Women's Predicament in Margaret Drabble Novels

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Abstract:

Margaret Drabble is an eminent British novelist who took deep interest in women's predicament, the feminist movement in Britain of the mid-twentieth century. Her numerous novels act as a mirror and a lamp of life. Her novels appeal and delight the readers with a distinctively modern woman's narrative voice and the unusual blend of Victorian and modern structures and concerns. Drabble's skill in portraying the sound of the female voice is among her most significant accomplishments, more simple and more complex than the evocation of a maternal career woman or of the mother-child bond. The condition of women in society, the thought content of modern women and particularly women's support and advice on women's study are also very relevant to Margaret Drabble and other women writers. Importantly, her novels does not speak about feminism, but she believes in the need for justice for women who are not granted fair play. While she addresses the topic of women and discusses the more superficial facets of domesticity, she provides a panoramic description of British culture. The issues of Britain are viewed from the viewpoint of a grownup woman.

Key Words: Predicament, feminism, maternal, domesticity, panoramic.

Introduction:

One year after graduating from Cambridge, Drabble wrote "A Summer Bird-Cage". Her development is highly influenced by the dominant feminist revolution in the mid- twentieth century when the so-called "second wave" of the revolution was advancing. Secondly, she was deeply inspired by Simone de Beauvoir, leading French feminist. Once, she reported that she studied Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* during her undergraduate life in Cambridge, which gave her perspective and inspired her to investigate the conditions of women in society.

Drabble's distinctive narrative voice is clear in her debut novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* published in 1973. The title of the novel is drawn from John Webster's reference of the illustration *The White Devil*. The novel tells the protagonist Sarah's background, shortly after graduating from Oxford with relatively easy plots. Sarah wanted to own a perfect life of rewarding jobs, friendship and love as a well-trained student of Oxford. She was looking forward to a new step in life, when she was at college and to embrace equality for women of the society. But the truth is, after a year's job in London, she couldn't afford to own a house. Her

sister's and friend's miserable married relationships revealed that the ideal reason for love or marriage was out of control. After graduation, it turned out to her that people around her fell downwards. For a woman of hobbies, marriage appears to be a bird-cage. Because of her consciousness of dream and reality, Sarah had to face dilemmas. She tried hard to push off time from emerging into the cage but she made it clear that sooner or later she would get married. The emphasis is on discussing the attributes and traits of females and the way they influence each other.

Early novels by Drabble, including *The Millstone*, deal with women and career issues. Her strategy is to examine motherhood and the responsibilities of intellectual challenges women encounter. *The Millstone's* main focus is on women's career, social engagement in which the value of women's professions is highlighted by Drabble. The protagonist doesn't encourage her maternity to evaluate her occupation. Rosamund is a young student who, after a one-night stand gets pregnant and contrary to all expectations, chooses to bear her child and raise her. In the character of Rosamund, Drabble has created a young, ambitious and career minded woman who strives hard for independence and equality. She is undoubtedly confident about her place in the academic world, and finds fulfilment in the quality of her work. Apart from portraying a woman's image of a single mother's travail of pregnancy, mixing career and family, *The Millstone* can well be seen as showing the broad social life of England. Her pregnancy forces Rosamund out of her privileged retreat and come into contact with people not of her class or social standing. The close contact makes her recognize the realities of life for the underprivileged and makes her aware of her own privileged position.

In the novel, *Jerusalem the Golden*, Drabble experimented for the first time the third person narrative technique, maintaining an ironic distance from her protagonist. Clara Maugham, from the provincial of Northam, a small town in the north of England, is a young girl whose capacities for development are greater than the opportunities presented by her narrow circumstances. Despite her deep dissatisfaction with her family, even as a girl Clara had entertained a fond and faint hope that "some day she might find herself somewhere where she might win" (JTG 6), her long cherished hope comes true when her industry and intelligence fetch her a place at London University.

Jerusalem the Golden also structures itself around models of fate: Clara's fated meetings with Celia and Gabriel Denham; Clara's attitude towards her home town and the telegram announcing her mother's illness, seem to be fateful signs of retribution of her neglect. Clara understands this but despite her understanding, she remains rather selfishly fixed in a doomed quest for escape. When Clara meets Celia, the narrator tells us: "She wondered… whether a conjunction so fateful and fruitful could have been, by some accidental offenses on her part, avoided, she did not like to think so, she liked to think the inevitability had had her in its grip, but at the same time she uneasily knew that it had in some ways been a near thing" (J.G. 3). Her fateful meetings made her seize the opportunity. She overestimates her power and the significance of the meeting, and she could never escape the fate that she meets with Celia and Gabriel because she could not see beyond the romance of the meeting and its selfish pleasure. Clara, at last, contemplates her victory:

her triumph over her mother's death, her triumph over her early life, her survival of all of it. She has achieved a perverse isolation in a fake, sterile Jerusalem.

Elisabeth Jay, on the other hand, also holds that Drabble's fiction *The Seven Sisters* refutes the conviction that her novels offer "the easy pleasures of the romantic novel spiced with the intellectual respectability open to readers whose education also bestowed the ability to think in quotation" (571). Although she apologizes for the distorted, moaning, resentful, martyred sound that she has accepted, Candida's account is freshly accurate of a visitor to London, who is alone. Drabble is a person who admires with hesitation while she paints Candida as being emotionally superficial and inadequate in motherly instincts is in compliance with French phrases and snobby judgments, while attempting to retain confidence that she will turn her life around. Then there is a little miracle. A financial windfall causes her to fly to Tunisia and Sicily following the footsteps of Aeneas with her fellow Virgil aficionados and two old friends. As the trip continues, Candida learns more about her friends and develops insight into her own behaviour.

Where in the beginning of Candida's own evaluation of herself as shining, rancorous, martyred, readers may be inclined to agree as the journey proceeds, she grows more and more appealing as cynicism and loss give way to a fresh, more intense joy in life and friendship. Yet the Drabble agenda is more complex for Candida than a straightforward account of enlightenment or emancipation. Candida had once dreamt of taking out the layers of things and people from their life and thereby enter into a different and lonely dimension; but her fate, which for a long period of time she avoids, turns out to be hard-working and stressful, far from glamour and fame.

The novel, *The Pure Gold Baby* published in 2013, centres on a young single woman in the 1960s who has to give up her aspiration to be an anthropologist in order to raise her disabled daughter. It is the early 1960s novel and Jessica Speight, a young anthropologist, becomes pregnant by a married professor. Her dreams of returning to Africa are put to one side and she becomes a desk-bound anthropologist in north London while caring for her daughter, Anna, the "pure gold baby" of the title. As she falls behind her peers, Jess realises that Anna has developmental problems and becomes even more bound to her special child. Eleanor, the narrator, relays Anna's birth without mentioning any of the opprobrium that would have been attached to a single mother in pre-Swinging London, even if she were a well-educated, middle-class woman, which seems odd. However, Jess brings up her golden baby in the company of other mothers, professional women like herself, and a brief marriage and occasional lovers do nothing to alter her close relationship with her daughter. Here the idea of a female-centric culture appears solid and Drabble has broadened her attention from one group of women's issues to an entire society.

The destiny of Jess is transformed by Anna's birth. Joy of Anna and social attitudes towards disabilities have been the obsession of Jess. This novel is also a complex jigsaw about how characters and situations interlink; themes arise in a true way from association and coincidence; and how events occur by chance. In episodic yet linked fragments of recollection and present experience, the story plays back and forth.

Drabble's way of doing things sometimes gives her novels a documentary tone, as though she had explored topical problems such as racism or the outrages of capitalism. But the novels also verge on closely followed life and its almost unbounded compassion for poor women who have to re-establish themselves from household duties. She isolates and explores a particular role of women whether in their community mother, child, wife, girl or professional woman and reflects on their own personal issues and on larger political and social dilemmas.

Drabble's novels are straightforward descriptions of the events in the lives of people who are representative of their time and social position, although they could hardly be called average. She deliberately chooses to focus on characters whose ages and social positions are similar to her own at the time of writing, arguing that these would be the people whom she would know best and about whom she could therefore write with the greatest confidence. Because she herself had to contend with the complications of building a career while rearing her children, she presents a number of characters who must deal with this problem.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the article has been to concentrate on how Margaret Drabble's characters are revealed and developed in relation to female issues of education, sexuality, marriage, motherhood, economic dependence, resentment of early pregnancy, housework, breastfeeding, personality clashes, love affairs, lack of vocation and so on. Drabble's heroines are bright, intelligent, hard-working women, capable of dictating their own destiny, trying to stand on their feet in man's world, some of them succeeding. But they suffer from lack of intimacy, lack of solidarity amongst them. Many of them are simply immature and avoid growing up because they know that being an adult woman in a man's world is not pleasant.

In her novels, women are badly treated and underestimated by men but they are not the losers. On the contrary they seem to do as they please. A woman can also be capable of great sacrifices for the sake of her children, even to the point of taking back the man she has already divorced. And a woman can give away her fortune following a religious inspiration, once again fulfilling the commands of a patriarchal society. Finally, being a woman can mean possessing an inclination to vulgarity, or a tendency to "have your cake and eat it too", in a society based on a sort of division of labour between those who are flesh-eaters and those who are eaten.

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