

CHANGES IN IDEOLOGY IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S FICTION

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I have chosen to contribute to this homage to Dr. María Luisa Dañobeitia with an essay on English writer Margaret Drabble for three reasons. Drabble was born just a few months before María Luisa, so they are of an age. Secondly, Drabble came to the University of Granada and visited us at the Department of English and German in 1994. Thirdly, and most pertinently, María Luisa has always been interested in women's writing or writing about women, which is one of the focuses of Drabble's fiction and critical writing. Author of seventeen novels to date, also short fiction and journalistic writing, Drabble was successful with her very first novel, A Summer Bird Cage (1963), written at the tender age of twenty-three. Her more mature focus was brought to bear on English Literature in 2000, when, to great acclaim, she made the first major revision of the Cambridge Companion to English Literature. We hope that her creative and critical corpus is far from closed.

MARGARET DRABBLE: CHRONICLER, MORALIST, ARTIST

The title of this section is that of Mary Rose Sullivan's chapter on Drabble in *British Women Writing Fiction* (Sullivan 2000:191–212). From the first novel, which made her name:

[...] each successive novel has been eagerly greeted, both by women who felt they had found a spokeswoman for their concerns and expectations and by a wider audience who found in her a chronicler of modern consciousness, a George Eliot of contemporary Britain (*ibid.*:191).

Thus Drabble is a chronicler, and she is a chronicler on the large scale: as Penelope Lively indicated, her work will be a “godsend” for future social historians (Lively 1980:61-62), her trilogy (1987–1992) alone giving us a “panoramic view of British social life in the 1980s” (Sullivan 2000:193). But she is also the chronicler of the intimate, “most mundane aspects of domesticity” (*ibid.*:194). Apparently however, she did not set out with these two goals as part

of her plan to become a successful novelist. In the later years of the century, feminists, particularly, have expressed their disappointment in the direction her work has taken:

Feminists, who wanted to regard her as one of their own, were dismayed by an increasingly ambivalent attitude toward women's issues in Drabble's 1970s novels and her virtual abandonment of the feminist cause by the 1980s. (*ibid.*:191)

Her reply on this as told to Sullivan was that:

[...] she writes not to provide a blueprint for women's lives but to explore her own experiences, experiences that confirm her sense that our freedom to choose is limited and that the curious workings of fate, or coincidence, are inescapable. (*ibid.*:191-192)

The word "choice" is important here, as it forms a crucial part of her philosophy of art: "art is moral as well as aesthetic, being intimately connected with our judgements of life" (*ibid.*:194). In her championing of the moral aspect of art, she and her sister, A.S. Byatt, follow in the steps of their admired model, Iris Murdoch, who refused to allow Postmodernism's rejection of metanarratives and single views and perspectives to deny an artist's right to deal in issues that concern matters of right and wrong, however clear-cut, or alternatively fuzzy, they might be. Sullivan sets out Drabble's beliefs concerning an individual's needs and responsibilities towards the world at large: "One must first come to terms with the past; second, reach out beyond the self to connect with another; and last; respond to larger social and communal needs" (*ibid.*:195). Drabble creates characters who allow her an interplay on this theme of the individual in relation to the group or mass:

So often, her novels end in tragedy, and this is because her protagonists fail to observe these three requirements. Thus there is a moral conclusion concerning the success or failure to base one's life on a related tripartite combination: the need for choice, compromise, and commitment. (*ibid.*)

In her 1995 work *Tiempo de Mujeres*, Pilar Hidalgo singles out Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980) as a pioneer in typical postfeminist themes and situations. As Sullivan says, it "is less pessimistic about England's social climate but more so about the situation of women in general" (*ibid.*:198). Its heroine, Kate Armstrong, has overcome obstacles like lack of a formal education, a failed marriage and an unwanted pregnancy, and in her mid-life crisis realises that she is no longer so passionate and radical in her feminist convictions as other friends or famous writers. Since in Western countries the most offensive forms of discrimination against women have been eliminated, some women writers reveal impatience with radical feminism (Hidalgo 1995:192-194).

In this essay, I take the 1980s questioning of feminist ideals by Margaret Drabble as a starting point to study her ideas on the future of the woman question

as formulated in her subsequent trilogy: *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), as well as in *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996). But I begin with a consideration of Drabble as an inheritor of the "Condition of England" novel, as she shows in her late twentieth-century work that the moral and physical deterioration of English society has come to the forefront, taking over from women's problems. However, the protagonists are all female and, like their creator, middle-aged, so in these novels women's problems, while no longer privileged, are very far from being neglected, and we could say that global problems are seen from a mature woman's point of view.

As the 1960s and 1970s Women's Movement and its protagonists grew to middle age, a reconsideration was made of many issues, recognising a new complexity. Core issues of feminist theory – institutions, the canon, conflict, the body, subjectivity and desire – within a male-female orientation involving sexuality, power, violence, political representation, class and discourse, are all either overtly or covertly included in Drabble's representation of English life in Thatcher's Britain of the 1980s and also after Thatcher in the early 1990s. Through portraying many examples of ordinary women, she finds herself working at the interface of theory and practice.

DRABBLE AND THE "CONDITION OF ENGLAND" NOVEL

In his recent editing of Drabble's short fiction (Drabble 2011), José Francisco Fernández Sánchez comments in his Introduction on Drabble's classification as an exponent of the social realist tendency in fiction:

It has to be said that Margaret Drabble has never disowned the tradition of the social realist novel and has always admitted the powerful influence on her work of the great English novelists of the nineteenth century, like George Eliot. She has often stated that in her writing she is arguing back, continuing their story. (*ibid.*:xviii)

The exponents of the Victorian "Condition of England" concept tended to be men: we think of the essays of such as Matthew Arnold, Walter Bagehot and John Stuart Mill, or the novels of Dickens which analyse the social evils of the day, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*, or Disraeli's novel *Sybil* and Anthony Trollope's serial novels set in the fictitious "Barssetshire". But some of the poets were female, Elizabeth Barrett Browning for example, and women novelists like the Brontë sisters covered these topics: Charlotte contributed *Shirley* and *Villette*, and Emily *Wuthering Heights*. We have already mentioned George Eliot (Marian Evans) and her *Middlemarch*, but Mrs Gaskell's *North and South* is also grouped in this sub-genre. In these latter novels, the main protagonist is a woman who has to struggle against all the normal problems that a person who leads an active life may encounter, as well as the specific problems that arise out of her condition as

a woman. Some of these novels also include the added factor of class, which is a question that Drabble is continuously fascinated by. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Dorothea Brooke is an upper-middle-class woman who is full of energy, resources and good will, but has to find an outlet and an ambit for action for that social goodwill that will not be frowned upon by her class. Here, Eliot analyses the situation of such a woman at a given historical moment, forty years earlier: just before the Reform Bill of 1832, a law which was to give the vote to the lower orders, but not yet to women. The legal rights of women and their demands, as well as their obligations and social aspirations, as we see them in the novel, reflect the state of affairs about six years before the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837. But they are just as relevant for the society that read *Middlemarch* when it was published in 1872, since the legal emancipation of women had not yet been formally achieved.

There is a certain symmetry between the Victorian "Condition of England" novel and the (far less full-blown) version of the second half of the twentieth century. Victoria came indirectly to the throne in 1837, as did Elizabeth II in 1952. Although she inherited the throne from her father, King George VI, he was not expecting to reign, but was precipitated onto the throne through the abdication of his brother, King Edward VIII. Victoria reigned over a country that enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace after the Napoleonic Wars; Elizabeth reigned after the Second World War. It remains to be seen whether Elizabeth II will beat Victoria's record of sixty-four years on the throne.

The changes that followed the trauma of the Second World War and their impact on British society were first recorded in the 1950s and 1960s by established writers such as Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, C.P. Snow and Lawrence Durrell. They embarked on long novels, often of various volumes, that minutely scrutinised such transformations. In 1956, a younger writer, Angus Wilson, published a novel, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, in which he attempted to analyse what it is, or was then, to be English. This appeared to be a modern version of the traditional Victorian panorama of national life, as it looked at an English person's status, and within that, his or her beliefs, moral positions, desires and hypocrisies. The novel had an immediate impact on both male and female writers, especially those who inherited a liberal tradition and sought in their work to continue in the path of their Victorian forebears, who had focused upon moral issues of right and wrong in their story-telling, views of the morality of social issues which did not exclude the position of women. Novelists and critics such as Malcolm Bradbury, but especially philosopher/novelist Iris Murdoch, were to keep the flame alive for this type of novel.

The right of place of moral considerations in fiction and, indeed, in art in general, was challenged by the new tendency of Postmodernism. If Postmodern theorists claimed that there were no longer any meta-narratives or essential truths, then those writers who insisted on pursuing and finding them, then recommending them in their fiction, were considered old-fashioned. José

Francisco Fernández has shown how Margaret Drabble, in defending the tradition, risked getting herself branded and placed in a slot from which she could not extricate herself:

One of course should not underestimate the power of a perfectly balanced syntactic structure: "I'd rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore". This statement, casually expressed by Drabble in a radio programme when she was a beginning writer, and later reproduced in Bernard Bergonzi's *The Situation of the Novel* (1970), has done much to pigeonhole her as a writer out of touch with fresh winds of change in the English novel, and this stamp has been difficult to rub off (Drabble 2011:xix).

But she has been innovative, as Fernández points out, "in form and theme" (*ibid.*:xviii-xix), and in terms of the justification of moral considerations in fiction, she has been vindicated. The so-called "moral turn" or return to ethics in the last decade of the century, particularly under the impact of trauma writing, has been shown to be not only permissible, but also recommended.¹ Past traumas should not be forgotten, and in remembering them, it is impossible to be detached and impartial. Even if the traumas recreated are not the recreations of real historical suffering, as with the Holocaust victims, imagined suffering still bears the traces of the original traumas.

In the light of a more general malaise or suffering, then, for some of these characters, and indeed their creator, the theories of Second-wave feminists are no longer in tune with reality. In order to work through this problematic, Drabble uses images that indicate disorder in the individual and in society at large. They are images of conflict (paralysis and paradox); of insecurity (shifting ground); even of rupture in the form of an image used by Iris Murdoch in one of her novels: the severed head.

DISORDER IN SOCIETY AND IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Paralysis and paradox

Always at the forefront of tendencies in her criticism and journalistic writing, Drabble was not caught on the wrong foot when the turn or return to the consideration of moral issues began to be felt. Indeed, she had never turned away. But she was to dedicate her fictional writing in the last two decades of the century – from *The Middle Ground*, through the trilogy, to *The Witch of Exmoor* – to the consideration of complex moral problems facing people, especially women, in the new liberal climate of the "posts": post-postwar, where the war was forgotten and new wars had emerged, albeit not in Britain; post-

1. See Miller, J. Hillis (1987); Adamson, Freadman and Parker (1998); Garber, Hanssen and Walkowitz (2000); and Arizti and Martínez-Falquina (2007).

feminism, and the problematic Postmodernism. In her mid-life crisis, Kate Armstrong, protagonist of *The Middle Ground*, realises that the clear-cut ideas of her youth, which were based vaguely, without any reference to ideology, upon freedom and progress for women, are far too simplistic for her more worldly-wise middle-aged self. This novel is a good example of Elaine Showalter's "female" phase, in that the protagonist undergoes a discovery of the self in the post-1960s new stage of awareness. But this discovery of the self is not uniquely orientated to the male-female dichotomy, but to the position of the individual in the specific culture of 1980s Britain. Another factor is that, as with her sister, novelist A.S.Byatt, the female protagonists tend to age with their author and therefore reflect their more mature outlook.

Kate Armstrong's problem with ideology and orientation leads to a halt in the pattern of her life, a loss of direction which she refers to as a "paralysis" (*The Middle Ground*:182). In fact, Drabble's mature heroines of 1970s novels, *The Realms of Gold* (1975) and *The Ice Age* (1977), have suffered this paralysis, finding no more meaning in life when their specifically female roles have come to an end. The realisation that she has oversimplified things, not only for herself but for millions of others (she is a famous writer in women's magazines), and the horror of the responsibility of this leads Kate to a second realisation: she is as guilty of turning woman into a commodity as any of the men she has attacked in her columns for converting woman into a sex object. She has purveyed opinions for money, and Drabble uses imagery of disease to convey Kate's distaste: "epidemic", "inflamed", "raw membrane" and "swollen organs" (*The Middle Ground*:107).

Her anger is directed at herself and at examples of the feminist canon, referring covertly to Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* as "a novel of shit and string beans" (*ibid.*:60) She is not alone in these discoveries. In the subsequent trilogy, where certain characters become obsessed with the idea of discovering the truth about evil as a possible source for the man-woman conflict, at least one of these characters, the writer Stephen Cox in *The Gates of Ivory*, draws the same conclusions, namely that simplicity implies exclusion of truth.

Kate learns to adapt to change and has to overcome certain disappointments and disillusionments before she can find her path in the new situation. By the early 1980s, she has accepted that the "dream of the sixties" (*The Middle Ground*:53), with its ideals of the egalitarian millennium, security, opportunity, prosperity, freedom of speech and expression for women as well as men, has not and will not be achieved. Two events assure her of this.

The first is a visit to her old school, where she finds that things have not changed much. The power of class distinction was too much even for the feminists (*The Middle Ground*:155-156). The context of a visit to one's old school has been used by other writers who refer to the 1980s as a period of disappointment, for example, Fay Weldon in *Growing Rich* (1992). The second event which makes Kate stop and think is the failure of her attempt to make a film about women's lives. She had not been able to draw any general

conclusions, and it became obvious that the male cameramen were turning the session into an opportunity to “paint a picture of women’s innate conservatism and resistance to change” (*ibid.*:201). She personally finds change an effort, but comes to accept it along with diversity and difference of opinion; in fact, she finds relief in not having to look for the exemplary (*ibid.*:24). In giving up generalisations and misrepresentations, she emerges haltingly into the future with new aims: to be herself, not an attempt at the “ideal woman,” and to write about the particular and the true. By giving up the exemplary and embracing diversity, in her maturity she has come to recognise paradoxes in almost every important sphere of life.

The contradictions that are worked out in this novel and continue either explicitly or implicitly into the trilogy are the following: marriage (“paradoxical”, *ibid.*:58); men (“progressive”/“unprogressive”, *ibid.*:73; “aggressive”/“superfluous”, *ibid.*:176); mothers (obsessive or neglectful, *ibid.*:121); existence of “the real woman” and “the real man” (*ibid.*:177); abortion (*ibid.*:67); America (*ibid.*:92); Britain in Europe (*ibid.*:107); Jews (*ibid.*:92-93); a racist play (*ibid.*:92); morals in the media (“New brutal journalism”, *ibid.*:93); the trivial and the frivolous (*ibid.*:109, 168); new developments in East London (*ibid.*:109); flexibility versus efficiency (*ibid.*:144); sibling rivalry (*ibid.*:131); segregated schools (*ibid.*:131); lesbians (supportive sisterhood / “a lot of female layabouts”, *ibid.*:229); Rastafarians (good/bad, *ibid.*:229).

In both *The Middle Ground* and the trilogy, Drabble uses comparison with 1980s trouble spots of the world, the Lebanon and Cambodia respectively, to discuss Britain. After attending a play with Mujid, the Lebanese student staying at her house, and other friends among whom there are Jewish Americans, Kate notices at dinner that three separate conversations are taking place: one pro-Jewish, one on women and feminism and one on the Lebanon and Marxism. She concludes: “The ideologies of the late twentieth century mingled but did not mix” (*The Middle Ground*:99). The greatest change therefore in her thinking is that we should learn to live with *mingling*, since mixing is not yet possible. Her new viewpoint is basically shared by Liz, Alix and Esther.

The Radiant Way and shifting ground

In the trilogy, going on from paralysis and paradox, we have images of vicious circles instead of the straight and narrow path of “the radiant way”. The “Middle Ground” concept, while it continues to mean middle age and the perspectives of life from that vantage point, has here a political connotation, and that is the political centre. The trilogy is about the lives of three women who were friends at Cambridge. The most prosperous, the psychiatrist Liz Headland, tends to be most right-wing. But the other two, the art historian Esther Breuer

and the sociologist Alix Bowen, remain faithful to their youthful left-wing principles.

Alix's parents shift to the middle ground, joining the SDP (Social Democrat Party) and later the Greens (*The Radiant Way*:250), since they have lost their allegiances to the disorganised Left (at a low point under Neil Kinnock and before the "New Left" of Tony Blair) and cannot stomach Thatcherism. Margaret Thatcher herself represents paradox: "a woman prime minister who was in fact a mother but was not nevertheless thereby motherly" (*ibid.*:17). Everything is in flux in Thatcher's Britain, and women who hoped a woman prime minister might bring a better deal for women were soon disillusioned. Under Thatcher, women did not lose ground in their demands for rights, but they did not advance either, they were on unstable ground. From the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century, we have to admit that Margaret Thatcher has been re-evaluated in the light of the economic crisis of the times and has been vindicated by some for her economic principles, if not her feminist ones.

Change itself is often traumatic. Early in *The Radiant Way* the narrator says:

The conventions were changing, assumptions were changing, though not everybody was to enjoy or to survive the metamorphosis, the plunge, the leap into water or air; change is painful, transition is painful [...]. (*ibid.*:33)

The most painful change in this novel is Liz Headleand's having to come to terms with the fact that she is an "abandoned wife". She thought she was a modern, emancipated woman, but as her friend Alix says: "It's not as simple as that," and discusses the "complications in the sex lives of emancipated women today" (*ibid.*:373). Women's Liberation seems suddenly to be bringing disadvantages instead of advantages. Alix works in the prisons, and changes are felt there too:

Women prisoners have traditionally been treated differently from male offenders, but Alix can see the possibility of a backlash of anti-feminism, a new harshness, a new "equality" on the horizon. (*ibid.*:185)

Liz Headleand finds there is little to insulate her from vulnerability and distress when her marriage comes to an end, and uses the phrase "shifting terrain" (*ibid.*:137). She is obliged to admit that she does not stand on "solid ground", and Alix doubts what Liz's daughter Sally says about the "brave new world of matriarchy" (*ibid.*:391). Liz is not convinced, as for her and for many other women, excluding the man means evading rather than solving the problem of the relations between the sexes.

But if change is voluntary and slow, it need not be traumatic. Liz's husband Charles Headleand is the traitor of the piece, as he gradually changes from being left-wing as a student at Cambridge, talking about the brotherhood of man and becoming famous in the late fifties and sixties for his "punchy social-conscience

documentaries" (*ibid.*:118). Twenty years later he is a very different man. *The Radiant Way* is the title of a film series he made on education when the Labour government brought in comprehensive schools, thus attempting to put an end to elitist education. He got the title from a primary school reader in which he first learned to read, so these two "radiant ways" are hopeful. Only the "Radiant Way" of the novel title is disappointed and ironic.

Charles himself has gone through managerial and executive posts in the 1970s, to emerge into the 1980s as the opposite of his younger, idealist self. The vicious circle of revolution-complacency-revolution that Marxists diagnose is seen clearly in Charles. At different points of the narrative of *The Radiant Way*, the narrator suggests various, often paradoxical possibilities. One such example concerns the miners' strike:

The miners went on holidays by the Black Sea. [...] The miners ate well in soup kitchens, on food parcels from rich Marxists in the Home Counties. The babies of miners suffered acute malnutrition. Miners beat their wives. The wives of miners stood bravely on picket lines. (*ibid.*:343)

Perhaps all of these views are paradoxically true at one and the same time, so the protagonists of *The Radiant Way* come to the same conclusion as Kate Armstrong: you cannot make generalisations, and different perspectives offer different views. Perhaps in youth, one wants to see things from only one perspective, but true maturity means the acceptance of alternatives.

The severed head: nature versus culture

Like Charles, Mrs Thatcher is seen as a traitor to her country, especially in her alliance with the United States: "The portrayal of Cartimandua of the Prime Minister, duplicitous Britannia, striking deals with a powerful America, abandoning the ancient culture of her own folk" (*A Natural Curiosity*:3). In this novel, Drabble delves into the ancient Celtic traditions of Britain in an attempt to find reasons for what is going wrong with the country.

Alix Bowen begins to study the "Horror of Harrow Road", Paul Whitmore, a serial killer; she at first finds "No obvious hatred of women, no Ripper-like despising of prostitutes" (*ibid.*:6). She had Utopian dreams of a world without violence, murder or aggression, achieved through good nurture (*ibid.*:25), but Liz, the psychiatrist, is far more sceptical, again believing such a view "simplistic" (*ibid.*).

As it happens, it turns out to be true: Paul Whitmore was mistreated by his mother as a child. Alix's discovery of Paul's trauma at the hands of his mother turns the novel, like the rest of the trilogy, into a quest for truth undertaken by several of the characters. At least four characters are following their "natural curiosity", even though it is a form of intrusive voyeurism. Alix wonders if it is a natural and inherent tendency to want to look at the dead Marat and the severed

heads of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette at Madame Tussauds or view Gary Gilmore in the electric chair (*ibid.*:65).

She encourages Whitmore in his curiosity about the Celtic religion, with its savage rites in the worship of gods. Liz puts Whitmore's fascination with beheading his victims down to the castration complex, but Alix wonders if, rather than a Freudian explanation, it requires an explanation from history, a natural, deep-rooted, violent tendency that is not necessarily sexual: "As the cross is to Christianity, so the severed head to the Celtic religion" (*ibid.*:165). Several severed heads figure in the novel, including a reference to Iris Murdoch's eponymous novel of 1961, *A Severed Head*. In *The Witch of Exmoor* the fetish is a severed hand.

The old saying "Curiosity killed the cat" is quoted (*A Natural Curiosity*:203), and for Stephen Cox, the quest for knowledge and truth ends in death: "We pursue the known unknown, on and on, beyond the limits of the known world [...] The fatal curiosity? When we see the Gorgon face to face, we die" (*ibid.*:212). Alix narrowly escapes death at the hand of Whitmore's mother. Charles and Liz Headleand's quests also place them in danger. Liz finds Cox irreparably lost, and her privileged status allows her to be evacuated from Cambodia suffering from toxic shock (*The Gates of Ivory*:399) caused by leaving an old tampon in too long. Drabble had brought up the question of women's basic sanitary needs earlier in the novel, by mentioning that in Cambodia's rejection of outside aid and progress, it had condemned its womenfolk to menstruate without any protection whatsoever (*ibid.*:153). Cox discovered that Pol Pot's utopian dream was not only impossible to realise but sadistic towards his people. It represents the "Bad Time" the East was experiencing in the 1980s, as opposed to the "Good Time" the West was experiencing (Sullivan 2000:202). José Francisco Fernández, editor of Drabble's fourteen short stories (Drabble 2011), has noted thematic links between some of the novels and certain stories. In this case, he suggests a link between *The Gates of Ivory* and the story "The Caves of God" (1999):

Liz Headleand was not able to find Stephen Cox, the man who could have been her lover, in the jungle of Cambodia in *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), but the interested reader has an opportunity to imagine how such a meeting would have fared in "The Caves of God", when Hannah Elsevir finally finds her ex-husband Peter, or rather, the reincarnation of her husband, in Turkey. (*ibid.*:xiv)

In a way, both accounts are like reversals of the man in search of his lost (female) love that we encounter in Michael Ondaatje's 1992 *The English Patient*. The woman has found herself in the role of the powerful one, the questing hero(ine), while the man has lost his power.

Thus at the end of the trilogy, Drabble seems to suggest that privileged people should address themselves to the basic needs and rights of women, indeed all people, in a world-wide context. The unstopped blood of the helpless

Cambodian women cut off from progress is similar to the blood of the severed heads of serial killers.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Drabble suggests that evil must be sought out and fought against, and both men and women must be on the alert for regression, a losing of the ground gained. Gender-specific paradigms are being revised by writers such as Drabble through the bringing into prominence of other forms of difference such as class, race or nationality. Drabble warns against the ivory tower syndrome of academe (*The Witch of Exmoor*:269), hoping that theory will not be separated from practice. She also discusses “cultural appropriation”, advocating a middle ground in delicate issues. We feel that she is neither with “[t]hese women who don’t want men taking up feminism” (*ibid.*:55), nor is she with the selfishly exploitative of anything. “The Middle Ground” is an appropriate symbol of common sense attitudes like Drabble’s. Thus in her novels, Drabble has tried to paint a portrait of Great Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, placing women in different positions and exploring their problems and reactions. The great scope covered by Drabble’s fictional works enables us to appreciate how the roles of women have changed, and how the middle-class educated woman has pondered her situation and shifted in order to locate herself in a correct and comfortable position not only on a national but a global scale.

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