Abstract

The thesis focuses upon the study of the moral vision in Margaret Drabble novels. The writer no longer requires introduction as she is one of the most contemporary writers with seventeen novels, scores of reviews, short stories, various plays, innumerable editions and articles to her credit. However, it is novel writing that Margaret Drabble considers her primary calling. It is not surprising that she took up writing easily, for she comes from a literary background. Her mother was a teacher at Quaker school and her father a judge who after retirement has devoted his time to writing novels. Even her sister, A.S. Byatt, became a famous contemporary writer. Drabble is always at work on a novel, therefore she publishes a new book on an average of every two or three years. This thesis explores the evolution of her positive moral vision from her earliest novels of the 1960s, in which her characters are mostly engaged with the idea of self-fulfillment, to her recent novels with more social, global and holistic concerns.

Chapter one considers the most important theoretical approaches which have so far been done by other Drabble critics. Her position as a contemporary novelist will be the focus of the discussions of this chapter. Chapter two studies her novels of the 1960s. Landscape and its effects upon the characters’ psychology and morality will be examined. The problematic relationships between mothers and daughters are among the most important discussions of this chapter. Chapter three examines Drabble’s novels of the 1970s, the novels which mediate between traditional humanistic realism and modern perspectives. In these novels, the writer turns to the social scene rather than to the individual self. The ways in which she gives expression to her more communal concerns will be examined in this chapter. Chapter four discusses Drabble’s novels of the trilogy. She broadens her scope even more to include the whole range of society. This chapter will analyze several strategies that she uses to
establish the morality which is so far personal and social in her earlier works to a worldwide and unlimited one. Chapter five encompasses not only the summing up of the findings of the thesis but also the concrete way in which Drabble deals with the problems of contemporary life, its values and moral issues.

The surprising point which I found while working with the novels was how Drabble created stories which convey her characters’ acceptance to cope with the predicaments that are at the first stage more personal and in other stages more social. It shows her vast knowledge about the world she is writing about. She uses amalgamating techniques of writing and narrative in order to create characters who are strong enough to set their lives against a world marked by violence. This matter will be discussed broadly in this part of the study. To show her shift from realistic to modern discourse I would show the progress of her narrative style from her earlier first and third person to her later multiple points of view. I will also discuss how she changes her narrative techniques gradually to reveal the diversity and continuity, and guides her readers to choose moral paths in the modern life which is full of complexities. The thesis reveals that despite the complex modern perspectives which Drabble brings to her narratives, she is resolutely traditional in her liberal belief that the individual must link up to something larger than the self, a community. This is the point which comes in stark contrast with the existentialist view of Fredrich Nietzsche. He argues in his famous work ‘On the Genealogy of Morals’ that we are our own creator and everything should be sought inside us, not “behind world.” Based on this, I will do a comparison of the views of the two writers.

I will attempt to show that Drabble’s novels, while insistently moral in focus, demonstrate not only the difficulty of applying moral standards to the multifarious situations of modern life but also examine the deterministic effects of family, society, geography, and religious on the psyche of her characters. But whatever these forces
would be Drabble ultimately conveys her moral message and provides new patterns for her characters. She believes that the only way which can bring moral change in their lives is to be equipped with love and care for others. It is in this point that I found some striking similarities between the views of Drabble and Emmanuel Levinas, the later being of the prominent French philosophers. During the discussions of the thesis my attempt will be to unveil the traces of Levinas’s concept of “moral transcendence of the other person” in Drabble’s narration.