs of what was essentially a serious movement trying to better women's lives.

What was important about the movement at this stage was that women's consciousness was being raised and women were becoming aware of a unifying female condition, and by sharing their ideas they felt a sense of partnership as women. Weldon (in Neustatter, 1989:20) talks of her early isolation as a housewife and mother in the early nineteen sixties and relates how:

> I lived a conventional life with a husband and a baby, in the suburbs, and it always struck me as curious that although there were lots of us in the same situation we never talked to each other, never intimately, only on the price of sugar level. Then if a husband came in, the woman who didn't 'belong' would immediately go away because somehow women weren't supposed to talk to each other for fear of marital disloyalty. Men felt very threatened by women talking. So as well as competitiveness between men and women - and that was very real, as was the flashing of the wedding ring by women who had them at those who hadn't, there was fear that one's man might be upset by too close a friendship and then, horror of horrors, you might lose him. So women were very isolated in this situation, and I remember feeling it was all very odd and weird.

At the end of the decade women were talking to each other, as Weldon (in Neustatter, 1989:20) states:

> Suddenly there was a sense of sisterhood, a feeling of women actually liking each other. I only went to the group twice but it was enough to make me realize the sense of communality with other women which could exist and from this I went on to write about issues to do with women. It was a wonderful, exhilarating sense of saying things which were unsaid. I felt I was speaking not for other women but about things which concerned them.

As Neustatter (1989:20) summarises, `Books such as Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1971) [1981], Eva Figes's Patriarchal Attitudes

(1970) and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) have been absolutely crucial in drawing many women towards feminism'. As the nineteen-sixties drew to a close `there was a sense of something revolutionary happening. For women who saw this new feminism as important and right it was a time of hope' (1989:23). Thus Kate Armstrong (MG) would be in the vanguard of journalistic writing about women's issues, and her innovative copy would be eagerly read by a female public anxious to engage in examining all aspects of their lives as women.

At that time women were banding together in consciousness groups all over the country and forming national bodies to co-ordinate their activities. Soon the movement focused on specific areas of `women's work'. Oakley wrote Housewife (1976) [1982], and commented on the important role unpaid labour contributed to the functioning of economic systems. Feminist groups researched and revealed the incidence of rape and wife battering: they supported the pro-abortion movement on the premise that women should make decisions about their own bodies and criticism of pornography was also instituted. After all this frantic activity why then did the movement lose its momentum and energy?

Although great practical progress was made in the field of women's health and welfare, the movement lost its sense of unity when women realised their equality was threatened because of race and class distinctions. And as Neustatter (1989:57) summarises, `But where the seventies had been the heady days of optimism, of group activity, and a sense of communality at the shared feelings about a women's lot, the Eighties were the days when women were looking far more critically at what feminism was about'.

It is against this background that MG should be seen as Drabble's subtle and ironic comment on the development of the feminist movement and the sense of disenchantment experienced by many of its supporters. By presenting Kate Armstrong as a journalist who is despondent about the direction of the feminist cause Drabble captures the mood within the movement at the beginning of the eighties.

The opening scene of the novel is a clever vignette which humorously and deftly deals with Kate's attitude to feminism. In her conversation with Hugo, Kate maintains, `I'm as bloody sick of bloody women as you are, I'm sick to death of them, I wish I'd never invented them, but they just won't go away because I've got tired of them. Will they?' (MG:1988) and a more telling point `every single bad thing that's happened to me happened to me because I'm a woman. There's no point in pretending it's not so' (MG:11). Drabble has introduced one of the major themes of the novel, the dichotomy between what Kate was writing about and the pattern of her own life as a woman: the dream of the seventies becoming the reality of the eighties. Kate's character is drawn lightly and humorously, as Drabble wants us to laugh at the ironies of life: her depiction of Kate is clever and credible. Kate considers herself a traitor to the feminist cause, much as her father reacted to the unions `That it was a good cause in the old days. and that's treachery, isn't it? I've sold out like my Dad. I thought I was a revolutionary, but I'm not' (MG:12). Kate thinks that perhaps things are becoming too easy for women and there is nothing left for them to fight for.

Kate does not have all the answers and she knows `At times she feels a sense of womanly solidarity, for the things that have happened to her - marriage, children, love, divorce, illness, ageing parents, lost love, rejection - are the things that happen to many, if not most people. At other times she feels a giddy solitude, and a sense of strength from this solitude '(MG:16). Like Clara Maugham, Kate has progressed from a narrow and confining lower middle-class background where there is nothing `more cramping, painful and pointless than the life of the lower middle-class family aspiring to be better than it is'(MG:21) to her present day comfortable social and economic position.

Drabble presents Kate's past as a feminine as opposed to a feminist blueprint of what behaviour was expected from her as a girl growing up in her particular set of circumstances. Her mother, like Belle in French's Her Mother's Daughter (1987), is trapped in an agoraphobic world. Kate knows she could easily follow her mother's example if she should remain trapped in an anachronistic timewarp, enmeshed in a world as confined as any nineteenth century middle-class woman.

Drabble describes the narrowness of Kate's experience as a child and a teenager, growing up in Romley Fourways. She has to be strong to counteract criticism of her father's trade and her brother's unpopularity. She is used to an insidious type of `sexist conditioning' and she lacks confidence in her abilities, taking for granted that she will have poor mathematical skills. She grows to be rebellious and over-confident, hiding her inadequacies behind a rebellious facade: `Was she angry, in those days to be a woman? Not at all, she was delighted, of that at least she is still certain' (MG:25).

Once she is in London, Stuart's family welcomes Kate into their midst and like Clelia with the Denham family, she enjoys the warm, ambience of their world. Also Kate's progress in the world of women's journalism is nothing less than sensational: she is part of the heady days of sixties feminist writing. She discards her alcoholic boss, is promoted and works her way through magazine editorial work to features, and her present day position of security where she has a column of her own which is published in one of the Sunday newspapers: she also has sufficient well-paid freelance work to make her standard of living very good indeed.

At the same time, she copes with her marriage, pregnancies and a husband who envies her her success. Stuart's career flounders while Kate's burgeons as she starts to write new women's pieces before they became fashionable, `sharing her pregnancies and exhaustions with a shocked and enthralled public' (MG:39). Kate's lower-middle-class origins `onto which she grafted the language and opinions of the artistic and articulate middle class, proved an invaluable asset: she could communicate with a large audience...'. She was unashamedly a women's writer but women read her eagerly. `She created a price for herself and set a good price on it' (MG:39).

Drabble is thus setting the reader up to expect a typical feminist `blueprint' but as the novel progresses the reader becomes aware of Drabble's strong protest against rigid, ideologically-based feminism. Drabble is not prescriptive and does not provide answers: once more she teases the reader into an awareness of what seems to have gone wrong with `the system' but she is not prepared to forward any solutions.

Kate serves as a role model for ambitious women of the seventies. However, Kate's marriage fails and like Frances in The Realms of Gold (1975) Kate bears most of the responsibility for her family. Drabble explores the theme of a failed marriage: Stuart has an affair and Kate begins her affair with Ted Stennett, the husband of her best friend, Evelyn Stennett, who is Hugo's cousin. Kate can only see the irony and humour in the end of one relationship and the beginning of another. She is brittle and artificial in her reactions and really appears quite unemotional about her relationship with men: `Adultery itself is farcical, and there was a lot of it around in those days...'(MG:55).

In fact, Kate felt extremely fulfilled in this exciting period of her life as a successful and satisfied mother and journalist, working and being a success on her own. She certainly `had it all' and fulfilled the image of the type of woman she had been writing about. Indeed, `She felt she had solved all the problems of being a woman alone' (MG:58).

However, as the women's movement gains credibility and momentum so Kate begins to feel dissatisfaction with her professional achievements and personal relationships. She begins to regret her lack of formal education, tries unsuccessfully to compensate for this and seeks satisfaction in a career change. Women's issues become boring and uninteresting for her, especially as she feels that perhaps working class men's lives are far worse than women's. Women might be surrounded by `shit and string beans' (MG:61) every day, but men like her father, have had to deal with sewage all their lives and their work is physically exhausting and demanding. Kate has lost enthusiasm for things she thought she really cared about and sadly states `I don't care any more, whatever has happened to me?' (MG:60).

As a parallel to Kate's growing malaise and disinterestedness in her profession is Britain's developing economic crisis - `The Welfare State itself, and all the caring professions, seemed to be plunging into a dark swamp of uncertainty, self-questioning, economic crisis' (MG:61). The metaphor of The Ice Age (1978) continues. Drabble cares about women and she cares about society. As she states `Equality and egalitarianism preoccupy me constantly and not very hopefully' (Drabble in Vinson, 1972:373). Minogue (1988:39) challenges Drabble's hopes for a more

equal distribution of wealth as too simplistic `to equalise the material things people enjoy must involve severing all connection between human conduct on the one hand and material things on the other'. He considers her ideas as too impractical and thinks that `all Miss Drabble really intends by her egalitarianism is that everybody should live (oysters and all) in Hampstead'. Walden (in Encounter, 1988:40), writing in `The Sunday Times' further maintains that Drabble `doesn't identify downwards. Oh yes, she feels for the broken, timid, passive dependants in society. But she does not examine the possibilities of self-improvement because her ideology does not assign it much of a role in life. Which is why I think it is vital that her depressing determinism should. We can do without slavery dressed up as compassion'.

Drabble's basic caring approach to the socially deprived is nevertheless sincere as revealed in the picture she portrays of contemporary England reflecting inequalities which certainly do exist and need to be revealed and discussed.

For, the ills of an ailing urban society are the backdrop to Kate's own story. At mid-life she comes to the bleak realisation that `one would never in this life be anything else but what one was' (MG:61). Kate's general dissatisfaction permeates her relationship with Ted and because she is `restless, unhappy, self-pitying, self-absorbed' (MG:64), this feeling spreads to Ted, who was at that time involved in a hospital dispute between the staff and the unions. Kate gives up the pill and falls pregnant in mid-life: faced with the onset of physical decay, indigestion, ulcer and varicose veins, she conceives a new life. She learns that Ted has been having an affair with a Cambridge biologist so she does not tell Ted about her pregnancy and feels ambivalent about an abortion.

All her preconceived ideas about supporting `a woman's right to choose' seem to disappear and she vacillates about all the issues she had felt so strongly about in the past. However, the amniocentisis reveals that the foetus has spina bifida and an abortion is essential. After the abortion Kate embarks on a succession of meaningless affairs, feels depressed and directionless, works in a frenzied fashion at too many projects and realises that she has lost her direction in life. She reveals her desperate feelings to

Hugo who comforts her and assures her that her feelings of guilt will dissipate in time.

Two new elements enter her life and redirect her energies. She accepts an offer to make a television film contrasting the choices made by girls now leaving school with those made twenty-five years earlier when Kate was at school. Kate, like Frances (RG) must come to terms with her past and ascertain what influence it has had on her.

Secondly Mujid, an Iraqi student and the son of a woman Kate once met in hospital comes to stay. In fact the lunch at the beginning of the novel is organised by Kate to ask Hugo's advice about Mujid. Already Drabble has gone beyond the Bildungsroman where the protagonist can expect success against adversity. Drabble's ambivalence about feminism which Rose is quick to detect and wishes her to resolve is paralleled with a lack of form which critics see as a weakness. Rose (1980:32) writes `If you are able to separate the content of a novel from its form, you will find The Middle Ground fascinating' (1980:32). Broyard (1980:19) maintains `This is not the Margaret Drabble we all know', Drabble is expected to write a typical nineteenth century novel but has not. Lucas (1980:55) further asserts that `What we do get is endless and pointless trivia, which may be the stuff of life but isn't the stuff of art'. However, Drabble is exploring the texture of Kate's life which is fragmented, directionless and bound by trivial demands. The formlessness of the novel reflects Kate's uncertainty and indecisiveness about the pattern of her life. The form is suited to the theme, for all the way through questions are posed and never answered.

Now Kate has to return to Romley Fourways: she is commissioned to make a television film about women, `focusing on the choices now made by girls leaving school, five years after the Sex Discrimination Act, and contrasting them with the choices made when she was a girl twenty five years ago' (MG:81-82). Drabble's use of the journey into the past is part of Kate's own quest `to restore a sense of perspective to her life' (MG:109).

Like Frances in RG (1975) she revisits familiar places. Familiar and haunting memories are interspersed with descriptions of a new and

overriding ugliness to be seen in new buildings and their design. The gypsies are still on the river bank, and she wonders why she had moved away from the area, as she feels comfortably at home there. Fleeting visual impressions of her past, lead her to examine the tatters of her marriage: apart from the bitter recriminations, Kate realises that her outward show of confidence and nonchalance about her marriage conceal a deep hurt about the rift in the relationship.

Three symbols trigger the contrast of the past with the present: the strongest evocation of her childhood comes through the sights and smells of sewage, a symbol of waste, which she found so pleasurable when she was young. Now her boots which were expensive when new are uncomfortable and broken: a shabby symbol of the life she now leads. Similarly, when she visits her old school the smell in the stockroom is `overpoweringly suggestive' (MG:154). Everything she is connected to seems to be subject to decay. Throughout this visit Kate seeks connection between her past and the present, but she cannot find it. She questions `Was this what she had come for, was this the window, the grille through which she should escape the prison of the present into the past, where the dark spirits swam in the fast moving flood?' (MG:116). This metaphor is central to Kate's quest: it is an answer to the events of early life where all she wanted to do was to escape from her stifling environment and lead a new and exciting life. She has succeeded but she feels dissatisfied with the results: hence her search to renew her connection with the past. The ironic intertextual link between Proust's madeleines and a sewage bank, emphasises the depressing nature of her childhood: only scatological images evoke the `Remembrance of things past'.

Kate can see no connection between the child in her dull, cheap dress and the trendy, confident journalist and `her smart views and expensive boots and trendy house' (MG:160). However, her boots - once an expensive symbol of her success - are broken, and throughout the visit Kate is conscious of how uncomfortable they feel. The experience of childhood for Kate is not recalled in idyllic imagery, for to her childhood's roots were `dirty and tangled, twisted back for ever and ever, beyond all knowing. Impacted, interwoven, scrubby interlocked and fibrous, cankerous, tuberous, ancient, matted. Back in the artificial pleasure ground, the dear solitary carefully nurtured groups of saplings stood and

shivered in loneliness, straight and slim, sad and forlorn. Their roots in artificial loam, reared in artificial fibre pots, carefully separate. Tastefully arranged, fruitlessly deployed' (MG:130). Childhood for her had been a battleground and a struggle and she now regrets her insistent retrospection, repeating to herself `I should never have looked...' (MG:132).

In her research Kate discovers that the last thing women really want is to be like men and she asserts `Do we really want to see women making themselves miserable doing men's jobs, jobs that no human being could enjoy doing anyway' (MG:155). Class differences will always exist, for `Life's not fair and never will be' (MG:156).

The results of Kate's research project enable Drabble to depict dramatically how little effect the feminist movement has impacted on the working class woman. Denise will not speak out on camera against her husband: women are still battered and exploited by their husbands. She finds from her interviews that men contribute very little to looking after their children and women still think it is treacherous to criticise their husbands in public. Ironically, she fell asleep dreaming she was an Arab woman wrapped in a chandor and how safe and protected she felt wrapped in this garment which was a symbol of woman's bondage.

Unlike Frances Wingate who experiences strong familial connections when she visits her childhood home, Kate's journey into the past remains an unfulfilled quest. Now she must look to her own circle of friends and her own life for some future direction for her life. Paradoxically, throughout the time that Kate is writing about independent women, many people are relying on her for her support and help. Again Drabble emphasises that because of sexist conditioning women will always adopt this nurturing role before considering their own needs. For example when she is lunching with Hugo, Kate naturally cuts up his meat for him, and carefully spreads it with mustard. She finds a ladybird in her spinach, but laughingly admits to Hugo that `women never send food back in restaurants' (MG:7). Here Kate with her `smile full of duplicity' (MG:7) is satirising the whole idea of `sexist conditioning' and Hugo recognises her tone of self-mockery. Hugo admits that `Kate was after all relentlessly goodnatured, that was one of her problems'(MG:85).

When Mujid comes to stay he imposes on Kate's good nature and hospitality in an extremely selfish way: her social conscience and her awareness of her own privilege and security as opposed to the uncertainties of his life in the Middle East have made her feel guilty enough to offer Mujid accommodation and food. However, he is a most difficult guest and she has to conform to his eating habits, listen to his criticisms about the English way of life and generally has to upset her routine to accommodate his.

Similarly, when Kate meets a woman outside her house staring pityingly at a dying pigeon, she tries to enlist Kate's help to take care of it, to transfer the responsibility of a dying pigeon to Kate. Kate now realises that she cannot escape from the responsibility of dealing with trivial things to do with other people's lives. This is the very stuff of her life. She wonders, `Pigeons, dogs, dead babies rotting on the sea shore - is there no limit to these claims?' (MG:88).

A comic vignette which clearly satirises pretentious attitudes to theatre-going is when Kate organises a group of friends and family with dissimilar interests and backgrounds to attend a theatre preview, where the tickets are free. The play is incomprehensible, the people in Kate's party have little in common and are from widely divergent backgrounds and they all meet in the foyer to exchange their views and opinions on the quality of the production. After listening to Linda Rubenstein bemoaning her fate at being Tom's wife and considering her life as a succession of missed opportunities, Kate has to admit that `it is true that babies interrupt studies, it is true that many men have curious expectations of domestic happiness' (MG:100).

However, Kate sees herself as being detached from Linda's predicament, for she has extricated herself from marriage and taken control of her own destiny. Kate further comments on women who think they are independent and in control of their own lives but cannot escape from the domestic routine, and do not really want to. She cites the humorous example of a housewife who speaks at a consciousness-raising meeting and realises she has been obsessive about domestic chores and yet in the

next breath felt the need to rush home and warm up her husband's supper as he always burns it if left to do it on his own.

The irony of this incident is that Kate, in her next observation, wonders whether everyone is enjoying themselves, especially Mujid. She complains about her inbuilt feminine guilt `How much time I waste worrying about whether other people are enjoying themselves, you can't please everyone all the time can you?' (MG:102)

Much covert information about the feminist movement is presented through Kate's experiences and her quest for a reaffirmation of purpose in her life and much perceptive observation is made on other aspects of English life through the eyes of Kate's friends and associates. Drabble is aware of the world outside, much more now than she was with her early self-contained solipsistic heroines living in their own confined `Bird-cages'.

Drabble's humour becomes blacker and more intense when she discusses Hugo, for he was a journalist in the Middle East and had lost a hand in the fighting there. He does not want to become involved in dangerous assignments abroad: he can now enjoy writing a book at home. Patriotism, jingoism and participating in worthy political causes are not what people want these days. Non-participation and the recognition that Britain is no longer a world power are all evident in Hugo's attitude. When Hugo's artificial limb is fitted Kate and Hugo can joke about the occasion but Kate realises how little emphasis is placed on the sensitivity and emotions of the patients being treated: she knows she can write convincingly about this issue and now has further material for her work.

Mujid shows Kate the weaknesses of a so-called civilised society where the family is no longer a powerful force in people's lives. He has different attitudes to marriage, divorce and to feminism. It was as if Kate were seeing British society through Mujid's eyes. When Kate and Mujid stand on the Underground Station together, she wonders how Mujid will judge `London Today' and she tries to see it from his perspective. The waifs and strays of humanity in the station confuse Kate and she has no explanation for this flotsam and jetsam of society. Similarly, the slogans and graffiti scrawled across walls reveal derogatory political remarks,

while the advertisement she notices seems tastelessly sexist and repugnant. Kate does not explain the unexplainable to Mujid as he has not been able to comprehend the feminist graffiti adorning sexist advertisements.

Ted's wife Evelyn is a social worker and her experiences reflect the inadequate services offered by Britain's welfare system, particularly to the old and infirm. Her good-heartedness backfires when she is involved in a violent attack when Irene Crowther, whom Evelyn has been trying to help, is attacked with a bread knife by Joseph Leroy. Irene retaliates by throwing a pan of hot oil at Leroy and follows it up with a few plates and some cleaning fluid which unintentionally hits Evelyn in the face. Ted maintains that it was Evelyn's fault for interfering in Irene's complicated life and after this incident Kate again ponders on the meaninglessness of past actions, for if one did not resort to violence, nobody would even know what goes on in the relationships between the sexes.

Kate maintains that `men and women can never be close. They can hardly speak to one another in the same language. But are compelled forever to try, and therefore even in defeat there is no peace' (MG:231). Drabble accentuates the neglect and abuse prevalent in an ailing society: the structures of the Welfare State are crumbling and do not provide a strong support system. Drabble is a humanitarian and feels people should care about each other. She hopes for a more egalitarian society but realises that social and class differences will always exist.

To celebrate the basic optimistic message of the novel, Drabble ends her narrative with a party in true Mrs Dalloway fashion: to celebrate Evelyn's recovery, Mark's birthday, and Mujid and Hugo's leave-taking. Kate is still undecided about her career direction and feels the year has been static and uneventful. Kate maintains `for months I had a strange sensation, as if the world had in fact slipped, and I'd fallen off it, lost my footing, I can't explain, as though it had all tilted away from where I thought I was, and had slid away... A thought just beyond the edge of something' (MG:250).

Kate finally realises that `the past is the past' (MG:251). She is now looking to the future to what her son's generation can achieve. Mid-life is a time for reflection but it can also mean a revitalising time for new

projects and a recharging of energy and activity: Kate and Hugo are each mutually supportive.

It is as if the tree and Kate's present are symbols of our communal life and how each must rely on the other for support. The novel ends on a typically uncertain note: Kate is left to choose her dress for her party, small choices foreshadowing larger ones for that is what life is all about. However, Hugo can now point out `It is time for the next thing, whatever it may be' (MG:257).

As Sadler (1986:127) correctly observes, `Drabble is not going to take a stand on the woman question, but she gives us a virtual compendium of its issues, both pro and con in The Middle Ground' .

Drabble's earlier heroines tried to escape from their `bird-cages' to obtain their own fictional space. Creighton (1985:32) accurately summarises that `their explanations of themselves are fragmentary and sometimes clearly inadequate. Their verbalizations are often classic defences against unpleasant self-revelation'. Her treatment of theme and form are expanding: she is in `The Middle Ground' and is poised to take a new direction in her work. MG contains a certain tension between surface and meaning and this irresolution reveals an exploratory quality that draws readers into conjecture and speculation about the unarticulated, the unexamined, the unexplained. This tension is experienced by many women who are struggling to define themselves in what she has termed the `uncharted world' of modern female identity'. For

> We do not want to resemble the women of the past, but where is our future? This is precisely the question that many novels written by women are trying to answer: some in comic terms, some in tragic, some in speculative. We live in an unchartered world, as far as manners and morals are concerned, we are having to make up our morality as we go. Our subject matter is enormous, there are whole new patterns to create (Drabble, in Wandor, 1983:156).

Lodge (in Kenyon, 1988:95) correctly labels MG as an example of post-realism, as it uses many of the techniques of realism to capture the fragmentation of contemporary society. Thus, although Rose (1980:129) wanted Drabble to write `an unequivocally feminist blueprint', this is not Drabble's aim at all. What she does is to comment on `male' and

`female' differences as a mediator and a realist. Creighton's (1985:33) conviction that Drabble produces `resonant fiction which is prototypically of her time, her place, and her gender' (1985:33), accurately crystallizes Drabble's achievement in the novel.

Also Drabble herself is secure in her place as part of the tradition of women's writing. She comments that after reading Woolf's A Room of One's Own: `I felt so in sympathy with everything she said about the tradition of women's writing and where it is going. And I know that's what I'm part of'(in Firchow, 1974:114).

In these two texts Drabble has with clever contrapuntal skill explored the shortcomings of both patriarchal power and feminist ideology. She has attempted to expose the weaknesses of patriarchal structures and foreground the methods women use to make their `voice' heard. These methods are often ineffectual or too extreme, and Drabble successfully pinpoints the faltering attempts women make to redress the balance of power in their favour. What emerges is Drabble's realisation of how difficult it is to make `correct' decisions: Drabble aims to heighten women's self-awareness, but tempers her crusading spirit by purposely avoiding the formulation of a rigid `blue-print' or plan of action. Her conclusions are that extreme hegemonies are destructive and the application of a radical ideology is too rigid and uncompromising.

Her approach is far more subtle for she exposes inequalities and accepted assumptions about women but offers them no solutions: she expects them to take control of their own lives.

Well my sister and I are very similar. She's a novelist and our lives have been parallel in many ways. One's relationship with one's siblings and parents is something that you're going to write about again and again, in different forms

(Drabble in Milton, 1978).

Compared with maternal influence, the combined authority of laws and armies and public sentiment are little things...

(`Parents' Magazine', 1840).

The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy

(Rich, The Second Sex, 1949).

Chapter Five

Family Ties

Drabble readily acknowledges the influence her early family experiences have had on her writing and her development as a novelist. In this chapter I intend to explore the nature of the mother/daughter relationship as experienced by Eliot, Woolf, Lessing and Drabble and illustrate how each of these writers experienced emotional distance from their mothers as they `wished to become something other than their mother' (Fishburn in Davidson & Broner, 1980:190). This difference inevitably leads to a mutual tension and a common anxiety which is reflected in the anguish, bordering on guilt, that many innovative women writers feel when discussing or writing about their relationship with their mothers. Women writers are often in rebellion against the social and geographical constraints which have been imposed upon their mothers and they wish to live completely different lives from them.

To support this thesis I shall attempt some analysis of the relationship Eliot, Woolf, Lessing and Drabble developed with their mothers and close family relations and how their experiences often influenced the type of texts they produced. I shall concentrate on Lessing's Martha Quest (1954) and Drabble's Jerusalem the Golden (1967) and The Radiant Way (1987) to illustrate my argument. Similarly, I shall examine the sisterly symbiosis between Drabble and her sister, Antonia, as reflected in Drabble's light-hearted A Summer Bird-Cage (1963) and the more powerfully tragic relationship of the two sisters in Byatt's The Game (1967).

The relationship between women writers and their mothers is initially intensely physical, but often grows to be emotionally frigid. Rich (1991:218) acknowledges the natural physical propinquity that exists between a woman and her mother: `The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality, comes from her mother.'

She also accurately observes: `The woman activist or artist born of a family centred mother may in any case feel that her mother cannot

understand or sympathize with the imperatives of her life: or that her mother has preferred and valued a more conventional daughter, or a son' (1991:229). The mother cannot identify with what the daughter wants to be and there is a constant tension in the relationship: an initial feeling of jealousy often leads to open hostility and eventual estrangement between the two.

Zimmerman (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:81) maintains that George Eliot's mother was `the most enigmatic character flitting across the rich stage of George Eliot's life' and `there is little doubt that Mary Ann was not her mother's pet'. Redinger (in Davidson & Broner: 1980:81) further posits that George Eliot's mother's treated her daughter with disdain: it was a relationship characterised by withdrawal, disapproval and rejection and that this marked Mary Ann's passage through life as `she did not easily come to terms with her unresolved feelings for her mother. But her attempt to do so may well have been a motivating, although untraceable force in the private quest that led her from novel to novel once she was free to write fiction'. Zimmerman (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:82) states further that:

> The dynamics of motherhood and daughterhood permeate every novel, because George Eliot's novels are pre-eminently about being a woman in the nineteenth century. Not only did George Eliot search for the meaning of motherhood in her novels, but she sought a definition applicable to her own life. And, furthermore, motherhood was a political concept to her, as it was to the nineteenth century in general. Christiana Pearson Evans was, therefore, a prism reflecting her daughter's light in multiple directions; literary, personal and political.

Eliot and her contemporaries were `female role innovators'; they were `breaking new ground and creating new responsibilities' (Showalter, 1991:19). For these writers were seeking a new identity, divorced from the stereotypical role of wife and mother.

Showalter (1991:61) also points to the early nineteenth century writers' `loss of, or alienation from, the mother'. She thinks that this may explain, among other things, why early female novelists had fewer children than later generations. They recall their mothers as being cold and rejecting: the daughter wishes to escape the narrow confinement of her relationship with her mother and gains more satisfaction from her

father who is more part of the educated and professional world. Showalter further observes that Eliot and her writing contemporaries had all lost their mothers in early childhood, and even when the mother was present she was emotionally distant and unfeeling. She cites this description of Mary Coleridge's family to reflect the `ambience of these households from the talented daughter's perspective':

> Mama moved in the background; a centre of rest where Papa was the centre of laughter. She arranged the comforts of the celebrated hospitality which Arthur's cordiality inspired. She did not excite or encourage Mary's imagination as her father did. On the contrary, she tried to make her daughter, so indifferent to what she wore or ate, more conventional. But Mary loved her dearly (Whistler in Showalter, 1991:62).

Thus `the daughter's nonconformity would lead her to make greater demands upon her father for love and attention, and unhappy childhood experiences may in fact have contributed positively to their vocation as artists' (Showalter, 1991:62). What women writers were striving for was to avoid the constraints of marriage and motherhood, and become more like men. Thus they wanted to have far different lives from their mothers.

Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, was a beautiful woman and she used this power in her two marriages; Lilienfeld (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:169) quotes a line from a poem in Rich's From an Old House in America to describe Julia Stephen's influence in her household `My power is brief and local but I know my power' (in Rich, 1975:239). She realised that the only power she could command was in the domestic sphere as she took care of a large household, many children and a writer husband. Although she wielded great power over the members of her family she expended very little time and energy on establishing any emotional rapport with her daughter, Virginia. Woolf (in Schulkind, 1976:83) herself states `I see now that a woman who had to keep all this in being and under control must have been a general presence rather than a particular person to a child of seven or eight. Can I remember ever being alone with her for more than a few minutes?'.

Woolf only received sketchy attention from her mother and when she died the writer felt totally deserted and angry. Rose (1978) explores Woolf's anxieties extremely well as she relates the story of Woolf never being

given the amount and kind of love that Julia had lavished on her husband or sons.

Subsequently, Woolf tried to become part of her sister's life, relied heavily on her husband Leonard Woolf to nurture her, and later her relationship with Vita Sackville-West carried her through to her middle years. Lilienfeld (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:172) asserts that To the Lighthouse (1927) acted as `a therapeutic tool' to Woolf and is a `close examination of male/female relationships. Lily Briscoe's picture is of a child who sustains her mother's loss, comes to work through that loss as an ability to reject her mother's limiting example, and goes on to live beyond her parent's life to achieve her own personhood'.

The painfulness and complexity of this particular mother/daughter relationship is echoed by Rich who considers `this cathexis between mother and daughter - essential, distorted, misused is the great unwritten story ... the materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement' (1991:226). Rich, writing as a lesbian, considers the mother/daughter relationship as being profoundly threatening to men. For Rich, Woolf `created one of the most complex and passionate visions of the mother/daughter schism in modern literature'. Further Mrs. Ramsay typifies the woman whose whole life is spent in the service of men. She recalls the scene where Lily Briscoe sits `with her hands clasped around Mrs. Ramsay's knees, her head on her lap, longs to become one with her ... Yet Mrs Ramsay is unavailable to Lily. For Rich this scene has a double charge: `The daughter seeking intimacy with her own mother, the woman seeking intimacy with another woman, not her mother but toward whom whom she turns those passionate longings' (1991:228). Thus Mrs Ramsay is dependent on men and Lily Briscoe, through her work, is independent of them. Reflected in this novel is Woolf's attempt to understand her own complex relationship with her mother.

Moers (1986:237) emphasises `the resentment, envy, the pain of betrayal, the cry of protest' in all Woolf's mother portraits. She remarks on how these portraits dominate her work : unintellectual society matrons whose way of life Woolf can criticise and reject. In doing so she asserts her

literary intellectual aspirations in contrast to her mother's unfulfilling existence.

Heilbrun (1989:120) further points to the narrative tension which exists between women and their writing. She rightly refers to Woolf's emotional needs as being unfulfilled and this frustration could not be conveyed through the narrative strategies available for women when she was writing:

> I think Virginia Woolf, for example, early realized, deeply if unconsciously, that the narratives provided for women were insufficient for her needs. Her life and her works, the equal for any by her contemporaries, have been until recently less studied academically because did not have quite literally, the theory of the perceptions with which to analyze them. All her novels struggle against narrative and the old perceptions of the world. She felt in herself a powerful need for a love we have come to call maternal, a love that few men are able to offer (outside of romance) and that women have been carefully trained not to seek in other women.

Woolf's search for a reciprocal emotional relationship with her mother was unrequited and eventually her life ended tragically. Rose (1978) and DeSalvo (1989) explore the complex nature of Woolf's childhood years where she was neglected by her mother, dominated by her father and abused by her step-brother. All these factors contributed to her inability to have a normal marriage and Woolf sought to resolve her personal conflict through her writing. Her own longings and frustrations are admirably conveyed through her innovative `stream of consciousness' technique, which is a suitable vehicle for the portrayal of the complexity and passion of her emotions. Perhaps her personal experiences heightened her sense of creativity and sensitivity, qualities of her work which have only recently been explored by modern critics. Her creativity was ignited and fuelled by her personal suffering.

In the novels of Lessing and Drabble the female protagonist often removes herself geographically from home to escape family and societal constraints and expectations. Fishburn (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:190) maintains that `Martha Quest is pressured...to become nothing more than a link in the chain of motherhood.' and further she shows that `many writer daughters rebel'. Fishburn (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:207) argues that Lessing `finds the cause of our social problems to be in part attributable to our homelife' . She further advances an interesting hypothesis

purporting that Martha Quest's mother is a symbol of her political rebellion as she typifies everything from which she wishes to escape. Martha Quest begins a pattern of behaviour which is continued, for example in Drabble's Jerusalem the Golden where Clara escapes from her Northern origins to the warm and relaxed family life of the Denhams in the South of England.

Martha Quest only has her mother as a role model: she desperately wants to escape from emulating this stereotypical role of wife and mother and the whole quintet of Children of Violence (1969) is concerned with Martha's search for her own identity. `By unintentionally becoming pregnant she loses control of both her body and her life' (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:212) while Mrs. Quest considers having a baby was a wonderfully fulfilling experience for a woman. What Martha is unprepared for is to be a sacrificial victim as a mother: she cannot conform to the idea that mothers must sacrifice their time and individual interests to fulfil this maternal role. Six years later she regrets leaving her daughter and it isn't until she is in London that she realises that what she has done has been a mistake, that she was `mad' to let her daughter go. However, the explanation Martha offers for deserting Caroline is not psychological but political. She claims that she left the child because at that time she and her communist friends believed that the family was detrimental to their cause.

Martha struggles with the demands of her body pitted against the structure of a patriarchal society which holds that a woman is only happy and fulfilled if she is a wife and mother. The tension between each generation is electric as Martha wants different things from life than either her mother or her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law feels she should accept her place in society while her own mother believes a woman should readily sacrifice her time and energy for her children.

Martha Quest, while rebelling against the constraints of society, alienates herself from her mother. She flounders both socially and politically for in her search for independence she foregoes the caring and romance that could be part of a truly fulfilling heterosexual relationship.

By accentuating the tension and unhappiness which exist between Martha Quest and her mother, Lessing posits the theory that mothers must not expect daughters to be replicas of themselves. Ideals and expectations which underpin one generation should not necessarily be passed on to another as necessarily worthy of emulation. Fishburn succinctly summarises Lessing's dire prognostications of what would happen if mothers should insist on imposing their ideas on their daughters `Lessing dramatically predicts that the power plays and oppression characteristics of the nightmare repetition of motherhood can only lead not only to alienated women but to the end of the world' (in Davidson & Broner, 1980:215).

In a recent article in 'The Sunday Times' it is interesting to note that Lessing writes:

> I still have not come to understand my own bad relationship with my parents. The writers I know, or whose lives I have read about have one thing in common: a stressed childhood. I don't mean necessarily an unhappy one, but children who have been forced into self-awareness early have had to watch the grown-ups, assess them, know what they really, as distinct from what they say, children who are continually observing everyone - they have had their best apprenticeships (1992:4).

Drabble herself admits to having had a difficult relationship with her mother. Creighton (1985:16) records facts about Drabble's background and life. She was born on 5 June 1939, in Sheffield, Yorkshire, the daughter of John Frederick and Marie Bloor Drabble. Her father was a barrister, then a circuit judge for Suffolk and Essex, and later, in retirement, a novelist. Her mother was an English teacher at the Mount York, a Quaker school her daughters were later to attend. The first in their families to go to university, both parents graduated from Cambridge. While Drabble has characterised her rearing as `very tolerant, liberal, middle-class professional' (in Creighton, 1985:17) she none the less feels close to her working-class roots, and is especially conscious of her mother's difficult transition into the middle class. Her father worked in the family business, a small sweet factory, to save money before reading law at Cambridge. Her mother's family were potters from the Potteries in Staffordshire. Drabble comments in her biography of Arnold Bennett:

> His childhood and origins are very similar to my own. My mother's family came from the Potteries, and the Bennett novels

> seem to me to portray a way of life that still existed when I was a child, and indeed persists in certain areas. My own attitudes of life and work were coloured by many of the same beliefs and rituals, though they were further in the past for me, but as Bennett knew all too well they were attitudes that die hard. He might have been surprised to find how closely I identify with them, after two or three generations of startling change (in Creighton, 1985:17).

Drabble had a complex and intense relationship with her mother. Mrs. Drabble recalls in an interview for `People' (13 October, 1980) magazine that `Maggie was a fiery child with a hyperactive mind. She gave me many sleepless nights'. Drabble thought her mother was painfully insecure and unable to make the transition to the middle-class away from her working class origins. Her insecurities emerged in the form of aggression and painful shyness, making their home and social life very difficult. Drabble, in an interview with Creighton (1980:21), maintains that `the home was a place to wither away in; there was no way you could have friends, and that made me very, very insecure. I mean as a child I had a most terrible stammer I could hardly speak'.

Thus Drabble's mother battled unsuccessfully to overcome social, economic and gender barriers. Commenting on her mother's attitude to her books Drabble states `I think she finds it terribly hard to read my books because there's so much that she recognizes and yet it's all slightly twisted. It must be very hard for her to know what I meant and what I didn't mean - difficult for anyone' (Drabble in Rozencwajg, 1979:339).

In an interview with Hardin (1973:278), Drabble mentions her impression of adult life as being `incredibly depressing' and throughout her life she had looked for `mother figures' and established `imitative relationships' with other women - the first model for which was her relationship with her older sister Antonia,[1] whom she admired so much as a child.

Comparison is made between the lives of the sisters in SBC with the lives of the two Drabble sisters, Antonia and Margaret. The novel is written in the first person from the point of view of the younger sister, Sarah trying to liberate herself from the domination of her elder sister, Louise. Of her relationship with her own elder sister, Drabble writes:

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1 The sister is A.S. Byatt, herself a noted novelist and critic.

> I think that it is a terriby difficult area, and obviously there are a good many things that one would like to deal with but for various reasons one never could. I find that there are things that are too close, or that are too painful, or that are too personal, or that would be treachery to any other person, and you can't use them, however good they are (in Creighton, 1985:23).

Drabble points to an almost painful intimacy in the relationship between Antonia and herself. Creighton (1985:22) remarks that the `interesting kinds of relationship in both sisters' works are those between two women - sisters, cousins, friends - relationships which grow in part out of the real relationship of these literary sisters' (1985: 22).

Sarah's obsession with Louise is `bound in a competitive, uncommunicable, symbiotic relationship' (Creighton, 1985:40). The relationship between Sarah and Louise is dominated by Sarah wanting Louise to help and support her emotionally while Louise evinces remoteness and a certain casual dismissiveness towards her younger sister.

Sarah's plea for recognition is poignantly conveyed in these words:

> Louise, Louise, I mutely cried as we went up to bed for the last two hours of the night, Louise teach me how to win, teach me to be undefeated, teach me to trample without wincing. Teach me the art of discarding. Teach me success (SBC:25).

There is a mutual aloofness in the way the sisters create space between each other. For example, after an invitation to Louise's party, Sarah records that:

> Doubtless there are sisters who immediately rush to see each other after returning from abroad, and doubtless there are even sisters who, if having a party, would invite each other as a matter of course, but we didn't belong to either of these groups. It never occurred to us to approach each other (SBC:101).

When she can be close to her sister, Sarah remarks:

> I was struck as we sat there by the charming convention of the scene - sisters idling away an odd evening in happy companionship. It was like something out of Middlemarch or even Jane Austen (SBC:171).

Sadler (1986:62-64) aptly observes that in SBC Drabble uses `form as meaning to emphasise the mother/daughter relationship and the theme of ambiguity and doubleness by switching to a dialogue'. In this dialogue Sarah expresses her uncertainty about what she wants to do with her life while Mrs Bennett adopts an attitude of martyrdom and self-effacement when she remarks on her daughters wanting to leave home and leave her, having used her for many years. Sarah reassures her that she will not desert her and Mrs Bennett becomes more and more self-pitying and pathetic.

She tries to manipulate Sarah as does Mrs Maugham try to influence Clara in (JG). Mrs Maugham is presented as the coldest and most intransigent of Drabble's mothers. Sadler (1986:17) considers her as `Drabble's most negative portrait of motherhood, and the Wesleyanism in her background cannot be blamed for her astringency or inconsistency'.

Both Sarah and Clara escape from home, Sarah to work at the BBC and Clara to London and the warm, caring household of the Denhams. Clara, unfortunately, had not been praised by her mother when she had achieved academically, and after passing the scholarship examination, her mother chose a `less distinguished school for her daughter' (JG:35). However, Clara gains a place at London University and sees this as an escape from her cold and unfeeling mother and the austere landscape of the North:

> It was her intelligence which was in her own home town so sourly disowned, that got her out of it and transported her, mercifully, to London (JG:8).

To Clara the difficulty of her relationship with her mother is reflected and exacerbated by her hatred for her hometown and the uncompromising harshness of the northern environment. Drabble is preoccupied with the effect of landscape on personality and in her A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature (1979) [1984] elaborates on this theme.

Thus, Clara is nervous when she has to return to Northam as she hated her home town with such violence that when she returned each vacation from university, she would shake and tremble with an ashamed and feverish fear. She hated it, because she doubted her power to escape; even after two years in London, she still thought that her brain might go

or that her nerve might snap, and that she would be compelled to return, feebly, defeated, to her mother's house (JG:27).

Clara basks in the warmth and open-mindedness of the Denham household and she learns that people can show their emotions freely and happily. Clelia is, for Clara, the symbol of the world Clara wanted to belong to and when Clara and Gabriel consummate their relationship Clara realises that she does not know what the word `love' means for `she had not been taught love, she had lacked those expensive, private lessons' (JG:165).

Accepting that the mother/daughter relationship is often complex and strained in women's writing, it is easy to understand that `Final daughter/mother confrontations are not sentimental occasions in women's literature' (Moers, 1986:239). Moers (1986:239) further considers the return to `women's fiction of the crucial scene, the maternal deathbed, and of the character of the ageing tyrant'.

She cites the example of Anne Roiphe writing in her first novel about the grown-up daughter

> ... returning from her independent, intellectual existence away from home to the Park Avenue apartment of her childhood to see her regal mother die, wasted and paralytic. The old lady sits stiffly in her bed; the daughther, with nothing to say, rummages through a dressing-table drawer and idly smears on her mother's cosmetics and ornaments that she remembers having played with as a child years before. Thus grotesquely bedecked, the daughter walks to her mother's bedside, and the old lady peers up at her, reaches up a sharp-nailed hand, and claws her daughter's cheek (1986:239).

Similar parallels can be drawn in two of Drabble's novels. Clara (JG) is in Paris when she is informed of her mother's illness. She feels guilty when she receives the telegram as she knows she has no genuine love or concern for her mother.

All Clara can think is that this is just retribution for the ill feelings she has borne towards her mother. She thinks, in fact, that:

> I have killed my mother. By willing her death, I have killed her. By taking her name in vain, I have killed her. She thought, let them tell me no more that we are free, we cannot draw a breath without guilt, for my freedom she dies. And she felt closing in upon her,

> relentlessly, the hard and narrow clutch of retribution, those iron fingers which she had tried, so wilfully, so desperatly, to elude; a whole system was after her, and she the final victim, the last sacrifice, the shuddering product of her past (JG:191).

There is little warmth in the exchanges between mother and daughter in the hospital. All Mrs Maugham can do is to complain about Clara's lateness, as Clara finds it very difficult to be honest with her mother and she hides behind mumbling excuses when she replies. Mrs Maugham expects Clara to feel guilty when she accuses her of not caring and maintains: `If I were on my deathbed, you wouldn't care. If I dropped dead, you'd walk over my dead body' (JG:199).

Even though she is emotionally removed from her mother, Clara can look beyond her mother's words and realise that perhaps all mothers say such things to their daughters at least once in their lives.

She can reconcile the idea of her mother's imminent death with her previous feelings of guilt and can look to the future:

> Her mother was dying but she herself would survive even the guilt and convenience and grief of her mother's death, she would survive, because she did not have it in her to die. Even the mercy and kindness of destiny she would survive; they would not get her that way, they would not get her at all (JG:206).

Liz Headleand in The Radiant Way (1988) has successfully achieved what Clara set out to do. She has travelled beyond Clara's tentative attempt at escape and she begrudges time spent returning to the North to visit her family. Liz is a successful psychiatrist, practising in Harley Street and as Alexander (1989:27) accurately summarises: `Drabble charts her roles as mother and stepmother, as sister, and as daughter of a mother embittered by a hidden distress discovered only after her death.'

Yet even when she is qualified and successful Liz is haunted by claustrophobic memories of her childhood. When asked by Henrietta Latchett at a conference about her commitments she can still be assailed by the same childhood feelings:

> [she] stood there, mouth clamped, feet rooted, as though turned to a pillar of salt, as though the deep boredom of childhood had reclaimed her, had rendered her helpless and speechless and

> powerless, the child in the attic, praying for time to pass and blood to flow. Which of course momentarily it did (RW:30-31).

Liz has reneged on her duties both as a sister and a daughter. She has severed her connections with her family quite successfully by being both geographically and socially removed from their lives. Liz, because of her assiduous attention to her studies was always considered `the dutiful daughter' while Shirley was `the wild one' (RW:49). Her sister, Shirley, who was the more daring and adventurous of the two sisters when young, has been left to look after their ageing mother. Liz's mother suffers from agoraphobia (like Kate's mother in [MG]) and she is imbued with a Northern piety which discourages the household from enjoying itself too much.

The different lives of the two sisters are adroitly contrasted in their New Year's Eve preparations: Liz and her husband, Charles are planning a sophisticated party with caterers and formal dress while in Northam Shirley is serving dinner to her mother before returning to cook for her family.

Liz had gradually distanced herself from her mother by not informing her about important events in her life. When she leaves Edgar she does not tell her mother and when she marries Charles she informed her mother after the event. She really does not feel she owes her mother anything and refuses to bear any feelings of guilt about their relationship:

> Liz Headleand did not tell her mother that she was, once more to be divorced. She did not see the point. She has succeeded in avoiding going to Northam for two years, on one pretext or another, and had managed to justify herself to herself, after a manner. She was after all very busy. She spoke to her mother on the telephone, but not often. The truth was, as she quite well knew, that she could not bear to see her mother. She hoped her mother would die, soon. She tried to put her out of her mind and almost succeeded (RW:132).

While Liz convinces herself she does not need to take responsibility for her mother, Shirley reacts angrily at having to bear the burden alone. When Shirley confronts her sister with how she feels, Liz retaliates with:

> Of course it was wrong, it was unfair, it was a scandal, that Shirley should cook and run errands and suffer criticism while Liz remained the favourite, the exempt, the righteous. Anybody could see that it was unfair. Liz knew that her very posture conveyed guilt; she tried to straighten herself out in her low chair (RW:222).

Liz avoids going to the North for another three and a half years; she only travels up there when she hears that her mother has had a stroke. Shirley is now feeling overburdened by the constant task of having to take care of her mother, and she speaks plainly to Liz about this:

> Well, I've had enough. I won't go on, do you hear, I won't. You can come up here and take over. I can't go on. You are the most selfish woman on God's earth, Liz Abelwhite, and I hate you. Do you hear? I hate you (RW:300).

Liz can only feel alienated and even repulsed when she confronts her mother at her bedside. She experiences feelings of bewilderment and detachment as if she were totally uninvolved; `This has nothing to do with me, thought Liz, and yet it is myself. Dry eyed she stared' (RW:304). When her mother dies Liz can only feel relieved: `Dead,' said Liz. `Yes, dead. At last. I can't believe it' (RW:379). Further, she destroys the societal expectation of family ties and love when she asks the taboo question `Why should sisters love one another?' (RW:279).

Liz deconstructs the family without sentiment and rancour. When she learns of her father's arrest many years previously for a minor sexual offence, and then his subsequent suicide, she can honestly state that `she could not help associating this kind of offence with inadequate and retarded lonely young men of the lower middle classes' (RW: 390). Although Shirley accuses Liz of behaving unfeelingly towards her mother, Liz can only retort that `She behaved appallingly to us' (RW:391). Such recalcitrance has to be learnt over a long period of time and Liz has totally divorced herself from her past.

There is even stronger tension and conflict generated in A.S. Byatt's The Game, for here the dénouement of the novel is ultimately harrowing. The relationship between Cassandra and Julia is competitive and destructive. Byatt's major theme of illustrating art through life centres around the lives of two sisters who themselves have broken away from their familial roots and are summoned home after their father suffers a stroke. Cassandra, the

elder of the two sisters who is a don at Oxford, still feels the need to rebel against having to return home:

> She still felt a vague need to reassert a private will in some way; to do something here that proved she was her own mistress. Childish at thirty-eight. She came back as little as possible (Byatt, 1983:26).

Julia, the younger of the two sisters, still has similar feelings when she recalls coming out of the Theatre Royal in Newcastle, as a child:

> ... she had imagined herself one of a furred and scented London crowd about to go into a dance in some night clubs, but was able wholeheartedly to enjoy being a part of a crowd outside a London theatre in the dark simply by remembering her own feelings at ten, eleven, or twelve in the cinnamon dress. I was hungry for life, she thought, wherever I look in these streets I remember wanting something: they were images of London. She looked sideways at Cassandra, who had certainly shared this dream, and wondered what she was thinking (Byatt, 1983:29).

Cassandra feels the constraints of the North bearing down heavily upon her soon after her arrival, for:

> she leaned her own head slightly against the window, away from them all; they were coming out of the suburbs now, along the dull road up into Northumberland. Fine February snow was beginning to fall. She was beginning to feel constricted already (Byatt, 1983:31).

Julia, as a child, had sought the same attention from Cassandra as Sarah had from Louise in SBC and the feeling still lingers on into adulthood. For when Julia tries to persuade Cassandra to communicate her feelings towards her about her father's illness or attempts some form of sympathetic communication, Cassandra cannot reciprocate. Julia complains:

> "I'm sorry," said Julia desperately. "I need company, Cassandra." It had always been like this. Always asking, for something she should long ago have known better than to expect. Cassandra looked at her, silently; the muscles of her face were stiff, and Julia could see the swelling around her eyes. She was nobody you could comfort. "I know you don't want - to talk."
> "There's nothing to say."
> "Well, some sisters might bloody well talk to each other for company", Julia's mind snapped, crossly (Byatt, 1983:44).

When they are together the sisters still play a childhood game `involving the invention of dramatic stories which feed the imagination to a point where neither can mature nor free herself of awareness of the other. This game exposes sexual, emotional and artistic rivalry. The two sisters represent different attitudes to the novel: Cassandra the violent, self-generated imagination: Julia, the domestic observer' (Kenyon, 1988:57).

Sexual rivalry between the sisters is generated in their mutual admiration for Simon Moffitt. Cassandra was the first to be introduced to Simon, at Oxford where he was preparing to be ordained. She was his `first clumsy experiment in pastoral care' (Byatt, 1983:73) and she feels that he has made `more spiritual progress than she had' (Byatt, 1983:72). Ironically, Julia and Simon meet when each is posting a letter to Cassandra. In a series of flashbacks Byatt evokes a picture of the relationship the two sisters had with Simon before he abandons his ideas of priesthood and joins instead a zoological team travelling to Malaya. To Julia, Simon is a romantic figure (1983:78). When they meet for tea in Cassandra's absence, Julia is charmed and attracted by him but she is quick to point out that their meeting would make her sister unhappy `as she...she doesn't like sharing things. She won't want me - sharing her particular friends' (1983:81).

Julia is wary of Cassandra's reaction to her growing relationship with Simon but she still wants to see him. She feels that Cassandra has always been dismissive towards her and in capturing Simon's attention she can revenge herself on her sister. At least she will take notice of her! Cassandra knows Julia too well and she berates her sister for her ability to draw attention to herself and for her need for self-glorification: `You know, Julia, I think perhaps one should make a real moral effort to forego one's need for a sense of glory' (1983:102). In her next novel, ironically entitled A Sense of Glory, Julia cruelly writes a study `of that sterile, in some sense permanently retarded emotion we call hopeless love, felt in intelligent if cranky middle age' (1983:219). It is obviously a study of Cassandra's unrequited love for Simon.

Cassandra reacts by committing suicide; Julia has wrought the ultimate revenge: the destruction of their relationship is absolute and complete.

In her journal, written before she dies, Cassandra records: 'Have I become a doll to stick pins in' ... and 'This is an eclectic and conflated text' (Byatt, 1983:230).

Ironically, A Sense of Glory is considered by critics to be Julia's most incisive novel as she has departed from her normal domestic and somewhat hackneyed themes to produce something acerbic and sharp. Julia's reaction to Cassandra's suicide is one of cool detachment: she wishes to expunge all memory of her sister from her life. The sibling rivalry between the two female protagonists has not united them but has finally divided them forever.

Both Drabble and Byatt, through their personal experience and writing, acknowledge that family relationships are complex and difficult to analyse: often when dealing with this subject writers are delving into a hurtful minefield of human experience. Propinquity does not always engender natural warmth and affinity within the family and consanguinity often results in discordance and unhappiness. Rich echoes the lack of unity which exists between women in their relationships with each other and Drabble's writing confirms this common discordance:

> Until a story line of love, confirmation and examples stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness (1991:246).

Thus Drabble celebrates the community of family but she openly questions the reality of the `happy' family, as she deconstructs yet another myth of our society. Nuclear families are expected to be happy and united but this is rarely true. Drabble points to the importance of the family unit but realises the complexities of close family relationships. She especially dwells on the divisions and jealousies which can occur when the younger generation has great social mobility and education, thus distancing it from the more insular and less socially ambitious aspirations of the older generation.

Drabble's exploration of the complexities of family life reaffirms her belief in the institution as an integral part of society. As Eliot gave us perspective on nineteenth-century Victorian family life from a female

perspective so Drabble exposes her readers to the realities and challenges of a `New Victorian View' in the late twentieth century.

They spend their time mostly looking forward to the past

(Osborne, The Entertainer, 1957).

The whole concept of story telling of intertextuality is fascinating, but I suppose I cling, possibly vainly, to the faith that behind the story, there's a sequence of events, and if I tell enough stories, I will find the true story

(Drabble, An Interview with John Hannay, 1985).

Chapter Six

Towards the Radiant Way?

In this chapter I intend to examine the strong intertextual links Drabble establishes in The Radiant Way (1988) as she explores `the ebb and flow of relationships in the context of contemporary British life' (Rubenstein, 1989:95). I shall attempt a basic definition of intertextuality and within this framework I shall trace the intertextual links Drabble engages in with the canon throughout the novel and illustrate how she adopts her own, almost playful, type of intertextuality as she weaves characters and images from her previous novels into the wider canvas of the text. Secondly, I shall examine what I consider to be the valid connections that exist between Eliot, Woolf and Drabble and how echoes of the structure and themes of their novels permeate Drabble's text.

Bromberg (1990:9) rightly maintains that `Drabble has always been a highly literary and allusive[1] writer, engaged in strenuous dialogue with the canon in all her novels. The Radiant Way achieves an entirely new level of allusiveness, in part because Drabble's characters include various writers and teachers of literature, but also because she pursues the anxiety-laden task of redefining the form and ideology of the English novelistic tradition in order to accurately represent late twentieth-century experience and reality'.

Intertextuality is the term coined by Kristeva in her Problèmes de la structuration du texte (1967) [in Moi, 1986:37] in which she expounds that:

> the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a hermetic of self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system. The writer is a reader of texts before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind. Secondly, a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-

1 Critics have endeavoured to distinguish intertextuality from `simple allusion' or `reminiscence'. In the latter case a text repeats an element from a prior text without using its meaning and in the former it alludes or redeploys an entire structure, a pattern or form and meaning. Allusion is thus closely aligned to the concept of intertextuality and it is unproductive to exclude one from the other (Swanepoel, 1987:103).

> fertilization of the packaged textual material (say a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it. There is a dual axis of intertextuality where texts enter via authors and texts enter via readers: there is a definite act of influence which is not neutral.

Further:

> Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read at least double (Kristeva in Moi, 1986:37).

Barthes (1981:39) had written previously that:

> ... it is impossible to develop [my selected mode of writing] within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own. As a stubborn after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing and even from the past of my own, drowns the sound of my present words. Any written trace precipitates, as inside a chemical at first transparent, innocent and neutral, mere duration gradually reveals in suspension a whole past of increasing density, like a cryptogram.

Worton and Still (1991:19) competently summarise Barthes' assumptions by stating `This (the above) is intertextuality in the sense that a text may appear to be a spontaneous and transparent expression of a writer's intentions, but must necessarily contain elements of other texts'.

Barthes also maintains in his `Theory of the Text' (in Young, 1981:39) that

> Any text is a a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text.

Easthope (1983:28) states that `the text has an identity, but that identity is always relational', he illustrates this by suggesting that a text which may have defamiliarized its reader in 1912 may not do so, or at leat not in the same way, in 1922. Reading conditions change as literary forms change, and vice versa. Bennett (1983: 216) takes up a similar position in his concept of `reading formations': a set of intersecting discourses which productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way. Bennett (in Webster, 1990: 99) develops this

interpretative model from Foucault's description of a book or text in his highly influential work The Archaeology of Knowledge (1969:23):

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first line and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration, its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences ... The book is simply not the object that one holds in one's hands ... its unity is variable and relative.

For Bennett (1983:216) a text is `constantly re-written into a variety of different material, social, institutional and ideological contexts'. Thus the idea of texts being written through the reading and interpretative processes, which has already been raised by other theorists, is a helpful way of thinking about intertextuality.

Further, De Lange and Combrink (1991:1) address contemporary complexities of intertextuality given the different contexts in which the concept is utilised and base their argument on Plottel and Charney's (1978:vii) summary of intertextuality:

> For some authors the notion of intertextuality opens all cultural facts and artifacts to the internal exchanges between them, or it opens up words to make them yield the 'infinite modalities' of language. Other writers turn to the more discursive and rational dialogue between literary texts. Still others spring free the text itself of its referential bounds, while many read, as the perfectly apt expression goes, 'between the lines'. This definition implies that the concept can be used as a basis for a reading strategy which will assist the reader to uncover variegated nuances of meaning in the interface between interconnected texts.

Having established that intertextuality is a complex and multifaceted concept, it will become clear that Drabble uses many of the techniques of allusion and intertextuality: from the nuance or echo of the `simple allusion' which is noted only by the `informed reader' to a strong intertextual link which refers to a whole structure or text. I shall attempt to examine the diversity of Drabble's use of these literary devices which permeate the chosen text.

Drabble uses the techniques of intertextuality to comment critically on contemporary English society: she examines the past in a wry and sardonically humorous way while illustrating that the present is not really an improvement on what has gone before. For example, the title of the

novel links the past with the present in an ironic and subtle way: The Radiant Way was the title of a book which Liz Headleand's father had read to her as a child, but this childhood experience had sinister overtones as Liz's father was guilty of molesting her and the idealistic picture of family life which the reading primer portrayed was a grim contrast to Liz's experiences on `her child molester father's knee' (RW:386). Charles Headleand uses `The Radiant Way' as a title for his successful television series which is a critique of contemporary values. His use of the title also has ironic implications as it was the title of a primer from which he had learned to read at his mother's knee. He then proceeds to criticise ruthlessly `the evils that flow from a divisive class system, from early selection, from Britain's unfortunate heritage of public schools and philistinism' (RW:174).

Thus, the golden dream of education as the great social equalizer in Britain, is used innocently as the name of a 1930's reading primer, and ironically by one of the novel's characters as the title of a 1960's television series which attacks the failure of the system to realize that dream. Drabble's novel defines this dream as a displaced, secularized, twentieth century version of Romantic apocalypse. In place of `The Brave New World' imagined in the TV series, `forward-looking, forward-moving ... full of opportunity...classless,' (RW:176) Drabble shows us `an England in decline and a set of characters at mid-life' (Bromberg, 1990:10).

The title echoes Drabble's preoccupation with images of illumination and radiance already present in two earlier titles: Jerusalem the Golden (JG) and The Realms of Gold (RG). Another intertextual echo in The Radiant Way is when Esther and Liz recall a fable - described first in Drabble's Jerusalem the Golden, of a boy who sees a house with windows all of gold; he later discovers that the brilliant house is his own house with the sun reflecting on the windows.

At the beginning of each section of the novel there is a sketch of the sun being overshadowed by clouds: a further indication of Drabble's quizzical attitude to contemporary society. The novel ends in the communion of a walk in the country, cementing the relationships of Liz, Esther and Alix and celebrates their lasting friendship: the snake in The Radiant Way

exists but is not a real threat. The sun at the end of the novel is an ever present glow and in the words `The sun bleeds, the earth bleeds' (RW:396), Drabble emphasizes that suffering is always with us.

The Radiant Way contains many references to literary characters as both Alix and Brian are involved with teaching English literature. Alix chooses to study at Cambridge `because of Dr. Leavis' and when Alix's car is giving trouble on the outskirts of London she reminisces about Cambridge and dating games and further wonders what Dr. Leavis would have made of the infiltration of television by his ex-students. Liz and Stephen discuss intertextuality, Stephen recounting an anecdote on intertextuality in the works of James Joyce and then remarking on the coincidence of their reading a novel by David Lodge, which in itself is a `form of intertextuality' (RW:157). Stephen and Brian, discussing the Spanish Civil War, become involved in a discussion about George Orwell and Homage to Catalonia (RW:161). Brian asserts his liking for the Great Tradition as he likes to teach D.H.Lawrence, Blake and Bunyan and George Eliot. Alix teaches Blake to her female felons and thinks of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell after she has inspected Ilse and Nicholas's art work (RW:241). Esther sits and reads Dante's Purgatory and when reading Zola's La Bête Humaine she dreams of the severed head. When her car breaks down, Alix recalls a quotation from Cymbeline `Do not play in wench - like words with that which is most serious' and further deliberates on how Shakespeare seemed to be `turning on his own art with a sardonic, elegaic, disenchanted wit' (RW:267), a technique which Drabble herself uses so adeptly.

Drabble accentuates twentieth-century social mobility for women when she focuses on the microcosm of `a few families in a Country Village. A few families in a small, densely populated, parochial, insecure country' before she extends her vision to `a more public level' (RW:172). By echoing Austen she makes connection with the tradition of women's writing and experience but she reveals the realities of contemporary society. Esther, Liz and Alix would never have met in Jane Austen's day.

Both Bromberg (1990) and Rubenstein (1989) point to Drabble's inclusion of several characters from her earlier novels in The Radiant Way. Present at her party are Kate Armstrong, the protagonist of The Middle

Ground, who is now `an irritable feminist' (RW:34), the epidemiologist Ted Stennett, Mujid (also of The Middle Ground), Gabriel and Phillippa Denham (of Jerusalem the Golden) and Anthony Keating (The Ice Age) sitting in a corner `talking of God' (RW:41). Drabble weaves the past into the present, so that each of her novels is an intertextual link with what has gone before.

Echoes of Eliot and Woolf vibrate through the text of RW (1988) and Drabble is continuing the tradition of these two writers `in order to tell the truth of women's lives' (Bromberg, 1990:6). Like Eliot, Drabble `employs the organizing trope from George Eliot's Middlemarch to express this concept of both the world she describes and the novel representing it' (Bromberg, 1990:10). For in Middlemarch `the stories are related so that different points of view are brought to bear upon each other and separate lives become inextricably intertwined' (Uglow, 1987:201-203). Harvey correctly observes that Eliot `never divorces the individual from the social' and her writing reflects a `meshing of individuals with their environment' (Harvey in Swinden, 1961:202). Drabble herself is fascinated by the technical problem connected with writing a modern Middlemarch:

> There must be some answer to the omniscient narrator and the interconnected articulation of society today which is different and which she [George Eliot] does so well. I'm interested in the way society is either pocketed or interlocking ... which bits overlap and which bits can never overlap, or only can overlap through crisis or disaster or things going wrong (in Creighton, 1985:109).

Alix in RW is searching for this web of connectedness, for:

> Alix liked her mind to wander over the map of Britain, asking herself which interiors she could visualise, which not. She aspired to a more comprehensive vision. She aspired to make connections. She and Liz had supper together, often spoke of such things. Their own stories had strangely interlocked, and sometimes she had a sense that such interlockings were part of a vaster network, that there was a pattern, if only one could discern it, a pattern that linked these semi-detached houses of Wanley with those in Leeds and Northam, a pattern that linked Liz's vast house in Harley Street with the Garfield Centre towards which she now drove. The social structure greatly interested Alix. She had once thought of herself as unique, had been encouraged (in theory at least) by her education and by her reading to believe in the individual self, the individual soul, but as she grew older she increasingly questioned these concepts: seeing people perhaps more as flickering impermanent points of light irradiating stretches, intersections, threads, of a vast

> web, a vast network, which was humanity itself; a web of which much remained dark, apparently but no necessarily unpeopled: peopled by the dark, the unlit, the dim spirits, as yet unknown, the past and the future, the dead, the unborn; and herself ... We are all part of a whole which has its own, its distinct, its other meaning: we are not ourselves, we are crossroads, meeting places, points on a curve, we cannot exist independently for we are nothing but signs, conjunctions, aggregations (RW:97).

Similarly, Eliot is searching for mechanisms to `weave together the stories of widely separated social groups and to make the final result believable' (Purkis, 1985:134). She mentions this web of connectedness which she is striving to attain:

> I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they are woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe (in Purkis:139).

Like Woolf and Drabble, Eliot uses the motif of the dinner party to illustrate `the separateness of the classes and the novelist's skill in linking them together' (Purkis, 1985:134). Brooke brings together disparate elements of society during the miscellaneous dinner party portrayed in Chapter 10 of Middlemarch: the landowners and gentry, the tradesmen and professionals, but is careful to seat them with their `own kind'. Brooke is in fact trying to gain political support by encouraging social mobility and thinking of his own political future in the light of the prevalent mood of reform developing in the country.

Eliot's skill in mirroring the subtle nuances of contemporary society is shared by Drabble who readily acknowledges her debt to Eliot and considers her as one of `her heroines' (Drabble in Milton, 1978:52). Eliot developed the realist novel to discuss a wide range od contemporary, philosophical and political ideas and Alexander (1989:27) considers RW to be an examination of British society `in the 1980's'. She points to Drabble's observance of `the gap between the rich and poor, policies of confrontation practised by both right and left, closures of industries, and withdrawal of educational provision. Drabble contemplates soberly `the abrasive and divided character of contemporary life' (Alexander, 1989:27).

Both Eliot and Drabble present an interlocking group of characters set against the contemporary political and social milieu of their time: Drabble presents a wide canvas of characters set against the political and social fabric of Britain at the beginning of the nineteen eighties and Eliot portrays a comprehensive picture of provincial life in England in the eighteen thirties.

Both writers have similar preoccupations: they have common anxieties about societal divisions, women's relationships and attitudes towards marriage and they are both attuned to the subtle interconnected articulation of society. Like Eliot, Drabble employs reflective vignettes which illustrate clearly the social and intellectual preoccupations of the middle class populace. Uglow (1987:199) considers Middlemarch to be `about glory in the shade, burning souls dampened by the suffocating atmosphere of the English Midlands'. The title of the novel is connotative of compromise and mediocrity, of a narrow strip of territory between boundaries. Uglow succinctly categorises the society of Middlemarch as `townsfolk who are acutely aware of degrees of rank, subtleties of status and nets of kinship (acknowledged or not) and enter with gusto into the perpetual small-scale confrontations between Whig and Tory, church and chapel, land and business, or between doctors who believe in `weakening' and others who believe in `strengthening' remedies' (1987:199). Thus, `The delicate meshing of one life with another in a complex community and the way that the natural balance of this small world is threatened by an energetic invasion of new ideas is one of the great themes of the novel' (Uglow, 1987:200).

For example, at the Brooke's dinner party (Middlemarch) town and country mingle to celebrate the impending marriage of Dorothea and Casaubon. The narrow and cramped society of provincial England just before the Reform Bill of 1832 is clearly reflected in the conversation at dinner which centres around meeting a famous inventor and poet, the suitability of modern methods of farming but also presents a clear view of women's position in society at that time. For Dorothea in her comment on farming methods `spoke with more energy than is expected of so young a lady' (Eliot, 1968:39) and Mr Brooke's patronising observation that `Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know' aptly reflects male assumptions about women's place.

The intertextual motif of the party dominates Drabble's oeuvre. The party in MG is a celebration of community and Drabble herself, in an interview with Diana Cooper-Clark *(1980:30)* calls Kate's party `a literary joke, a Mrs Dalloway type party' and in the text of MG Kate's well educated daughter, who `was doing Mrs. Dalloway for A level', tells her mother to follow that lead and `...arrange the flowers... That's what people are supposed to do before parties' (MG:268). This is in turn linked with the narrative with Clarissa Dalloway's culminating gathering in Mrs Dalloway (1925).

Liz and Charles (RW) embark on their party `as a sign that they had weathered so much, and were now entering a new phase, a phase of tranquillity and knowledge, of acceptance and harmony, when jealousies and rivalries would drop away from them like dead leaves? Well, why not' (RW:6). They plan the party, not from any gesture of real community but as an act of retaliation `a brand new concept of social vengeance' (RW:7) as they owe hospitality to half of London. Ironically, the party turns out to be a fiasco for Liz. Through Ivan Warner's suggestive remarks Liz realises how ignorant she is about Henrietta Latchett and after the party is over, Charles suggests that they should divorce.

Indeed, this is not the only depressing conversation of the evening as there is mention of the Harrow Road murders at the party - horrendous murders perpetrated on female victims on London's Harrow Road. Similarly, at Mrs Dalloway's party, Septimus Smith's death is first mentioned.

Current affairs are vigorously discussed at Liz Headleand's party. For example, `Marxist infiltration of the Open University'... and `the abuse of North Sea oil resources, the situation in Afghanistan, the Annan report, the prospect of a fourth television channel, the viability of Charles's attempt to conquer the United States' (RW:26) and many other relevant contemporary topics are debated. Drabble presents a kaleidoscopic picture of the fabric of contemporary society: a microcosm of the macrocosm.

Both writers deal with marriage as it affects their respective protagonists. Dorothea is blind to the consequences of marrying Casaubon and Liz is unaware, during her party, that her husband Charles is planning to divorce her. `Liz would try to remember the moment at which she had known rather than not known: she would have liked to have thought that she had known always that there was no moment of shock, that knowledge had lain within her (the all-knowing), that she had never truly been deceived, that at the very worst she had connived at her own deceit. Surely Ivan's first sentence of the New Year had alerted her?' (RW:39).

Likewise, Dorothea does not heed the critical but disarmingly honest comments of her family and Middlemarch society to warn her of Casaubon's unsuitability for her as a husband. Celia remarks on his ugliness and questions whether he has a `great soul' (Eliot, 1968:43). Mrs. Cadwallader merely considers that `he is a great soul - A great bladder for dried peas to rattle in!' (Eliot, 1968:82). However, given the social circumstances of the two female protagonists, Liz's survival after her divorce is easier: she is a professional woman with an income and her period of adjustment is one of self-growth and appraisal. Dorothea has to realise that Casaubon is not the Pascal she hoped him to be and she has to learn submission within her marriage. She realises that she cannot help in the way that she wished and she cannot grow mentally within the marriage, for she is certainly more intelligent and creative than Casaubon.

As Harvey (in Swinden, 1961:199) correctly states about Dorothea: `It is in her marriage that Dorothea has to search for her true vocation ... Dorothea is innocent, ignorant of herself and the world, she is morally as well as literally myopic. It is in her marriage that her painful self-education must begin.'

Both Eliot and Drabble are aware of societal values and the inequalities that exist in the society to which they belong. Alix and Dorothea are prepared to involve themselves in the wider community to improve the living conditions of the poor and underprivileged. Dorothea's vision is coloured by how she thinks she will be able to do `great works' once she is married to Casaubon `Oh, I hope I should be able to get the people well housed in Lowick! I will draw plenty of plans while I have time' (Eliot,

1968:51), while Alix's whole career is devoted to the education of the underprivileged and socially displaced.

Alix has had a socialist upbringing and becomes involved in the Garfield Centre where she teaches English literature to a group of female felons. Like Dorothea she sees marriage as an escape from a confined background: Alix elects to marry Sebastian to escape from her grim, Northern working class background. However, Alix soon acknowledges that marriage to Sebastian had not been a wise decision: `she should not have married Sebastian. She doubted Sebastian. She had betrayed herself and Sebastian by marrying Sebastian' (RW:97).

After Sebastian's drowning in a swimming pool on holiday in Tuscany: `Alix Bowen was slower in the making. She put together slowly the bricks of her new self' (RW:101-102). Left alone Alix reconstructs her life: `She dismantled, she rebuilt' (RW:102). It is at this stage that she `observed poverty' (RW:102) and her social conscience slowly developed. She realises the vast differences that exist between the social classes and finds it almost fascinating to observe the `Unknown city beyond and within the suburbs, where nobody, middle-class folk-lore declared, read books or washed or cooked proper meals. She had sometimes even as a child, wondered if it could be as fearful as its reputation' (RW:102). She starts teaching English literature and learns that her deprived and poor pupils are not `stupid but different' (RW:104).

In her English literature group at Garfield Alix befriends Jilly Fox who has been incarcerated for drug-related offences. Fox threatens to cut off Toni Hutchinson's head with a carving knife but this threat becomes reality for Jilly herself when she is the victim of the Harrow Road murderer. It is Jilly who implores Alix to visit her and she is appalled by the repulsive circumstances in which Jilly lives and by the psychotic paintings on the walls portraying disembodied, bleeding body parts. To add to the horror Jilly Fox's severed head ends up in Alix's own car.

Rubenstein (1989:101) correctly asserts that `through Alix Bowen, Drabble raises complex questions about competing social and political forces in contemporary British life and about the inner forces of the individual personality. Jilly Fox's deep personal, social and sexual

confusion and her anger express issues that the major characters in RW initially deny or ignore but eventually confront'. Dorothea elicits this same social awareness in Middlemarch.

Rubenstein (1989:98) elaborates further on the central correspondences that `link Drabble's narrative with Woolf's oeuvre' and she particularly cites Liz's mother as lonely but her madness does not have `deviations from the norm as wide as that of Virginia Woolf or her unfortunate cousin F.K. Stephen' (RW:210).

Drabble's allusive and intertextual connections with the canon and with both writers and teachers of English Literature dominate the text of RW. Echoes and nuances of both Eliot and Woolf's writing are privileged in her text and literary references elaborate and support her themes.

Her incorporation of this subtle and effective technique helps Drabble to elaborate on her themes which centre on encapsulating the anxieties of society through her bold presentation of the three lives of her female protagonists. The final image of the novel reflects Drabble's jaundiced and somewhat tarnished concept of progress and reaffirms her belief in women as survivors.

Thus, Drabble is sceptical about many aspects of modern life and `she deplores rampant commercialism, random violence and other dehumanizing aspects of mass culture' (Creighton, 1985:110) but she is interested in what English society is becoming and this broadening of consciousness is subtly and ably presented in RW. The strong intertextual links utilised by Drabble echo the thematic concerns of both Eliot and Woolf. She is also widening her perspective and considering the English social system from an outsider's point of view. This development is particularly reflected in her later work.

This precious stone set in the silver sea...
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England...
That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself...

(Shakespeare, Richard II: 1595).

"No," says Alix. "No." The lake glitters, the mountains soar, the coloured sails catch the evening sun, and the shadows of the Lombard poplars are long. "No," says Alix, "England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out, post-imperial, post-industrial slag heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons. It's not a bad country at all. I love it."

(Drabble, A Natural Curiosity: 1989).

Chapter Seven

Beyond the scepter'd isle

Drabble attempts a more penetrating study of the human condition in her latest two novels A Natural Curiosity (NC) (1989) and The Gates of Ivory (GI) (1991). She continues to search for social justice and her stance is a moral one. Implicit in Drabble's writing is an inbuilt sensitivity towards the difficulties women face when dealing with adverse political and social situations. She has gradually developed away from her concentration on Anglo-Saxon attitudes and values as reflected in the preoccupations of her earlier protagonists to writing about a multi-ethnic Britain in which her protagonists come in contact with people of other races, cultures and ideologies.

For example, I have already traced this gradual thematic evolution from the solipsism of Sarah Bennet (SBC) and Emma Evans (GY) to the innovative and independent attitude adopted by Rosamund Stacey in her approach to a career and single motherhood: to Clara Maugham's bid for independence (JG) and Jane Gray's search for some sort of satisfying sexual relationship as described in The Waterfall (W).

Drabble's hope for social justice is embodied in The Needle's Eye (NE) where Rose gives her inheritance to a Third World country, reflecting the responsibility the well off should feel for the less privileged. However injudicious Rose's decision proved to be, the basic moral implication of her gesture cannot be ignored. Drabble's stance is an essentially moral one.

Frances Wingate (RG) is a well travelled and independent professional, and Kate Armstrong, a journalist, meets many different sorts of people in her professional life, including Majud who shows her the power of patriarchy in other countries. Drabble addresses pertinent contemporary issues in both The Middle Ground (MG) and The Ice Age (IA) while directing a penetrating glance at the structures of patriarchy and the progress of the feminist movement.

The Radiant Way (RW) introduces a broader canvas with the three female protagonists coping with the exigencies of mid-life against a backdrop of changing social values and the difficult social conditions of Britain in the

eighties. Alexander ably crystallises Drabble's intentions in this text by stating: `Her perspectives are still female but her concerns are with problems that affect men and women together' (1989:27). These problems include the destruction of the countryside, the failing economy, the fear of Aids, all pertinent issues which affect both men and women.

In this chapter I propose to trace Drabble's questioning of assumptions about the First and Third Worlds by examining how she continues to seek for social justice by exploring and exposing the inconsistencies of the English social system. Colouring her narrative is her sensitivity to women's condition when they experience personal and family problems (NC) and are involved in political conflict which they have not constructed themselves (GI).

In NC a strong motif which dominates the text is the affinity the major players feel with the past. I shall explore this interest in archaeology and the origins of man and link it with the central tenet which dominates both texts, the idea of curiosity. This curiosity leads the protagonists to ask questions about the past, the present society in which they live and leads them to look beyond the insularity of their lives to question the status quo of things as they are in England in the late eighties: the First World is contrasted with the Third World. Readers are asked to judge the Western against the Eastern: Good Time (Western life) versus Bad Time (the horrors of Cambodia).

Her commentary on worsening social conditions is reflected in NC: she questions Thatcherite values: are the people of England really wealthier than previously and do they now have more personal freedom? In GI she widens her vision to include a concern with international issues and deliberates on the whole fabric of Western society, challenging preconceived ideas about what constitutes supposedly `civilised standards':

> We stare backwards into time, and continue to find new plots, new patterns (NC:211).
>
> ... she is far-sighted now, she can see into the past and the future (NC:308).

In NC Drabble constantly alludes to archaeological finds and uses archaeology as leitmotif throughout the text as her characters express a constant curiosity

about their past. Alix's curiosity manifests itself in a `coming to terms' with human evil as she visits Paul Whitmore, a convicted killer, in prison:

> Alix Bowen goes to see her murderer quite regularly. This will be her visit for a month, her Christmas gift, her New Year's gift. Some of her friends disapprove of what could now, Alix realises, be described as an obsession, but most of them are too polite to comment (NC:1).

This almost strange obsession with Whitmore is shared by the old poet, Beaver who also had an `admirably lively curiosity about Paul Whitmore' (NC:7). Beaver `lived in the past, in the past of the 1920's that had been his own twenties, in the distant past of Greece and Rome and ancient Britain'.

Paul Whitmore's obsession with history is shared by Beaver, but Alix herself realises that `why she should try so hard to please a convicted multi-murderer is a riddle, a mystery' (NC: 10). Drabble herself recognises `One of my deep beliefs is that we are all very peculiar', and this is reflected in Alix's obsessive curiosity and Liz's inquisitiveness which is ultimately going to lead her on an unexpected quest away from the middle-class comfort of St. John's Wood to the unknown darkness of Cambodia. Liz herself confesses to a basic curiosity about human nature:

> "Actually," says Liz, "what I do suffer from is curiosity. I want to know what really happened."
> "When?"
> "At the beginning of human time. And I know I'll never know. But I cannot stop looking. It's very frustrating. When occasionally it comes over me that I'll never know, I can't quite believe it. Surely, one day I'll find out?" (NC:75).

Also, Shirley Harper (NC) reacts to her husband's suicide by escaping the consequences of reporting his death, has an affair with a stranger she meets on the ferry and tries to `find herself' when she is on the road and away from the familiar. This wrenching away from the familiar is reflected in Liz's determination to assuage her curiosity in GI.

Drabble's characters are all assailed by varying degrees of curiosity which leads some of them to fulfil strange quests and curious dreams:

> Attractive danger. Natural curiosity. Unnatural curiosity. Charles Headleand cannot resist pursuing a visa for Baldai, Alix Bowen cannot resist travelling to see her murderer across the lonely moor, Susie Enderby cannot resist returning to take tea with Fanny Kettle. Janice

> Enderby cannot resist inviting people to dinner and Liz Headleand will not be able to resist an invitation to appear in a contentious debate on television. Their friend Stephen Cox has been unable to resist one of the challenges of the century, the secretive Pol Pot, hiding in his lair, at the end of the shining path (NC:52).

Stephen's compulsive fascination with the mystery surrounding Pol Pot is the catalyst for Drabble's next novel GI which traces Stephen Cox's fulfilment of his strange desire to visit Cambodia which Liz refers to in NC:

> "You know" says Liz, "I keep thinking about my friend Stephen Cox. Did you ever meet Stephen? I can't remember. He went off to Cambodia, you know, and nobody knows what he's up to. He used to send postcards, but now he doesn't write. There's no news. Do you think he's dead?" She laughs again miserably, "Maybe when you're tired of looking for Dirk you could go and look for Stephen" (NC:171).

Stephen's objectives for visiting Cambodia are not clearly delineated: he is obviously jaded with his own particular circumstances and still has a lingering left-wing idealism which leads him to explore the communist experiment of the Khmer Rouge. When questioned by Charles about Stephen's motives for visiting Cambodia, Liz replies:

> ... Curiosity ...he said. He was a traveller by nature. A political traveller. He said he was going to write a play about Pol Pot. But he's ben gone nearly two years now. It can't take two years to research a play, can it" (NC:172).

Obviously, Stephen's `fatal curiosity' leads him `to see if the atrocity stories are true. To see for himself' (NC:172).

Liz is curious about his whereabouts and the omniscient narrator reveals that Stephen Cox is still alive `although none of the characters in this novel know it' (NC:172). Liz recalls they had dined together in her house and had discussed truth, facts and the nature of curiosity. Stephen questions assumptions about God and history: `Maybe, Stephen had said, there is no history. Nobody but God can record how many died. And as there is no God, there is no history' (NC:172). Stephen has boldly deconstructed previously held views about religion and history and Liz herself wonders whether it is right to try to unravel mysteries, whether it is right to count the unnumbered dead.

She is conscious of a burning and deep-seated curiosity about the past and the origins of civilisation: this leads her to have the same curious aspirations

as Stephen. When Stephen sends her a parcel of mysterious fragments relating to his sojourn in the land of Bad Time, Liz tries to find out about them in London. Her search proves fruitless and she decides to embark on her journey into `darkness'.

Once he is in Bangkok Stephen recalls the discussion he had with Liz about the idea of a fatal curiosity which he had discussed with her at the beginning of the year:

> Communism had failed and capitalism has triumphed and John Stuart Mill's hypothesis has been rendered otiose. But had Pol Pot known that? Stephen has come here to try to find out. He is still curious ... they had talked of Pol Pot and Kampuchea and atrocity stories. Stephen had expressed his interest in his curiosity about a country which had tried to cut itself off from the forward march of what is called progress ... (GI:84).

> ... "Anyway," Stephen had said with gay bravado, "perhaps I shall go and see" (GI:85).

Earlier Stephen had questioned his whole reason for undertaking his quest:

> He wonders what on earth he is doing here. Is he in search of a story or of himself, or of an answer to the riddles of history? Or is he merely trying to colour the globe (GI:45).

Stephen compares his own journeying to that of Joseph Conrad: he feels that he shares his idealism, sense of adventure and his curiosity. He recalls that Conrad's adventures began in Bangkok:

> He thinks of Joseph Conrad, whose own adventures in the South Seas began here in Bangkok. It was here that Conrad received his first command. Stephen Cox admires Conrad. He is drawn to his loneliness, his restlessness, his temptation to despair ... Dreams of escape, dreams of distance. He had wanted to see, before he died, the whole wide world (GI:45).

Stephen' view of Conrad, which is unashamedly idealistic, is sharply criticised by Hattie Osborne, Miss Porntip and Alan Headleand, who support Achebe's view that 'Conrad is a racist, sexist swine'. Aligning herself firmly and problematically with Chinua Achebe and other literary intellectuals, Hattie Osborne, the perky, acerbic second narrator questions Stephen's idealism and his comment that 'this is the gorgeous East. Conrad was here'. She questions Stephen's attraction for Conrad 'which is odd when you think

that Conrad was an amazing racist old reactionary, and frankly Stephen has always been somewhat to the left of Pol Pot' (GI:47).

Through Alan and Liz's observations Drabble questions the Eurocentric view of the Third World as the dark and savage unknown, and that the Western nations enlightened the uncivilised nations of the world.

Further, Alan investigates strange patterns of human behaviour. For example, 'Was the charismatic leadership of Pol Pot a socializing influence, binding the exploited peasant of Cambodia into a purposeful society? Or was it a barbaric, primitive influence, deconstructing the institutions of society and family into "pure unmitigated savagery", into the killing fields of savagery?' (GI:174).

He explores possibilities and deconstructs any preconceptions about the nature of the régime. Similarly, when Stephen experiences the street life of Bangkok, he realises that cruelty and human and animal exploitation are the sum of what the West has brought to the East.

Liz's curiosity about Stephen's reasons for going to Cambodia is a catalyst for Drabble's further exploration into defining the terms 'civilization' and 'savagery'. Conrad's An Outpost of Progress becomes a point of discussion between Liz and Alan Headleand, her stepson, about individual and group behaviour.

The theme of Conrad's text is important: it is a 'tale of two poor whites at a trading post in Africa long sustained in a belief in the superiority of their own civilization and culture by the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of the police and of its opinions' (GI:173)

'Here, alone, isolated, confronted with "pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man" in the shape of a few indigenous merchants and villagers, they fall to pieces. Things "vague, uncontrollable and repulsive" take over' (GI:174). Alan does not hold the view that primitive man is full of unmitigated savagery. He does not believe that the dark-skinned races are by nature more savage than others. He suspects Conrad of racism.

Similarly, when Liz reads Conrad's Victory she realises 'simply doesn't speak these days or enormous buck niggers or chaps with flat noses and wide, baboon-like nostrils' (GI:237).

Further, Drabble deftly contrasts the scenes of plenty in NW 3 with the scenes of utter squalor and deprivation in Cambodia. Her approach is subtle and ironic as she challenges the comfortable middle-classes on their own ground.

Sage comments acutely on the narratives of both NC and GI: she maintains that they 'reflect a world of loose ends. There's a larger cast, the plotting is fragmentary, episodic, almost picaresque. Mobility and anomie are not longer confined to the margins, but have moved into closer focus' (1992:97).

Drabble 'achieves her enlarged viewpoint by several means. There are two narrators, one omniscient, the other an opinionated, irreverent, sceptical alcoholic, Hattie Osbone, whose method is to bombard the reader with her view ... the time scheme is varied: the narrative moves in and out of the past and present tenses with ease' (Ashton, 1991:27).

For example, Drabble presents several vignettes of Liz Headleand's life in St. John's Wood. She emphasises the pleasant nature of her surroundings, ' ... a comfortable, Good Time room' (GI:138). Ironically, she is reading through Stephen Cox's 'atrocity stories' booklet. Drabble accentuates the incongruity of 'Liz safe in Good Time St. John's Wood reading about abhorrent atrocities which have been committed over the ages' (GI:138).

Similarly, when Liz is trying to ascertain Stephen's whereabouts Drabble resorts to a common Woolfian device of using a social set-piece, a committee meeting held in comfortable St. John's Wood, called to discuss what is known about Stephen's movements and what can best be done to locate him. Drabble creates a comfortable middle-class ambience:

> ... an intimate glow of yellow lamplight, golden and red flowers, fresh coffee in white and porcelain cups ... the polished wood, the woven fabrics, the sea-green curtains that exclude the night (GI:263).

Drabble evokes Liz Headleand's world:

> Hers is the chipped eagle mirror, and hers is the cut-glass vase. She is at home here, she sits firmly and heavily, her foot resting upon a little tapestry covered stool. The distress of the lamp brackets is here, and hers too is the drag of the cream paint (GI:263).

Liz is to leave the `comfort' of the Western world: where there is a surfeit of food and drink while in the refugee camps there is starvation: the West suffers from aids, alcoholism and toxic shock syndrome while in the East the people are starving, suffer from malaria and the women experience premature menopause.

While Drabble cleverly exposes the hypocrisy which underlines political ideologies and philosophies, she also reveals the hardship women experience when subjected to harsh physical conditions. Drabble has always been sensitive to women's condition and she is overt about the physical reality of being female. What is refreshing about her early protagonists is that their physical awareness is an integral part of the text. For example, Rosamund Stacey (M) records her dissatisfaction at the way pregnant women are treated in the ante-natal National Health clinics: Jane (W) experiences extra hardship in prison because of the non-availability of Tampax: both Alison's sister Rosemary and Frances Wingate have cancer scares. In NC Janice Enderby has a lump on her breast but does not want to face the reality of the situation. Drabble also deals openly with the uncomfortable experience of menstruation.

Feminist writers have commented about the assumptions society has made about the menstruating woman. In Menstruation and Menopause (1976) (in Brownmiller, 1984:194) Weideger writes that `the physical reality of menstruation is not considered an attribute of femininity but rather `a fall from feminine grace'. This `untidy event' as Simone de Beauvoir (1988:337) calls it, forces women to pay minute attention to the inner workings of the body in a way that men find difficult to comprehend. And she further remarks that `It is not easy to play the idol, the fairy, the faraway princess, when one feels a bloody cloth between one's legs; and more generally, when one is conscious of the primitive misery of being a body' (1988:337). Brownmiller (1984:194) further posits that `menstrual flow despite its testament to female fertility and to gender, runs diametrically counter to the prized feminine virtues of neatness, order and a dainty sweet and clean appearance'.

In GI Drabble's approach to women's bodily functions is not at all covert and she constantly alludes to the special problems women face when experiencing difficult and primitive conditions. For example, in her presentation of supposedly Good Time (The Gates of Ivory) contrasted with Bad Time (The Gates of Horn) she deals with the different problems women face when placed in unhealthy and politically turbulent situations: conditions which have often been imposed on them because of a man-made search for patriarchal power and domination.

When Helen Anstey is briefing Stephen about life in the camps she tells him how many women had ceased to menstruate. Many of the women in the camps have little privacy and have lost all personal pride and decency. Drabble poignantly portrays the plight of the schoolmistress Mme Savet Akrun:

> ... she groans, and waits. She is not defecating, she is waiting for the thick dark metallic gouts of blood that she knows will soon be loosed from her. She feels their formation, she awaits their passage. In the Old Days, the City Days of the Old People, she could not have timed this so well. Now she is in touch with her own rhythms, her own cycle. If she times this squatting carefully, the clotted blood will fall neatly to the dry earth, red to red, and she will wipe herself neatly clean with leaves (GI:153).

And more pertinently:

> Sanitary pads and towels are forgotten luxuries. Tampons she has never used, though they had, briefly, been obtainable in Pnom Penh ... Menstrual blood runs down the legs of women who once took a butterfly pride in their appearance. Women smell. Women cease to menstruate (GI:153).

Drabble immediately switches her focus, from supposedly Bad Time to Good Time, to the second narrator, Hattie Osborne, who relates her meeting with Polly Piper. The vision of Polly Piper `leaning against the lovely white rows of pads and fluffy packets and neat little cardboard packages' considers `the tampon to be the liberator of womankind' (GI: 155) is a complete contrast to the deprivation and unsanitary conditions the women experience in the Cambodian refugee camps.

However, Western women are beset by their own particular problems. Polly Piper is concerned with the onset of toxic shock when women leave tampons

in for too long and she cannot decide whether this phenomenon should be advertised or she should keep quiet about it.

What happens to Liz in Bangkok is an extension of this emerging Western illness. When she arrives in Bangkok Liz feels afraid and uncertain: the weather is extremely hot: she wonders whether she has malaria, `or is it a hormonal flush', or simply the heat? In short, she is afraid. Later, when she arrives in Kampuchea she `feels rotten' and the next morning she starts menstruating; as she is well into her fifties she cannot understand what is happening to her. The fact that she is `bleeding' distracts her from the purpose of her visit as she is afraid of `leakage'(GI: 379). The entire panoply of the `male' world is displayed before her:

> The entire male world of communism, Marxist-Leninism, inflation, American imperialism, rice production, exchange mechanisms, statistics, hostages, the CIA, the SAS and KGB, the Chinese, the KPNLF, Sihanouk and Hen Sen, war, death, and Ho's marble mausoleum dissolve and fade before the bleeding root of her body, impaled on its grey white stump. Woman-being, woman-life, possesses her entirely. Shames and humiliations, triumphs and glories, birth and blood. Let armies fight and die, let people starve. She hopes that the seat of her skirt will not be stained when she arises (GI:379).

While she should have been totally absorbed in the ministers' speeches Liz is preoccupied with her body and wondering if she is really ill. At the same time Liz thinks of Mme Savet Akrun and her daughter, Sok Sita, and the stories of premature menopause from the camps. Soon Liz has to deal with an even worse problem and the prognostications of Polly Piper about the incorrect use of tampons have been realised. The next morning she feels extremely ill and ends up in hospital suffering from toxic shock: a Good Time illness. As she relates, `Here she is, afflicted with one of the most new-fangled of feminist disorders, while Stephen Cox has died in a field hospital of old-fashioned malaria or dengue' (GI: 400).

The obvious question which has to be asked by the narrative is therefore: Good Time and Bad Time; is there really such a difference?

By cleverly switching focus between the First and Third Worlds but maintaining her preoccupation with the condition of women's lives, Drabble accentuates the universal problems women experience. Whereas people in the West consider themselves to be civilised and even superior, Drabble

undercuts these assumptions to prove that they are plagued by different but equally serious problems as those faced by people in the Third World. Thus, when surveying the events in her life, combined with what has happened to Liz, Hattie Osborne can wryly state:

> Rum business, really. Women's lives. Eggs, blood and the moon. Rumour has it that Liz Headleand nearly died of some gynaecological disaster in Bangkok. Aaron says that it was toxic shock. But I don't know if that's true (GI:416).

Hattie, through her colourful first person narration, relates the dramatic experiences of her life. She recalls her experience of premenstrual tension:

> My body is swollen. It feels as though there were a fish hook inside me pulling and pulling ... an ache at the base of my spine, a swelling in my soft parts. I need to bleed. I am a day late (GI:245).

Later, she jauntily explains how her contraceptive device, an IUD, was dislodged and how she became pregnant at the age of forty by Liz's stepson, Aaron.

Hence, both Hattie and Liz have unexpected gynaecological `surprises' to deal with. Drabble does not attempt to hide the nature of these disorders but relates them as being a part of what women experience quite naturally.

Stephen does not return from a journey he makes into the interior and a memorial service and party are held at the end of GI. This is a typically Drabblean technique (cf. Kate's party in The Middle Ground) which serves as a coalescing device binding all the diverse elements of the narrative.

Drabble uses Stephen's funeral as a final forum for her commentary and covert criticism of the comfortable middle-class world with which she is so familiar. There will be a church service followed by a reception at Liz's house in St. John's Wood and what seems a socially correct occasion is touched by the bizarre nature of the people attending. After the church service the guests are feeling suitably sentimental and looking forward to the Good Time post-memorial party `with excellent refreshments, pleasant decor, interesting company. And they are all, after all, still very much alive' (GI:445)

However, the other guests' view of `post-industrial capitalist civilization' may not be quite so benign. For this is one of those days, long awaited and by some gleefully predicted, when it seems that the whole system will break down' (GI:446) and a mammoth traffic jam has immobilised traffic lights and affected traffic flow throughout the city.

Alix and Brian Bowen comment that `This is the way things are, increasingly in London. It would not surprise them if the whole city came to a halt' (GI:449). Drabble again counterpoints Bad Time and Good Time. The first world is disintegrating too. The final meeting of the various characters occurs in a miasma of personal trivia, social commentary and a grand mêlée of characters from several of Drabble's previous novels. However, the last meeting of Esther, Alix and Liz again affirms the friendship of the three protagonists.

Like the seasoned and relaxed companions that they are they deliberate on the nature of the service and the irony of Hattie's leaving to give birth while everyone else is commemorating Stephen's death. Drabble counterbalances the idea of life in death: a death, a birth.

This celebration of friendship echoes the final meeting of the three protagonists in Italy in late May, 1987. The English weather is stormy and unpredictable, England itself is beset by complex social problems: they long for the warm weather and relaxed pleasures of the continent. However, Alix, as she has done previously verbalises their collective thoughts about England:

> "Still, I do fancy England," says Alix. "There's nowhere quite so good for walking. We always used to say we'd do the Devon Coast Path. Or the Ridgeway. Why don't you all come up and stay with me, and we'll redo the Pennine Way? Or we could do the three Dales Walk. Ryedale, Dovedale and Glydale. It's wonderful country" (GI:459:460).

Their friendship is an enduring factor in a hostile world: Drabble's optimism is embedded in the subtext of her strong female protagonists.

In a recent review of GI (Ashton, 1991:27) Drabble has been criticised for not being more bitingly satirical in her contrasting portraits of the First and Third Worlds: but in all her observations about contemporary problems Drabble is cautious, never radical nor overtly ideological. She always distances herself

from her text and invites the reader to form his/her individual opinions about social, political and gender issues.

Further, Sage (1992:205-206) ably encapsulates Drabble's present dilemma as one of endeavouring to reflect a world of `arbitrary, devalued freedoms' where `her vantage point becomes (relatively, very relatively) vagrant itself'. Drabble might now wish to go beyond the bounds of the real and be more experimental with narrative structure and form. As Sage comments about GI, `the form is "shot to hell" very much in Lessing fashion' (Sage, 1992:206): perhaps Drabble is ready to embark on a new stage in her journey from tradition to innovation.

Drabble's extension of social boundaries, her sensitivity to world problems of poverty and political oppression are particularly foregrounded in her latest work. Two major developments emerge after an examination of her latest novels: they are her tentative experimentation with narrative form and the wider scope of her thematic concerns. Drabble may be on the cusp of inventing diverse narrative structures and introducing new themes into her writing: the irresolute mood of the last decade of the twentieth century may demand this additional focus.

Down among the women. What a place to be! Yet here we all are by accident of birth, sprouted breasts and bellies, as cyclical of nature as our timekeeper the moon - and down here among the women we have no option but to stay. So says Scarlet's mother Wanda, aged sixty four gritting her teeth

(Weldon, Down among the Women : 1971 [1980]).

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

Continuing the tradition

In this final overview it is important to assess Drabble's thematic contribution to the tradition of women's writing and how she, with her contemporaries, has built on the traditions of realism to produce texts which are original and innovative.

This dissertation attempts to validate Drabble's corpus as part of a continuing tradition of women's writing which reflects contemporary social, political and gender issues. Drabble can be judged as an innovative `voice' from the early nineteen sixties onwards.

In what does this innovation lie?

In her earlier novels her young protagonists make decisions and discuss openly things which are important to women's lives but have rarely been voiced before. Drabble thus quietly encourages women to consider their own needs before fulfilling familial and societal expectations.

Gordon (1992:123) captures the silence that prevailed in 1960 concerning women and their own special needs in this description about the rather wild and exuberant Flora:

> For all this, nothing was said about women's bodies, their own needs: unarticulated, these bodies didn't appear to exist except to nurture the next generation. Flora's awakening desires, her public declarations and wilder demonstrations, seemed excessive, if not outrageous, in the context of the passive female manners of the time. My grandmother warned us not only against the dangers of licence, but of the tactical inadvisability of showing emotions. She was not analytic: she simply passed on the rules of women in what was still a man's world. Initiative of any overt sort was unwomanly, demanding, indecent.

Gordon vividly illustrates how life for the middle-class woman in 1960 was just as confined as it was for the Victorian heroine. Drabble's work overtly confronts the problems young women face in making important decisions about their lives. For example, Rosamund Stacey (M), young,

independent and choosing not to marry but to have her baby and to look after it herself breaks many societal taboos of the early sixties and totally disregards normal societal expectations.

However, as she had already written about women's needs and in some ways could have been labelled a forerunner of the `feminist movement', Drabble was sceptical about the radical ideological stance of the organisation as it developed in the seventies. She is adamant in her interviews and in her writing that she reflects the truth of women's lives but she does so by undercutting societal and gender assumptions in a clever and subtle way. In writing the truth about women's lives, Sage (1992:97) remarks on the `cosiness' of Drabble's world and that `her characters homes are often authentic in their dreariness'. Further, the ending of The Middle Ground shows Kate weary of being the dynamic feminist of her era and turning into a conventional hostess at the end of the novel. Kate limits her choices to what she will wear to her party and as Sage remarks `the larger questions are cheerfully transposed into entirely local speculations. So concrete circumstance closes in, claustrophobic and reassuring'.

Drabble follows the pattern of women's lives from youthful idealism to rather disillusioned middle-age, where her protagonists are preoccupied with their own careers, the demands of marriage and the complexities of family relationships. Drabble celebrates the importance of home and family, but this concern with women's lives is only part of Drabble's manifesto as she gradually exhibits a wider concern for the injustices of society as a whole - as she maintains:

> ... my books are I think mainly concerned with privilege, justice and salvation ... None of my books is about feminism, because my belief in the necessity for justice for women (which they don't get at the moment) is so basic that I never think of using it as a subject. It is part of a whole (in Vinson, 1972:373).

Embodied in her oeuvre is a biting criticism of inefficient political and business practices and she reveals a sharp dislike of the crude patriarchal structures of society. Her later concerns revolve around a perspicacious analysis of the contrasting aspects of First and Third World value systems. Thematically, Drabble exposes many social, political and gender inequalities which exist in contemporary society.

Drabble has been established as a writer who, as part of a realistic tradition, is 'an admirer of the Victorian realistic novel, who believes it can be adapted to be an appropriate medium for a contemporary writer' (Alexander, 1989:16-17). This is the paradigm by which Drabble should be judged as a New Victorian who has built on the traditions of the past to produce writing which is innovative and reflects life as she views it from a late twentieth-century perspective. Alexander (1989:17) points out that in the many interviews she has given over the years `Drabble always has great respect for the traditional novel, and she wishes to use its resources as a basis for her own work'.

In this study an attempt has been made to validate this statement while realising that Drabble has adopted the themes and form of the realist novel to give it her own particular `voice' and texture. Part of her innovation is embodied in the following critical comments. As Alexander (1989:17) remarks on Drabble's development: `For Drabble life has changed sufficiently for an exploration of the implication of new ways of living, done in a basically realist manner, to be an appropriate kind of new fiction.' Drabble herself maintains `I and most women are writing about things that have never been written about, really' (Drabble in Poland, 1975:263) and `The rules have changed, the balance of power has shifted... I'm trying to find out where we are going' (Drabble in Cooper-Clark, 1980:71). Also, `Part of me is obsessively interested in social documentation. Just saying what it is that is different' (Drabble in Lauritzen: 1985:20). Drabble's comments to Poland are particularly pertinent in relation to her earlier novels, when she successfully sensitizes women to their own particular gender needs and condition.

Drabble's contribution to this tradition of women writing is innovative and vital to any study of contemporary fiction for she aims to reflect life as she sees it and she hopes to continue to do this through adopting the realist novel to suit her themes.

While a move away from the realistic nineteenth-century novel with its basis in social realism is a common twentieth-century phenomenon, Lodge (in Alexander, 1989:16) points out `that there is a common phenomenal world...located where the private worlds that each individual creates and

inhabits partially overlap'. In other words we assume that the reality that realism imitates actually exists, and he further posits that `It is this sense of reality which realism imitates' (1971, 34:52). To summarise Haffenden's supposition (in Alexander, *1989:16*) `realism is just a way of seeing things as is myth or fantasy' (1985:293). Thus, Drabble presents her own individual interpretation of realism within the structure of the traditional novel.

Similarly, both Anita Brookner and A.S. Byatt use the vehicle of the traditional novel as vehicles for further development. Brookner tells a straightforward story, lucidly and simply. Her style is ordered, disciplined and sparse in its presentation. Brookner presents a miniaturist world of heroines thwarted by unrequited love. Like Drabble, Brookner is interested in women's condition but her heroines, in spite of their intelligence do not seem to be able to ease themselves out of their helplessness and their world is encompassed by ordinariness.

For example, Kitty in Providence (1982) believes implicitly that Maurice is in love with her, even though we as readers realise she has misread the nature of their relationship. The final dénouement when Kitty is disappointed in love is not surprising even though she assumes she has interpreted events in a perfectly reasonable manner. The intertextual similarities between Kitty's own story and the text of Constant's novel Adolphe, which also deals with the miseries of disappointed love accentuate the novel's main theme.

Through Edith Hope in Hotel du Lac (1984) Brookner presents a penetrating study of different perspectives on love, romance and marriage as seen through the eyes of her female protagonist who, ironically is a writer of pulp fiction. In fact, the important focus of the novel is how women live their lives and is once more telescoped into a small world of a hotel and its guests for Brookner to make her observations. Drabble and Brookner's writing interfaces in technique and theme, though Drabble's writing is more robust and outward looking, focusing more specifically on relevant contemporary social issues and she imbues her work with a more boldly crusading spirit.

Further, Alexander (1989:35) succinctly describes how Byatt `takes realism and explores its possibilities' and how she explores `theoretical issues and reflects her concern with the nature of art'. Like Drabble she is interested in the condition of being woman, but is cautious about feminist approaches to literature; `I'm interested in women anyway. Literature has always been my way out, my escape from the limitations of being female' (1989:35). She has said that she thinks the last great writer of the novel is George Eliot and that she began to think about The Virgin in the Garden (1978) when a student asked her about why it is not possible to write another novel like Middlemarch.

Both The Virgin in the Garden (1978) and Still Life (1985) are part of a proposed quartet of novels and Byatt has adopted a realistic style of reflecting the lives of real people in a provincial setting in true Eliot style, but her self-reflexiveness reveals a far more complex and wider world view. Her world is not at all cosy and she delves into an examination of what reality is: is it totally chaotic and unaffected by religious forces? She questions the very foundations of our social fabric and religious beliefs through her realistic approach to text.

She also focuses closely on the different lives women lead and her two female protagonists in Still Life (1985) have completely divergent lifestyles. Frederica is being educated at Cambridge, but is still looking for a husband while Stephanie is the intelligent woman trying to conform to the role of wife and mother. Byatt reflects pertinently on the societal assumptions about women's role in the nineteen fifties, for them `marriage was still the end of a very good story' (1985:127).

Weldon, whom Brookner admires `because she cannot be fooled' (in Alexander, 1989:34), like Drabble also started writing about women before it became popular to do so. Her accounts of women's lives deal with the same thematic concerns as Drabble but in a far more directly satirical and acerbic way. She is outspoken in her criticism of how women are used by men in a strongly patriarchal society. Weldon's stance is not one sided for she is not just hostile to men, as she sees women as being too dependent on men and that they have an inbuilt complacency which assumes that men are put on this earth to take care of women, and women are unable to accept the challenge of independence.

For example, in Down among the Women (1971), Weldon emphasises women's low status and oppression and they are particularly disadvantaged in their sexual relationships. Scarlet, like Rosamund in Drabble's The Millstone is pregnant from a single act of sexual intercourse but she reacts quite differently from the self-contained and unemotional Rosamund. She marries her mother's elderly boyfriend, is then divorced and learns to live independently. Weldon explores the intersecting lives of women of different generations in the fifties. Although Weldon reveals the oppressive lives of her protagonists the final message is that life offers choices and it is up to women to take control of their lives and become independent. In her later novels she writes the story of women's lives as she sees them but widens her scope to include a bitter satire against militarism, a fantasy of revenge and includes criticism of pertinent moral and political issues in her novels. Her highly individualistic style is bitingly satirical, conversationally vengeful and she confronts issues directly while Drabble would be more subtle and suggestive. However, like Drabble she speaks out openly about the condition of being woman. As Praxis states `Nature does not know best, or if it does, it is on the man's side. Nature gives us painful periods, leucorrhea, polyps, thrush, placenta praevia, headaches, cancer, and in the end death' (1979:147).

Thus, the way in which women write their lives is vastly different and inventive. Drabble with her `mature taste for a wide canvas, enables her to capture the confusing variety of interests, pressures and obligations that crowd into a different kind of female life' (Alexander, 1989:41). She does this by being strongly aware of the tradition to which she belongs, and she has modified this tradition to ensure her place as a writer who can be considered as both innovative and a New Victorian. Her innovation lies in her ability to reflect the truth of contemporary women's lives and her role as a New Victorian is validated as she has an acute social conscience, adopts a definite moral stance in exposing inequality and she is an indomitable supporter of basic human rights.

Further, she cleverly deconstructs the self-satisfied middle-class world to which she belongs. She attempts to redress the blasé, hypocritical attitudes adopted by much of her reading public, who are perhaps,

`typically English'. Thus the title Drabble as a `New Victorian' aptly encapsulates her adherence to a particular historical tradition of women's writing and her innovation is embodied in her unique treatment of contemporary social, political and gender issues.

Coda

Further research might be based on:

* Drabble's use of allusion and intertextuality to create an Eliotesque 'web of connectedness'

* narrative structure in Drabble's novels

* an examination of the tension between realistic tradition and post-modern irresolution as revealed in her later texts

* theoretical interpretations of Drabble's work linked with her obvious interest in post-colonialism

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