Introduction

The resonances of her work, I will argue here, grow out of her strong sense of the powers and resources of existing literary traditions, coupled with her intelligent portrayal of the familiar problems of people in modern society, and her awareness of the moral and formal changes this forces on the contemporary novelist. (Creighton, Margaret Drabble 9)

To those who know Margaret Drabble as a rather traditional and popular women writer, it could be surprising to realize that she is writing about an alternative system of morality and of moral standards in patriarchal society in the contemporary world. Arguably, she is a writer with moral vision who attempts to define her characters’ individual identity and yet their need to find new ties with their fellow man. Ever since the publication of Drabble’s first novel where she starts to show her moral concerns in *A Summer Bird Cage* (1963), she has seldom been out of the public perception, testifying to her indefatigable industry and proficiency. After the publication of her latest novel, *The Sea Lady* (2006), she has seventeen novels to her credit and has made a niche among top-notch writers of her day with international reputation. Apart from these works of fiction that have earned her the well-deserved position as a best-selling novelist, she has also written many of non-fiction books, like *William Wordsworth* (1966), an essay entitled “Virginia Woolf: A Personal Debt” (1973) and the much acclaimed book *Arnold Bennett: A Biography* (1974). She also has to her credit the editing of a collection of essays named *The Genius of Thomas Hardy* (1975). She has written a book entitled *For Queen and Country: Britain in Victorian Age* (1978), and a book dealing with the relationship of writers to the landscape around them, *A Writer’s Britain: Landscape in Literature* (1979). She has

Her skilful mediation and equivocal position between the traditional and the modern makes her an important voice in contemporary fiction. In the nineteenth century, England was awakened intellectually. Many social issues were discussed, a major social issue being the cause of women. The nineteenth century also seemed to be the age of female novelists due to the emergence of great writers like Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, among others. Entering the twentieth century, the prevailing tone of English literature changed and became one of uncertainty and tension. It is the time when the complexity of modern life, the sense of flux and the uncertainty of a revolutionary period make writing unusually difficult. Extremes of pessimism, neurosis, and despair have become the accepted norms behind a considerable proportion of serious literature. The sense of isolation has reached its climax and the individual is trapped in a world which is not merely hostile to him personally, but apparently impervious to human action. Besides being psychological and realistic, the modern novelist is frank about sexual matter too. One of the other striking features of the twentieth century fiction is the dominance of the women novelists. Perhaps among the names of the great women writers like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, etc, Margaret Drabble is the most ambitious of all; she writes with broad social concern and plays a lively role in popular and literary culture.

Born on 5 June 1939, in Sheffield, Yorkshire, she is the daughter of John Frederick and Marie Bloor Drabble. Her father was a barrister, and later in retirement,
a novelist. Her mother was an English teacher at The Mount in York, a Quaker school where her daughters attend later. The first in their families to go to university, both parents graduated from Cambridge. After graduating from Cambridge with double starred first in English, Drabble joined the Royal Shakespeare Company. She decided to turn her creative energies to writing when her dream of an acting career ended with her first pregnancy. While Drabble’s work has demonstrable formal and moral links to traditional realistic fiction, these links are obliquely established through an informing modern consciousness.

Frequently interviewed and photographed, and the subject of several feature articles, Margaret Drabble is more personally knowable than reclusive writers. Besides her seventeen novels to date, she has written several stories and screen plays, biographies and other literary subjects. She has written scores of reviews and other pieces—from short stories to extended essays—for literary journals and magazines. She writes for both school children and adults, both scholars and ordinary people. She has appeared in televised literary programmes and participated in government councils, and British Council lecture tours. She has served on national political and art committees, has won three major literary prizes, and has been interviewed frequently by American literary journals. Articles about her are published in Italy, Russia, and Japan; and her novels have been translated into many languages, including French, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Spanish, and Japanese.

She started her career as a writer with her first two novels, A Summer Bird-Cage (1963) and The Garrick Year (1964). Her award-winning novels are: The Millstone (1965), winner of the John Llwelyn Rhys Memorial Award; and Jerusalem the Golden (1967), winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Book Prize. Her early novels of the 1960s are semi-autobiographical and her protagonists resemble to a
certain extent the fictional heroines of the nineteenth-century novelists such as George Eliot, Jane Austen, and the Bronte Sisters. *The Waterfall* (1969), like *The Millstone*, shows the sexual freedom characteristic of the 1960s. In *The Needle’s Eye* (1972), which received the Book of the Year Award from the Yorkshire Post, Drabble began to experiment with new themes and characters. Over the next decade, she published *The Realms of Gold* (1975) responding to the major movements in English social and cultural history, and portraying the individual within a vast complex of interrelated circumstances. In *The Ice Age* (1977) and *The Middle Ground* (1980) she continued her engagement with the issues she initiated in *The Realms of Gold*. In these two novels, she is increasingly preoccupied with the texture of contemporary urban life and the mid-life crisis of her characters.

During the late 1980s, Drabble wrote a trilogy: *The Radiant Way* (1981), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), which deals with social and spiritual quest. As the trilogy opens, the central characters are in their mid-life stage, and seem ready to embark on their spiritual quest. Retrospectively, however, Drabble traces the stages of their earlier personal and social quest, their struggle to establish their individuality in society. The spiritual quest forces Liz, Alex, and Esther, the three educated middle-aged old friends, to confront unresolved issues in their own psychic depths, to integrate their split-off halves, and to achieve qualified self-affirmation. In search for their true selves, Drabble’s characters face different degrees of separation from their families and the other people related to them. They confront and come to terms with parental figures and family situations. The ways in which they negotiate with the crises and try to reintegrate fully into society will be examined in the chapters of the thesis. I will argue how Drabble’s novels can be used as a blueprint for an exploration of her sense of moral values. Further, I will discuss how these
novels exemplify the crucial moral values and present a model which affirms the potential for wholeness.

Drabble continues the nineteenth century novel of family life, social problems, and moral growth. She portrays the inner lives of London academicians and intellectuals, and at the same time deals with the daily concerns of ordinary people. Joanne V. Creighton points out, “Fundamentally liberal and humanistic, Margaret Drabble is committed to the idea that novels should be about common human experiences and should be “available to a fairly large reading public, by which I don’t mean popular novels, I mean novels that aren’t esoteric or hermetically sealed”” (Margaret Drabble 15). However, as she is always preoccupied with personal and social morality, the focus of the thesis will be on a study of her moral vision prevailing in all her novels.

Drabble has a very sharp humanistic vision because of her parents’ attitude and her literary educational background. So, it is quiet natural that she comes under the influence of great literary moral figures, such as F.R. Leavis and George Eliot. She admires them for their ability to write about moral and social consciousness and the responsibility they feel about human beings. Drabble also reveals her indebtedness to Arnold Bennett and her admiration for his social consciousness. She praises Wordsworth for his philosophical concept of plain and in-depth living while holding high thinking. I believe that Drabble got a sensitive philosophical vision in the course of her writing. I make this claim on the basis that she writes about the important personal, social and global moral codes and values that can be considered timeless. During her long history of writing, she also writes on the secrets of human nature and the role of literature in presenting moral lessons. What is valuable in her fiction is that it shows us the true human nature and the true nature of society in transition. She
depicts the true nature of an individual and of a society through drama, event, and character.

It is one’s definition of good and bad, moral and immoral, right and wrong which make one’s philosophy of life different from another. But, the place, where we get these valuable concepts of our lives, has more importance. As a matter of fact, in the case of Drabble, her religious and moral views were shaped by her parents’ liberal attitudes at the time. Her father took the children to the Anglican Church while her mother was an atheist, but they were sympathetic to Quaker values. They were also taught to live their lives not to their own satisfaction, but in contribution to the general good.

Drabble always appreciates the modification which is created in her characters, stemming from love and care for others, and emancipation of themselves. For her, those people who do not recognize their responsibility for the others are not “existentially and ethically free” (Hardin 284). I state that Drabble’s philosophy is on the basis of love for others. To me, Drabble’s great sense of connectedness towards human community can be considered in the light of philosophical and moral ideas of Emanuel Levinas, a prominent French philosopher. He writes in the opening line of his famous book Totality And Infinity (1969): “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality” (21). The common points would become more meaningful when one reads his celebrated book Humanism of the Other (2003) where he talks about “the superlative moral priority of the other person.” There he writes that “ethics is the first philosophy” (12) and he starts his discussion with his “face- to- face” hypothesis. By this concept he means that the encounter of the other through the face installs a responsibility for the other in the self. Richard A. Cohen writes in his introduction to this book:
The distinctive moment of Levinas’s philosophy transcends its articulation but is nevertheless not difficult to discern: the superlative moral priority of the other person. It proposes a conception of the “humanity of the human,” the “subjectivity of the subject,” according to which being “for-the-other” takes precedence over, is better than, being for-itself. Ethics conceived as a metaphysical anthropology is therefore nothing less than “first philosophy.” The positive moment of Levinas’s thought thus lies in moral transcendence of the other person. Concomitantly, it lies in moral response to transcendence, a self charged with taking responsibility for the other. (Humanism of the Other xxvi)

Levinas shows the importance of the other from different perspectives. Interestingly he points out a very important moral fact that when you encounter another face, the first vehicle that you use is speech. What he writes about the importance of this relation is worth mentioning. According to him:

Speaking becomes serious only when we pay attention to the other and take account of him and the strange world he inhabits. It is only by responding to him that I become aware of the arbitrary views and attitudes into which my uncriticized freedom always leads me, and become responsible, that is, able to respond. It is only then that I see the need of justifying my egocentric attitudes, and of doing justice to the other in my thought and in my action. (Totality And Infinity 15)

Though Drabble lived a very sophisticated, contemporary outer life yet she is always guided by an inner life replete with Bunyanesque notions and symbols. The general influences of Puritanism and Methodism are revealed in a number of ways in her fiction, ranging from the fatalistic universe she portrays to her characters’ habits of
Spiritual introspection and ruminating on Biblical stories. The belief taught at her Quaker school in a “light of God” in everyone in the efficacy of good works is undercut in the thinking by a residue of Calvinistic belief in a deterministic universe where some are blessed and others damned. She writes about theological vocabulary in all her works: Judgment, punishment sin, retribution, salvation. Although she is unsure about her exact theological beliefs, she continues to be influenced by the religious teachings in her background. In her interview with Diana Cooper-Clark she says:

I think that literature is a part of life. I read Bunyan at a very early age. And he profoundly affected my moral thinking, but I’m not alone in that. He profoundly affected the moral thinking of the whole of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Everybody read *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It was a way of looking at the world. It’s like saying, “is the Bible irrelevant?” No, it’s not. You may not believe it, you may not even read it, but it’s in your consciousness. (Rose, *Critical Essays* 22-23)

Deeply influenced as a young girl by *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Drabble creates characters, like that of Bunyan’s, who are wending their way through an uncharted moral landscape, a world where old values are no longer tacitly accepted and new views are unclear. Knowing only too well that they have been shaped and maimed by forces larger than the self they question whether they can impose a shape upon their lives at all. Some critics believe that Drabble’s style of writing stems from existing conflict between her religious tradition and her modern mind. It is because of this conflict that she got paradoxical views. For example, although she points that she was infused both at boarding school and at home with the belief that God “was in every man, making him equal and worthy of respect” (Creighton, *Margaret Drabble* 19), and that she
herself felt the need for God. She also adds at the same time, “‘I have more confidence in myself as a mother than in Him as a Father’” (Myer, *Puritanism and Permissiveness* 14). However because of her inner conflict, although this background and puritanical inheritance left a sense of guilt and wickedness for her characters yet she could not deny it at any time, and the ethical standards of her characters remained the same as Christians for the most part. Drabble indicates in “The Author Comments” that she never follows existentialist concepts and declares.

> 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 gratuite, 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. (36)

I will argue that Drabble does not believe in Existentialistic thought because the moral codes she writes about stems from reconsideration and revaluation of the English puritan tradition without doubt. She has recognized that this strain although, left an inheritance of guilt and anxiety and is popularly denied, it is still very much with human beings. In fact, her works suggest a deep emotional and philosophical attachment to the concepts of determinism and fatalism, which is in complete contrast with Existentialist views.

I bring my point to the surface by comparing her hypothesis of moral behavior with that of the eminent German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. For example, while Drabble advocates her Christian strains in her novels, Nietzsche on the other hand critiques Christianity in his book *On The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). He as one of the first existential philosophers who questions and critiques the value of our moral judgments based on a genealogical method where he examines the origins and
meanings of our different moral concepts. His book consists of a preface and three interrelated treatises, which trace the evolution of moral concepts with a view to undermine moral prejudices, and specifically the morality of Christianity.

Nietzsche opens his preface with the observation that philosophers generally lack self-knowledge. Their business is to seek out knowledge, a knowledge that takes them away from themselves. They only rarely pay adequate attention to present experience, or to themselves. Arguably, while he shows his interest “in the enhancement of individual and cultural health” through “creativity, power, and the realities of the world we live in, rather than those situated in a world beyond,” Drabble talks about her affinities toward Wordsworth who believes in a world “slightly beyond the immediate.” Drabble explains that “accidents are all planned, and one’s fate is planned. It is going to contain certain accidents. There’s nothing you can do about it” (Hardin, “Interview” 283).

Drabble, while not doctrinally religious, readily acknowledges belief in something larger than the finite, the individual and the material, “I don’t believe that this material world is all. I can’t bring myself to think that there’s even a sensible way of looking at things” (Creighton, “Interview” 29). She subscribes to religious consciousness, an ethical commitment to play a responsible part in the human community. However, while for her God is there everywhere, the only source of the cosmos who is the creator of your fate and destiny, for Nietzsche “God is dead”. Arguably he shows a reaction to the conception of a single, ultimate, judgmental authority that is privy to everyone’s hidden and personally embarrassing secrets. His atheism of “God’s Murder” also aims to redirect people's attention to their inherent freedom, the presently-existing world, and away from escapist, pain-relieving, heavenly other worlds. His interest has never been the purely academic question of the origin of morality: he has pursued this question as a means of understanding the
value of morality. In order to understand the value of morality, we need to understand how it arose among us rather than just accepting its dictates as indisputable truths.

Nietzsche hopes that we might gain a broader perspective by seeing morality not as some eternal absolute, but rather as something that has evolved, often by accident, never free from error—much like the human species itself. When we can see our morality also as part of the human comedy and look upon it cheerfully, we will truly have elevated ourselves. Contrary to Drabble’s belief, Nietzsche remarks that he soon gave up looking for the origin of morality “behind the world,” that is, he began to see the origin not as an event but as a process. To explain the origin of morality by an appeal to God is to look "behind the world," to sidestep any factual information that we might find through historical or anthropological research. To him instead of an Adam and Eve model for the origin of morality, we might appeal to the Darwinian model. According to Darwin, humans have not descended from an absolute and essential origin but rather find their origin in an evolutionary process that can be traced back to earlier primates. Like human evolution, we might see the evolution of our morals as a gradual process, marked by accident and error, which has no driving reason or end goal.

Valerie Grosvenor Myer in Margaret Drabble: Puritanism and Permissiveness (1974) argues about Drabble’s characters: “Most of the heroines are working towards some kind of clarification, some degree of reconciliation between the demands of their instinctive natures and the moralistic puritan conscience” (16). While Drabble matures as a writer, this reconciliation becomes harder for her characters but she creates a special ability in her characters to resolve their conflict through love and involvement with others. Drabble, perhaps contrary to Nietzsche who challenges the foundations of Christianity and traditional morality, is more interested about the importance of playing one’s proper part in the human community.
While Drabble emphasizes on her belief on God’s will and says, “Fate and character are irreconcilable. That’s why I write the books. The whole point of writing a novel, for me is to try to work out the balance between these two and there is no answer” (Preussner 566), Nietzsche in his “On the Genealogy of Moral” writes about “perspectivism”, the idea that there is no absolute, “God's eye” standpoint from which one can survey everything that is. He says:

But precisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to such resolute reversals of accustomed perspectives and valuations with which the spirit has, with apparent mischievousness and futility, raged against itself for so long: to see differently in this way for once, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future “objectivity”-the latter understood not as “contemplation without interest” (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to control one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge…. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity,” be. (555)

He ultimately advocates valuations that issue from a self-confident, self-reinforcing, self-governing, creative and commanding attitude, as opposed to those that issue from reactive attitudes which determine values more mechanically, subordinating, and opposing to those who are inherently more powerful.
Drabble deals with a life of integrated humanism in the face of the growing complexities and dehumanization of modern existence. Her works are concerned with connecting the personal and the social. Her concern with social determinism and historical change has in some ways made her more of a realist. I believe that she not only kept her moral vision but throughout her long history of writing it has acquired a philosophical taste as well. I will attempt to reveal this vision through the discussion in the chapters. As an instance, while Patricia Sharp, one of her critics, writes in “On First Looking into The Realms of Gold” that the love for others cannot lead the characters to a kind of joyful and happy life, in an interview with Cooper-Clark about this matter Drabble’s answer will definitely reveal the core of her philosophical insight. She declares:

I think the idea that you’re here in order to enjoy yourself is very wrong. You’re here in order to do the right thing and to seek the depth in yourself which aren’t necessarily very happy. It’s more important to be in touch with the depth than to be happy. And you can be happy on a superficial level while you’re estranging yourself from the most important things in life. And that presumably makes you unhappy in the long run. So, in a way .if you seek and preserve, then you’re more likely happy, but that’s not why you’re doing it. (Rose, Critical Essays 20) Early in her career Drabble was explicit about her identification with the great nineteenth-century English tradition, and was disdainful of the more ambiguous modes of modernism and postwar experimentalism, “I’d rather be at the end of a dying tradition which I admire than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore” (Rose, Equivocal Figures 40).
Locked inside their heads, her early characters are narcissistically preoccupied with their appearance, with the bodies which they use as deceptively misleading facades and barriers against intrusion. Their houses are usually extensions of themselves and protective retreats from external realities. These first-person narrators are for the most part intelligent, educated, and naturally fluent in the discourses of literature, psychology and contemporary culture. Yet their explanations of themselves are fragmentary and sometimes clearly inadequate. The strength of these characterizations stems from her unresolved questioning and her experiences of living in what she has termed the “uncharted world” of modern female identity. In “A Woman Writer” she remarked:

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 uncharted 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. (6)

Although some of the critics have made cursory references to the role of ethics and manners in Drabble’s novels, no one has attempted a full-length study of her moral vision. This study will demonstrate that Drabble is a moralist who attempts to explore the changing values in a contemporary world. Since her fiction deals with moral decisions and choices between what is right and what is wrong, an extensive investigation is called for. It is the purpose of this study to examine the various forces and different visions that she sees as shaping and determining the lives of characters in the fiction. This study would examine how art and literature, landscape, family and social forces can influence the psychology and behavior of each of the major as well
as some of the minor characters in her fiction. Following this chapter there are three more chapters which completely examine her novels chronologically to elucidate her moral perspectives as well as to reveal her distinctive progress in her moral vision on the other hand.

It is apparent that Drabble has moved from the semi-autobiographical to a wider canvas in her recent fiction. While seeking a moral humanistic centre, especially in her early works, she reflects the contemporary world in its complexities and uncertainties. She is concerned with social determinism and historical change and her fiction has a double–voiced and equivocal, mediation between traditional humanistic realism and modern perspectives. She is however talking about the difficulty of leading a moral and self-directed life.

I place Drabble’s first twelve novels into three groups – her first five novels, her middle four, and her trilogy. The thesis will examine the changing scope of her fiction from the early novels of personal morality to her recent novels of social and universal morality. The examination of her moral vision will be carried out in five chapters. Chapter One “Introduction”, will attempt a study of theoretical approaches which have so far been taken up by other Drabble critics. While doing so, it will contextualize her position as a contemporary novelist. It deals with her place as a writer who holds a mirror to contemporary British society. In the mean time since the discussions of moral codes and standards can be seek in the branch of philosophy, it will provide a cross-reference to the moral hypothesis of great philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas.

deals with the quotidian lives of middle-class women who are dissociated from larger social and political matters, and engaged more with the morality of the self. This chapter will explore how the inability to undertake significant action or to contact with anything larger than the self can create psychological and, ultimately, moral problems for Drabble’s protagonists. These novels present the lives of the educated women who explore their specific moral problems. The thesis will analyze the moral ambiguity which prevails in these novels.

One of the main concerns is the interaction between members of the family, especially the problematic relationships between mothers and daughters which will be examined in this chapter. Drabble’s fiction will be examined to find the reasons behind the moral ambiguities and psychological problems. Landscape and its effects upon character’s psychology and morality will be analyzed with a look at Drabble’s book *A Writer’s Britain: Landscape in English Literature* (1979) in this chapter. Here Drabble writes about the inner landscape of writers, and the people they met when young. I will attempt how this condition influences the author’s work and affects her readers. Searching for their identities, Drabble’s characters struggle against their environmental conditioning and they arrive at acceptance that environment has made them what they are. This acceptance usually comes as a profound illumination about their nature. The conflict which is created as a result of their adaptation will be examined in this chapter.

The Third Chapter, “Communal and Social Morality”, examines Drabble’s novels of the 1970s. In this group of novels, *The Needle’s Eye* (1972), *The Realms of Gold* (1975), *The Ice Age* (1977), and *The Middle Ground* (1980), Drabble expands her range and scope of writing. She presents men as prominent characters. Drabble, in these novels, increasingly turns to the social scene rather than to the individual self. Many of the thematic preoccupations of her, such as the relationship of the individual
to larger shaping institutions, contexts and, forces will be attempted in this chapter. The ways in which Drabble gives expression to communal concerns and conflicts will be examined in this chapter. These novels mediate between traditional humanistic realism and modern perspectives.

The next Chapter, “World view and Unlimited Morality”, takes up Drabble’s novels of the trilogy — *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991). These novels reflect an encompassing view of British life. In her trilogy, she broadens her scope even more to include the whole range of society. This chapter will examine this group of novels which contain major male characters. I will discuss Drabble’s universal moral concerns and argue that she is not confined to the label ‘women’s novelist.’ Here attention will be paid to her holistic approach to society and the world of various social, political, economic and legal issues which affect and inform the existence of contemporary people. She reveals her concern for the recent history of Cambodia, and the Vietnam War in *The Gates of Ivory*. 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. I will address in a concrete way the depiction of the collapse of moralistic and humanistic values in a determining world.

The concluding Chapter focuses on the summing up of the findings of the thesis. The conclusion drawn from the thesis will be addressed in a concrete way. Margaret Drabble forms satisfying representations of social reality, expressed in an increasing command of moral paradox. In her work as a whole, we find a coherently developing worldview and interests which stretch beyond social morality to concerns of the spirit, and of man’s place in the universe. As a matter of fact, she tries to convey her message that, if the society, the morals, and the system of our outer world are different today, it’s because they are all different from us, the modern human beings.
In this Chapter I will argue how Drabble, a writer with a great sense of humanity, pleads with people to observe themselves as human beings and not as isolated entities, indifferent about their other human fellows if they are serious to save their world from being destroyed. The concluding part of the thesis will chart how her characters used the vehicle of love for others as a means to enter the world of enlightenment. It will also finalize how she expanded her scope from a narrow vision to the universal, timeless values and issues while maturing as a writer with a great moral vision. This will be attempted in the discussion of the last chapter.

Margaret Drabble is an aspiring and prolific writer dealing with political, social and global concerns that are reflected in her writings. Her committed engagement with the social issues of contemporary society is evident in her varied writings. She also displays an ingrained sense of literary historicism in her writing that is much appreciated by her critics. Not surprisingly, she is one of the most important and well-known British novelists in recent decades, with several novels to her credit showing her versatility as a writer. She got recognition not only because of her wide range of writing but also for the attention she gives to the moral needs of society. Throughout her novels we come across humanistic concerns which can be considered in the light of the works of great philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Friedrich Nietzsche whose major preoccupation was tribulations of modern life. According to Levinas one can enter the world of the other and help him or her through vehicle of language and communication vehicles. He points out that:

The questioning glance of the other is seeking for a meaningful response. Of course, I may give only a casual word, and go on my own way with indifference, passing the other by. But if communication and community is to be achieved, a real response, a responsible answer
must be given. This means that I must be ready to put my world into words, and to offer it to the other. There can be no free interchange without something to give. Responsible communication depends on an initial act of generosity, a giving of my world to him with all its dubious assumptions and arbitrary features. They are then exposed to the questions of the other, and an escape from egotism becomes possible. (Totality And Infinity 14)

Her concern with the social problems concomitant with historical change, a concern brought forth increasingly in her recent work is evident. In this regard, Joanne V. Creighton rightly observes:

It is easy but erroneous to confuse Drabble’s lucidity and her focus on the ordinary – particularly ordinary women’s lives – with ordinary work. Her attempt to come to terms with women’s changing role in modern society is serious, searching and important, as women around the globe have recognized. Fundamentally liberal and humanistic Margaret Drabble is committed to the idea that novels should be about common human experiences and should be “available to a fairly large reading public, by which I don’t mean popular novels, I mean novels that aren’t esoteric or hermetically sealed” or exclusively “a clever array of symbolic patterning for the scholarly mind.”(Margaret Drabble 15)

This Chapter will focus on a study of approaches taken up by several other critics of Drabble’s work with a view to stating a claim to examine the moral vision of Drabble. In the survey, it will also examine the main focus of Drabble criticism, especially the view of Drabble as a feminist, humanist and a historic chronicler. This Chapter will
present a brief account of the novels which are to be examined in the following Chapters. The literary influences on Drabble will also be discussed thoroughly in this Chapter. However, before dealing with the main discussion of this Chapter, I would like to attempt a critique of contemporary situation with the aim of contextualizing Drabble’s work.

One important thematic preoccupation of air of twentieth century English literature is of confusion and boredom. The complexity of modern life and the sense of instability and insecurity of a radical period make modern and contemporary writing also complex. The most striking feature of twentieth century fiction has been the ever-increasing separation between what is considered right and what is accepted by society. Extremes of pessimism, obsession, and hopelessness have become the accepted norms behind a significant portion of creative literature. The sense of alienation arising out of individual instant gratification has reached its climax and the individual is trapped in a world not merely indifferent or hostile to him personally, but also apparently not responsive to human action. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the long struggle of the classic English novel towards a full and comprehensive realism got sidelined. The First World War opened up the literary scene to new experiments in fiction, most significantly, by authors like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Aldous Huxley. Joyce’s exploratory writing of the unconscious record of the psychic and its thoughts and processes, called “the stream of consciousness”, influenced Virginia Woolf. Aldous Huxley’s novels depict quite a realistic snapshots of the lives of people between the two World Wars.

The English novel, which is a characteristic product of the English Class system, deals with individual consciousness and its multiple facets, its ability to preserve the individual’s past history in its entirety, which is perpetually pertinent and
is always engaged in mental processing and is responsible for the individual’s sense of solitude. Loneliness is perceived as one of the essential conditions of the era. The tendency to escape from this feeling is one of the main preoccupations of the modern man. The experience of transcending the self through participation in otherness is probable. The modern novelist is candid about sexual matters besides being cerebral and realistic. Modernism of D.H. Lawrence and of E. M. Forster lies in the uneasiness of the soul, which made them both such good critics of contemporary civilization. Their novels are practices on the principle of “right personal relationships,” to use a phrase of E.M. Forster. Forster hopes for a harmonious development of man in which there is an amalgamation of body and spirit, reason and emotion. He considers that the aim of the civilized life should be the enhancement of the quality of personal relationships.

The prominent feature of modern time is the emergence and dominance of the woman novelist. There are nevertheless profound differences between writing styles and the subjects of male and female authors. The female literary tradition arises from the expanding relationship between women writers and their society. The self-awareness of the educated modern woman writer has transformed itself into a literary tradition that addresses mostly gender and other specific issues. The first phase has been of self-discovery, an inward looking and of seeking an identity. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, education, and sexual liberation have led to contemporary women writers discussing the various relationships between women, as mothers and their daughters, sisters, friends, and other women communities.

Virginia Woolf wrote prolifically about women’s fiction and, is an important forerunner of modern feminist criticism. While she herself did not adopt a feminist stance, she continually analyzed the problems facing women writers. She argued that
women writers wrote differently from men not because of any perceived psychological differences, but because their social experiences were different. Her attempts to chronicle the life experiences of women were intentional and aspired to finding linguistic ways of describing the confined life of contemporary women during her time. She created fictitious works to explore the inner reality of female characters. She felt that fiction is actually a re-creation of the complexities of life experience, and she was the first woman critic to include a sociological dimension in her analysis of women’s writing.

Virginia Woolf revolutionized women’s writings by introducing a new vista of frank discussion about sexuality, especially from the women’s point of view which has been neglected for centuries. A new generation of university-educated women, who were free to express feminine discontent, came into existence. Authors such as Margaret Drabble and her sister, A. S. Byatt, belong to this group. In this relation Elaine Showalter writes in her famous book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) that the recent women novelists such as Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, and Margaret Drabble “are able to incorporate many of the strengths of the past with a new range of language and experience” (35). Like the pioneering feminist writers these modern-day writers are also concerned with conflicts between art and love, self-indulgence and duty; like them, they are aware of their place in the society and the polity, and their inter-connectivity to other women. The modern writers are daring enough to use a vocabulary previously reserved only for men, and are bold enough to talk about taboo subjects like women’s sexuality.

Margaret Drabble has become a towering figure in the contemporary literary world. Her novels have been translated into several languages, and have been the subject of deep study and varied criticism. She has been bestowed with many
significant literary awards, including the Commander of the British Empire in 1980 in recognition of her immense contribution to the world of English literature. The fifth edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* was one of her most ambitious projects, and its publication in 1985 brought her worldwide recognition. Her writing evolves from her engagement with contemporary issues and a deep-rooted sense of literary historicism. Thus Drabble’s work is characterized by a productive tension between the traditional and the modern, the literary and the experimental. Though her novels essentially deal with human nature, with an emphasis on the woman’s point of view, she does not consider herself a feminist writer. In an interview with Diana Cooper-Clark, she says:

I’m not at all keen on the feminist view that there’s a male conspiracy to put women down. I don’t think that’s true. Society is organized so that these collisions and disasters take place, which they have notably. There’s no use pretending that marriage is in a good state or that the relations between the sexes are happy at the moment. It’s no good blaming patriarchy or men for this. Both sexes are at fault. And the institution of marriage itself is at fault. This is one of the things that novels can explore without any preconceived ideas as to what the answer should be. (Rose, *Critical Essays* 21)

Drabble’s critics point out that while her work absorbs intensity from literary contexts, it is founded in real life experience—particularly that of ordinary women. Drabble herself is the first to admit that she was profoundly affected by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), which she read while she was at Cambridge. In an interview with Peter Firchow she talks about her ability to use this material as a good reference. She says, “This seemed to me to be wonderful material and so important to
me as a person. It was material that nobody had used and I could use and nobody had ever used as far as I could see as I would use it” (Firchow 110). Therefore, Creighton is right when she points out in her book *Margaret Drabble*. She remarks:

In drawing inspiration and example from writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, the early Doris Lessing and Mary McCarthy, rather than Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, Drabble breaks here too from the modernist tradition which would make of both novelistic and psychic female space a deathly safe “inner” place. (31)

Drabble was not just a novelist, but also a scholar who had studied women writers and one who has written her own novels during this new phenomenon of the female literary tradition, from the early 1960s through the present day. Her formal studies at Cambridge started in the 1950s. Her opinion about her student days at Cambridge is evident when she says, "The universities in the 1940s and 50s were intent on bringing literature to a halt at the end of the nineteenth century: Cambridge was progressive in that it allowed and obliged students of English Literature to read D.H. Lawrence” (Wilson xvi). Drabble liked the British literature of nineteenth-century, and in her interview with Firchow she says, "I would defend reading nineteenth-century novels absolutely. This seems to me a very valuable thing for a novelist to do and it means a lot to me" (112). She further recognizes her close connection to the literary tradition, particularly that of women writers. She is aware of the difficulties in the literary tradition she has chosen to follow. She often refers in her own novels to her female forerunners and their strong women characters. She purposefully chooses to write in the realistic tradition and often pays tribute to her nineteenth-century women-novelist pioneers in her own work. She says in an interview:
When I started I was not conscious there were parallels with Victorian Novelists: I was bored, lonely, needed money. I had no sense of conscious feminism. . . . In a tradition which includes Jane Austen and George Eliot there is no need to feel apologetic. . . . But I wasn’t sure what my subject-matter was in those early novels. It was domestic, inevitably connected with babies, as I found them fascinating. (Kenyon 45-46)

Just as the nineteenth-century forerunners realistically presented the day-to-day life of women in their times, Drabble too showcases the twentieth-century woman's family-centric role, which will be discussed in this Chapter. She introduces female characters who embrace the maternal aspects of their roles, and are bold enough to create their own gender-specific concept of morality. Since women carry, give birth and nurture their children, and also retain most of the responsibility for raising them, at least, in early years of their childhood, the maternal bond is very strong, and their role will always be important to them in some way. Drabble wishes this importance to be positive. She clarifies the modern role of the mother in the family, simultaneously recommending the removal of any roadblocks to a woman assuming a public role, outside her home. These Drabble women gain so much strength from their families that they have helped to stabilize society, as Drabble indicates in her trilogy.

Apparently, Drabble has attracted a great deal of critical attention. Nevertheless, her work is not easily categorized. Although she is a contemporary writer, she has written in the tradition of the great nineteenth-century novelists. Elaine Showalter has called her “the most ardent traditionalist” (304). In a review of The Ice Age (1977) Maureen Howard writes, “It takes its life from the best tradition of the nineteenth century novel: elaborate plotting, coincidence, meaningful resolution it has a surface vitality that comes from Margaret Drabble’s pure, old-fashioned narrative skill” (11). She further states that Drabble’s “social context is like Hardy’s, the
interlocking lives she has adapted from Charles Dickens, the chain of circumstances from Charlotte Bronte” (7). Joanne Creighton writes in her book Margaret Drabble (1985), that she believes Drabble to be explicit “about her identification with the great nineteenth century English traditions,” (25) and adds that Drabble “looks back to the past and the literary tradition for connection and guidance” (36).

Of late, Drabble criticism has taken an entirely different sociological approach, just as the pragmatic British realist approach has made way for the emotional and feminist writing. Drabble is hailed as “the first English woman to give voice to the delusive promise of college life, followed by the cold douche of matrimony and child-bearing” (Miles 168). However, as someone who deals with issues faced by people rather than just women Drabble has shown herself to be not just a feminist but also a humanist.

With regard to her commitment to “the tradition of women’s fiction,” Margaret Drabble has affirmed that “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” (Bergonzi 373). And though she recognizes that “All my first books were written very much from the woman’s point of view and they were narrated through the vision, if not by the voice, of women.” (Drabble, “Lecture in Japan” 82) she has gone to considerable extent in her later novels to shed the label of “women’s writer,” but ending up with ambiguous labels “cautious feminist” and “double-voiced feminism” (Beards 35).

After examining Drabble criticism, it is clear that no one has attempted a full-length study of Drabble’s moral vision in her novels. Hence, this thesis takes up this aspect of her novels for its study. The theoretical framework deployed in the thesis is that of mainly Emmanuel Levinas. The traditionally applied criteria for assessing the quality of literary work whether contemporary or classical irrespective of the gender
of the author are moral profundity and imaginative craftsmanship. This study will attempt to examine that Drabble is a moralistic writer because of her care for humanity irrespective of gender.

With regard to criticism of Drabble’s works, the first book critiquing her works was published by Valerie Grosvenor Myer’s Margaret Drabble: Puritanism and Permissiveness (1974). In this in-depth and all-inclusive study of Drabble’s six novels, Myer argues that Drabble’s enduring theme is Puritanism both in the social and spiritual sense. She deals with the differences between religious beliefs and customs and the modern mind and intellect, and the conflicts which are revealed consequently. She analyzes these conflicts in the leading characters, looks at the system which nurtured them and helped to forge their personalities, and writes a chapter on “Educated Women,” and other chapter on marriage and motherhood. Myer finds a substantial combination of sexual frigidity and passionate maternal feeling in some of Drabble’s characters. In Myer’s view, Drabble’s solution to the conflict faced by her characters between morals and instinct is found by the individuals discovering their own nature through love and community. Myer further observes:

Margaret Drabble’s continuing theme is a reconsideration and revaluation of the English puritan tradition. She has recognized that this strain, though popularly denied, is still very much with us, and has left us an inheritance of guilt and anxiety. This perception has enabled her to portray with sympathy, accuracy and sharpness those classes of English society where the puritan tradition is strongest: “liberal” intellectuals and the northern lower middle class...

The extended analysis of the puritan inheritance, played out in all her leading characters, is her characteristic and unique contribution to the contemporary novel. (15)
Part of Myer’s study consists of the impact felt on the psychology and behavior of the major characters. This feature of her work is crucial, for Drabble’s protagonists’ puritan consciences are frequently at odds with their true natures; and if unimpeded would have led them to find love, community, and spontaneous delight and happiness in life. Myer feels that Drabble demonstrates, through her characters’ conflicts and progress that a puritan streak has to be reconciled with the natural instinct for pleasure. All the characters created by Drabble deal with and resolve this conflict, though with varying degrees of success, and progress to find love and form healthy relationships with others. Essentially Myer’s thesis argues that as her heroines, Drabble’s intellect rejects her puritan inheritance but is nevertheless molded by it; therefore her novels can be seen as an extended analysis of the contemporary people’s search for morals and values. Myer’s study is noteworthy because she has drawn attention to Drabble’s dismal and dreary, almost Calvinistic, point of view; however she errs in her assumption that Drabble is gradually shedding or at least trying to shed this outlook in favor of a healthier one. As a matter of fact, Drabble’s works indicate a deep emotional and philosophical attachment to the concepts of determinism and fatalism.

The questions of fate and will have been found as Drabble’s most important themes by critics such as Marion Vlastos Libby. In her article “Fate and Feminism in the Novels of Margaret Drabble”(1975) she writes, “because [her] central protagonist … is always a woman and the society in which she lives is always depicted, accurately, as deeply patriarchal and class-bound, the problem of the individual’s capacity of self-determination is inevitably tied to the feminist perspective”(176). But in her interview with Diana Cooper- Clark which is published in Ellen Cronan Rose’s Critical Essays on Margaret Drabble (1984), Drabble makes her point clearer when she says:
Well, we certainly do live in a world of chance, there’s no disputing that. The duty of the human will is to seek sense of it and to resist being swamped by the arbitrary and saying because it’s arbitrary there’s nothing you can do. You have to endeavor in the face of the impossible. That’s what we are put on this earth to do: to endeavor in the face of the impossible. (*Critical Essays* 26)

Regardless of Drabble’s refutation of her critics’ who view her work from a feminist angle a number of readers and critics still find out the feminist messages in her works. But one of the first critics to study her seriously as a philosophical writer was Monica Lauritzen Mannheimer, in 1975. She analyzes Drabble’s novels in her article: “The Search for Identity in Margaret Drabble’s *The Needle’s Eye*.” She affirms that, while the novels, “all centre around (sic) crises of identity undergone by the main characters”, they were more than “fictional versions of the liberal bourgeois debate on the Woman Question”(*Rose, Critical Essays* 4). She studies certain aspects which were earlier neglected yet, the critic also ignores an important facet of Drabble’s fiction: its delving into the often problematic relationship between feminist ideologies and female experience.

Ellen Cronan Rose in her *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures* (1980) ponders on the fact that Drabble ought to be holding up examples of feminist models though she is not doing so. According to Rose, the questions about women’s choices that were raised by Margaret Drabble’s early novels ought to have been addressed in her later ones. As an illustration, in *A Summer Bird-Cage*, the heroine Sarah aspires to have both a career and a successful marriage, in other words, both intellectual and emotional fulfillment – but she is sadly aware that it is impossible for women of her generation to have both. Rose charges Sarah Bennett of accepting uncritically “patriarchy’s definition of what it means to be a woman”, and that the
book’s main theme is dealing with this dilemma of a woman wanting both a family and a successful career. However, criticism of Sarah’s actions and aspirations includes not just “male” notions of femininity but also to an equal degree, the “female” constructs of their own gender.

Rose’s analysis of Drabble’s novels seems to imply that while women should call into question patriarchal definitions of femaleness and women’s role in society, they should not challenge feminist concerns. However, contrary to Rose’s contention, Sarah demonstrates a well educated ability for autonomous thought and action. In reality, for the first time in history, it was the 1960s of post-war England where large groups of educated women were placed in institutions of higher learning, and this had a huge positive impact on the emerging women’s movement. Contemporary feminists celebrate those pioneering women who advanced the cause of women both within their institutions and also in their personal lives. In fact, Drabble presents a young woman in *The Millstone* (1968) who does both; Rosamund Stacey is an aspiring university teacher who decides to have a baby outside of marriage. Drabble is criticized by critics, like Susan Spitzer because, according to them, she is not sexually liberated enough. Spitzer contends that Rosamund, in order to achieve her ambitions, neglects her femininity.

In Chapter two Rosamund concentrates on the prevalent presumption raised by Spitzer’s paper, namely, the presumption that the contemporary career woman is also a “liberated” woman, and also that a key aspect of such female liberation is emancipation of their sexuality, which is perceived as an unqualified right. Spitzer spreads a negative methods to annihilate and wipe out Rosamund and her sexual liberation, while presenting herself as self-righteously and morally superior. For example, Rose translates Rosamund’s initial anxiety over whether or not she will be able to combine motherhood and career successfully unlike any of us, to be held as
evidence that, though a woman, she lacks “maternal impulses”. Spitzer totally ignores the societal setting in which Rosamund arrives at her decision to have an “illegitimate” child, seeing as the novel was written in 1965. She also lays down lofty standards for individual conduct that few women can emulate, thereby perpetuating the feelings, like inadequacy and inferiority in women, which she claims to redress.

In contrast, Drabble creates in Rosamund a woman who is ahead of her time, even with all her fissures and faults; furthermore, Rosamund’s cracks which make her human, are what engage and help to bring the reader closer to Drabble’s characters, as opposed to cringing away from the intimidating, and disconcerting feminist women created by Spitzer. The following novels illustrate the accuracy of this opinion, which present women who are forced to settle for a narrow and an unfair way of existence. However, Rose feels that with The Waterfall, Drabble has finally created a woman who manages to attain autonomy and integrity. With the success and progress of this novel Rose would rather have Drabble continue in a feminist focus, creating protagonists who can be upheld as models for their contemporaries.

But Drabble deviates from this feminist path. In The Needle’s Eye (1972) Rose Vassiliou does not finally break free of patriarchal institutions, as she seems to have been on the verge of doing it. In The Realms of Gold (1975) Drabble’s heroine solves the problems she faces, living in a patriarchal society by personal means rather than political and social change, and so cannot be taken as a chapter working against patriarchy. In The Ice Age she ignores the potential feminist example of Alison, focusing instead on Anthony Keating and his embracing of patriarchal ideals.

Ellen Rose perceives “hidden agenda of women’s liberation” in Drabble’s novels. Drabble permits women like Rose who is on the verge of breaking free of patriarchal society’s strictures, to finally settle for much less; and she creates characters like Emily Offenbach in The Needle’s Eye, and Alison Murray, who, if
granted freer rein, would have overcome the subversive intentions of the novel’s male-dominated societies they live in. There is a subconscious desire to make a radical feminist statement running through most of Drabble’s work. Ellen Rose would like Drabble’s heroines to stop breaking away from this vision, but break through with strong feminist messages. She closes her analysis with a sincere request to Drabble to make her next book “an unequivocally feminist blueprint” (Rose, *Equivocal Figures* 129). Rose’s analysis of Drabble’s novels is brilliant; but she is concentrating on what could have been in Drabble’s writings and not on what is actually there. Rose sees Drabble’s conservative desires as contrary denials of her true feminist vision rather than as veritable and genuine aspects of her philosophy.

*Margaret Drabble: Existing Within Structures* (1983) is a critical study of Drabble’s works by Mary Hurley Moran. Though Margaret Drabble is celebrated as a “woman writer,” Hurley Moran explicates that Drabble is in reality “ultimately concerned with larger philosophical and psychological issues” – the most important issue being the questioning of the human will. She regards Drabble’s fiction as being “focused more on the problems, which confront both men and women, of living in the bewildering contemporary world.” Studying Drabble’s fiction thematically, Moran proves that in Drabble’s work men and women are “embedded in strictures and subject to forces over which their rational selves have little control: a universe ruled by an omnipotent deity, nature and the family” (16-17). Moran delineates Drabble’s protagonists as “intelligent, often cynical people living in a society of existential choices and situational ethics, and yet they use concepts such as providence, sin and grace in contemplating their lives” (18). She believes that for Drabble, the term ‘nature’ encompasses not only the physical world, but also the innate character of a person, and his or her relationship to the biological composition of that world. Being
conscious of the power and importance of nature to man’s life can mitigate the existential anxiety that can sometimes overcome contemporary patriarchal system. As a matter of fact, families, with their physical and psychological connections, provide both spiritual and psychological reinforcement and comfort for human beings of modern time. Moran writes the importance of family in Drabble’s work thus:

Although the family curtails individual freedom, by influencing one’s character and imposing familial responsibilities, it is ultimately a bulwark against life’s turbulence and uncertainties. Many of her protagonists move from rejection to at least partial acceptance of their families, both by recognizing their own inheritance of certain ancestral traits and by assuming greater responsibility toward their relatives.

(Moran 62)

Though by submission to these restricting rules persons can seemingly let their free will be inhibited, Moran proves that Drabble’s characters do achieve freedom through imagination. Such freedom of thought and will get translated into hope that enables human beings not only to persist in this confounding world, but also to flourish, attain wisdom, strength, and a profound understanding of the world around them and to understand what it means to be human.

In response to Myer’s ideas Patricia Sharpe wrote an article entitled, “On First Looking into The Realms of Gold” (1977), where she differs with Myer’s perception that the protagonists in Drabble’s novels progress to achieve health, happiness and become mature enough to contribute to their societies by the end of the novels. Sharpe comments that while Drabble’s characters do learn to live in harmony with their true natures, they are not well-adjusted or mentally healthy enough to suit Myer’s expectations. In fact, some of her characters, like Stephen Ollerenshaw, are by their
very nature psychologically unhealthy. But Drabble, as an author who appreciates the uniqueness and the distinctness of each individual, seems to like her characters developing in true harmony of their true nature, whatever it might be.

Jouanne V. Creighton has done an in-depth study on the themes of Drabble’s fiction in her analysis in *Margaret Drabble* (1985). In the Introduction, she carefully deliberates over Drabble’s works and their themes. She observes:

Her works are lucidly contemporary, and yet informed with a sophisticated sense of literary history and tradition. Because she attracts, like few writers can, both general readers and literary critics, her work draws together middlebrow and serious fiction, helping to resynthesize a readership split by modernist elitism. Actively participating both in ordinary, middle-class British life and in intellectual and literary circles, she is one of those seminal writers who write out of deep engagement with the culture in which she lives. Assimilating, creating, pronouncing judgment upon literary form and value, she also gives voice to common problems, to communal concerns. (15)

In the chapter entitled “Bird-cages” she focuses more on the general aspects of Drabble’s novels: *A Summer Bird-Cage, The Garrick Year* (1966) *The Millstone* and *The Waterfall*. Creighton places special emphasis on what she calls Drabble’s “Englishness,” and her role as a woman writing believably about contemporary women, and her ability to handle issues between the traditional and the modern. Her contention is that the energetic and fascinating relationship in Drabble’s novels have evolved from her strong feel for the power and the resourcefulness of existing traditions, paired with her sound characterization and her characters’ dealing with the
familial problems that people face in modern society. According to her it is this ability which makes Drabble a significant part of contemporary fiction. For example, when she talks about modernized London, she tries to show that it is not hopeless, but varied, vital, and endlessly self-renewing: reflective of a greater human connectedness. She says:

The old and the new side by side, overlapping, jumbled, always decaying, yet always renewed; London, how could one ever be tired of it? How could one stumble dully through its streets, or waste time sitting in a heap staring at a wall? When there it lay, its old intensity restored, shining with invitation, all its shabby grime lost in perspective, imperceptible from this dizzy height, its connections clear, its pathways revealed. (*The Middle Ground* 238)

Creighton deals with *Jerusalem the Golden*, *The Needle’s Eye* and *The Realms of Gold* in the third chapter. With regard to *The Realms of Gold* she remarks:

No other novel by Drabble contextualizes the characters in such complex networks of ideology, history, family, culture, and language. No other has such extensive imagistic patterns which skillfully interweave the real and the metaphorical, outer and inner realities. No other is written in such a grandly omniscient way. No other “invents” a more resolved ending or projects more boldly into the future. An impressive novel with a scope unequalled in Drabble’s canon, it is overtly controlled and manipulated in a way uncharacteristic of much of Drabble’s work. But what is gained in novelistic breadth is in some ways lost in characterization – particularly that of Frances Wingate – less interesting than earlier, less ambitious novels. (90)
Another significant critique on Drabble’s work is *Critical Essays on Margaret Drabble* (1985) edited by Ellen Cronan Rose. She has weighed the dramatic changes in the feminist criticism: the ever-increasing attention to language and contemporary literary theory as artistic manifestations of feminist principles. In her contribution to this collection of essays, entitled, “The Progress of a Letter: Truth, Feminism, and *The Waterfall*” Eleanor Honig Skoller writes thus:

In an effort to reveal the misrepresentation of women in literature and the occultation of women writers by men, feminists are assiduously researching and testing the “truth-value” of literature against an overwhelmingly experiential reality. In this kind of reading, it is not only a matter of how “true-to-life” a writer’s words are, but also how faithful (or not) the elements of her work (plot, character, description) are to those in her “real” life. Another facet of this reading strategy is the insistence of many feminist critics on evaluation themes and portrayals according to their usefulness (or the lack of it) to the ideology of feminism which, in few words, is the struggle for liberation (on all fronts) from patriarchal oppression and for self-realization and self-possession (in several senses). (120)

While the terms of references and scope of the critiques in this volume, including Skoller’s, are indicative of the broadening approach of feminist criticism, Skoller’s remarks clarify the perimeters of conventional criticism of Drabble’s works.

Ellen Z. Lambert in her essay entitled, “Margaret Drabble and the Sense of Possibility”, talks about Drabble’s heroines as if they were real people, whom she finds charming, lovable, generous, and full of hope, personifying what she calls Drabble’s own “hope against hope.” According to her, Drabble continues to celebrate
the persistence of hope in human psyche, because she is completely aware of tragedy, misery and loss.

Michael Harper in his article, “Margaret Drabble and the Resurrection of the English Novel” contends that Drabble is not a self-satisfied, complacent neo-Victorian writer as she has been wrongly portrayed frequently. Though he also asserts thus:

The world she presents may superficially resemble the “densely imagined, realistic social world” of the Victorians, but its apparent “realism” is not something that Margaret Drabble naively takes for granted. Her “realistic” social world is something painfully and with difficulty constructed by the author and her characters, something not assumed but affirmed in an act of faith, but achieved at the end of an odyssey of doubt and questioning of both the world and the self. (55)

In another brilliantly argued essay, Harper studies Drabble’s work in another context, namely the post-modernism of Pynchon and of Derridean epistemology. He remarks:

Margaret Drabble’s novels explore areas that are very much evident in contemporary criticism, but they arrive at different conclusions. That knowledge is never certain, that language does not represent or clearly and infallibly communicate, that personal identity is a fiction and that our belief in other “selves” rests upon shaky evidence - these “facts” are not for her grounds for celebration like Pynchon’s but neither do they plunge her into an abyss of nothingness from which there is no return. Despite all this, life of a sort seems to go on, and something like
community can be erected upon knowledge that is always questionable. (68-69)

He maintains, “but they arrive at different conclusions,” including the notion that, though it is fiction, “community is possible.” (69)

Lorna Irvine in her essay, “No Sense of an Ending: Drabble’s Continuous Fictions” places Drabble’s writing in yet another tradition. Looking back over the corpus of Drabble’s works, Irvine takes notes of Drabble’s “striking” avoidance of narrative closure, coupled with a thematic emphasis on the importance of nourishing relationships, and arrives at a gender-specific morality. In this essay, Irvine writes:

These particularly maternal denials of ending suggest a feminine narrative pattern. For example, in the concluding scene of The Garrick Year, Emma, descending with her family from the commons where they have picnicked, sees a snake sucking at the belly of a sheep. Fraught with symbolism, the scene could end the novel with a revelation of the inevitability of death. But Emma chooses instead to emphasize continuance: “One has just to keep on and to pretend, for the sake of the children, not to notice” (GY, 172). Nonetheless, the grand finale continues to fascinate. (76) 

Irvine seems to concur with Emma’s belief that she is more rooted in reality than in George, the incidental father of her baby.

“Fantasy and Femaleness in Margaret Drabble’s The Millstone” by Susan Spitzer is however a psychoanalytic interpretation of The Millstone. Spitzer declares:

The truth Rosamund arrives at a close reading of the text will reveal to be shabby, partial truth that only barely camouflages the more vital current of self-deception flowing through the novel. Self-knowledge is,
finally, too easily acquired to be worth much, and the seriousness of the events in the novel serves only to disguise the deeply childlike nature of Rosamund’s unconscious fantasy. (88) Spitzer argues that this apparent realism is just a “smoke-screen” allowing Rosamund to act out certain infantile fantasies; for example, her unconscious desire to have a baby and thereby duplicating the pre-Oedipal bond with her mother, her desire for independence, and more than anything, her desire not to be an adult woman. Because *The Millstone* is recounted in the first person, Spitzer seems uncertain as to what extent Drabble is conscious of these fantasies and to what extent she wants us to either agree with or doubt Rosamund’s self-assessment.

Joanne Creighton in her essay critiquing *The Waterfall* called “Reading Margaret Drabble’s *The Waterfall*” contends that the textual matter actively encourages us to play amateur psychologist. Employing an Iserian model of reader-response theory, she asserts that *The Waterfall* is artfully fabricated to contain “gaps” or indeterminacies which the reader is compelled to fill in, just as he or she would attempt to do with “real” life experience. Here She picks up a theme that has been outlined by Ellen Z. Lambert and Michael F. Harper in different ways and developed in following essays by Cynthia Davis and Mary Jane Elkins, which holds that Drabble’s novels to some extent validate the “real” world we live in. All the while, Creighton maintains that *The Waterfall* “playfully” (106) recognizes its own fictional quality, and it is this aspect of play that Eleanor Honig highlights in her essay.

Eleanor Honig Skoller in her essay, “The Progress of a Letter: Truth, Feminism, and *The Waterfall*”, like Irvine, identifies Drabble’s works in an especially female literary context, but she takes exception to the habitual and somewhat limiting interpretation of Margaret Drabble as “the novelist of maternity.” Skoller’s brilliant
analysis of verbal play in *The Waterfall* is similar to what the French feminists of neo-Lacanian conviction are doing, and also to a great extent substantiates her claim that Drabble is “misconstrued” by many critics, including most feminists. She asserts thus:

> Another facet of this reading strategy is the insistence of many feminist critics on evaluating themes and portrayals according to their usefulness (or the lack of it) to the ideology of feminism which, in few words, is the struggle for liberation (on all fronts) from patriarchal oppression and for self-realization and self-possession (in several senses). The struggle is necessary and has been effective, but it has caused, in spite of its liberating aims, a narrowing of the feminist purview, a kind of monism that consists in a devotion to the authority of experience in literary works. (120)

Cynthia A. Davis in her contribution, “Unfolding Form: Narrative Approach and Theme in *The Realms of Gold*”, argues that while “Drabble uses some of the techniques” of self-reflexive literature, her motive in doing so is radically different. “Direct comments on the narrative are only one part of an approach that finally attempts to mimic the workings of the external world as well as explore human responses to it.” (141). Davis considers the novel’s central concerns to be “the relation of self to world and the limitations of individual perspectives” (143).

Carey Kaplan in her essay “A Vision of Power in Margaret Drabble’s *The Ice Age*” remarks on Drabble’s verbal art the metaphorical level thus presenting a rich, indicative display of Drabble as a “novelist of maternity.” Simultaneously, by reasoning that the “uterine imagery” (134) validates not only creativity, both in its imaginative and biological manifestations, but also highlights the indispensable need to nurture and therefore to construe, Kaplan reinforces Davis’s interpretation of the
novel along with the interpretations of critics as Irvine, and Creighton, who attribute epistemological and moral import to Drabble’s formal strategies. In his analysis of *The Realms of Gold* Kaplan remarks:

In *The Realms of Gold*, the power to create imaginatively is seen as an extension of the power to procreate physically, to beget offspring. At the beginning of the novel, Drabble shows us an octopus who dies immediately after serving her procreative function. For people, though, life goes on after childbirth. When, however, the human organism - Frances Wingate in this case chooses to continue living after procreating, creation becomes self-conscious rather than merely biological. (136)

Elaine Tuttle Hansen in her essay, “The Uses of Imagination: Margaret Drabble’s *The Ice Age*”, explores “the uses of imagination” in *The Ice Age*, which is considered androcentric by most critics. Hansen’s analysis demands “careful readers,” who are led through the grammatical intricacies of the first and last paragraphs, thereby demonstrating that the narrative style distances the readers from Anthony, the apparent protagonist, and favors Alison. Thus interpreted, *The Ice Age* manifests Drabble’s “ongoing” belief in “the power of women to use the imaginative faculty in ways that men, for various reasons do not,” (152) because most men are not ready or able to acknowledge the connection to or the responsibility for other people. Hansen’s study of *The Ice Age* may be controversial, but it surely introduces the intricate nuances of Drabble’s writing style.

Mary Jane Elkins in her article, “Alenoushka’s Return: Motifs and Movement in Margaret Drabble’s *The Middle Ground*” discusses *The Middle Ground* (1981) the book which Drabble couldn’t “find words to describe” according to Cooper-Clark.
Elkins identifies it as a novel dealing with “the search for meaning,” which she feels is “embedded” in its “digressions, the interior wanderings of characters and the stories that Kate hears or tells or both.” There is a simple but profound truth at the heart of this novel, which Drabble has been “exploring” for more than twenty years: that our prime responsibility is to others rather than self. It is very important that we steep ourselves in the human community, which is what matters ultimately.

Lynn Veach Sadler, in her book *Margaret Drabble* (1986), demonstrates that Drabble is not a feminist writer as she has been unfairly labeled or the queen of babies and motherhood as she has been derided, but a writer greatly interested in the lives of contemporary women and men. Sadler discusses throughout her book the issues faced by modern women in Drabble’s novels. She analyzes *A Summer Bird-Cage* in the second chapter of her book. It is the story of Sarah’s run for independence. Pretty and clever, she is privileged and she is also aware that such privilege is granted and cannot be earned. She becomes the mould which shapes the pattern for other Drabble characters by being conscious of her luck and also simultaneously being alarmed at its unfairness and fearing that it might disappear. She is also nervous because she feels that she must have added to her cache of good fortunes by being “lucky in love”. Her unique quality lies in the fact that she is unable to accept Francis. She creates problems under the pretext of struggling to gain something that she already has. Though the other characters in the book try to put her in trap, yet we know that she commands this particular line. But she is too young to foresee that she will encounter real difficulties as life puts up its own traps.

Sarah learns about self-induced traps and about those who cast people into stereotypes and those who allow themselves to be stereotyped. Her best example is Louise, who is doubly self-entrapped: she is trapped first in the golden cage of
glittering London into which her entrée is Stephen, and again in her refusal of John because society prescribes that an actor should not be taken seriously when professing his or her love and that he cannot take care of her. Sarah gives way to typical female drama, by acting like a drama queen and becoming the stereotypical victim: she feels “like someone living in a paper house surrounded by predatory creatures” (87). But her world is not the uncomplicated world where men are predators and their women their helpless victims. Yet she arrives at her differentiation between the sexes by juxtaposing Louise and herself as brides, and her anger quickly vanishes in a wish for not just women, but also the human race. Sadler remarks:

> For Drabble, writing novels is a means of exploring alternative lifestyles, and such exploration is the genesis of Sarah’s writing. Her tale of Louise is an extension of her tendency to note people. What she is observing is not just marriage and nonmarriage. Like Louise, she could already be married for money, but the banker’s son was too boring. She is learning to reject the emergent extremes and encompass what the extremes miss. (12)

Sadler analyzes *The Millstone* in chapter three entitled ‘Independent Women.’ In this work of fiction, the protagonist Rosamund Stacey determines to dispose of her virginity with the assistance of Hamish Andrews, but her plan is foiled when she signs her own last name in the hotel register. Attractive to men and attracted by them in turn, despite her difficulties with sex, she thinks of a way to enjoy their company while working for her doctorate. For a year, she goes with Joe Hurt and Roger Henderson, holding each of them at bay sexually by letting them think that she is sleeping with the other. One evening, George Matthews walks her home, and they end up making love. Her stubborn pride and his diffidence contrive to prevent further contact between the two, though she thinks of him frequently and listens to him on the
BBC. Months later, while working in the British Museum on Sir Walter Raleigh, she realizes she is pregnant. She attempts to abort it herself with gin and hot water, bungles it and then when her older sister suggests putting up the baby for adoption she decides to continue with pregnancy.

Then everything works miraculously. Rosamund’s parents, who are ignorant of the impending crisis, go to Africa for a year and let her live in their flat, which she decides to share with Lydia Reynolds, a novelist friend. Her dissertation proceeds as per plan, but her only problem seems to be with the National Health Service and Prenatal Clinic. The birth is uncomplicated and the child, whom she names Octavia, is beautiful. The doctor takes it upon himself to reveal her situation to her parents, who have moved on to India. Lydia is not angry when Octavia chews up parts of the manuscript of her latest novel, only relieved because Rosamund pretends that she is unaware that she and the baby are its subjects. Life continues happily until a doctor treating Octavia’s cold, accidentally discovers a heart defect necessitating a dangerous operation. The child recovers, but Rosamund is forced to have hysterics to be allowed into the ward to see her. Her career is also very successful, and she is set to take a position at a new university. Sadler believes:

*The Millstone* is a study of a character privileged beyond most of us, yet for whom life is a puzzle. If episodic, the episodes are also epiphanic as in the glowing scene with the nurses. They are revelatory for us if not for Rosamund despite her being a successful literary critic accustomed to searching the text for resonances of meaning. (34)

Indeed, for many of Drabble’s women, sexuality is a central and vital aspect of self-fulfillment, and although they recognize “the pulls of sex and blood” which might “drag them into unwilled motion” (SB 76), they are also aware that the same is true of men. Sarah’s sister, Louise Halifax, definitely uses her feminine deceiving strategies
and charms to “suck the blood” and money from her wealthy husband, although feminists, not to mention many male critics, tend to interpret the title, *A Summer Bird-cage*, as an image of the female trapped in marriage. This raises another crucial and vexing point in Drabble’s fiction: she shows that although her “modern” women may exhibit a “liberated” behavior, like Louise, for example, who does not wait for a man to “make the first move”, yet paradoxically they are also as "traditional" as Mrs. Bennett of the past. Drabble’s novels talk about the quality, and not the quantity of female liberation, including sexual emancipation, in an attempt to forge a new morality or at least to suggest one.

Margaret Drabble acknowledges the fact that modern women enjoy equality in rules even if not always in fact, that is, in theory if not in practice, because generations of women, who suffered, slowly but steadily advanced women’s rights. Drabble wrote some of her novels just as the first wave of feminism originated in the 1960s. The first set of novels that were written then actually span almost a decade, from 1963 to 1972, a formative period of modern feminist ideas. Thus, these novels can provide an understanding of the origin of the discontent that some contemporary women feel toward certain aspects of feminist ideologies.

In order to understand the reason and origin of this discontent, this study will look at selective feminist interpretations of Drabble’s early work. As Drabble began to carve a place for herself in the English literary tradition, critics began to recognize that there were other concerns and issues addressed in her novels which were philosophical, social and political in nature and were not necessarily related to gender-specific ones. Criticism of her work turned from the polemics of gender toward such questions as determination, grace and damnation, order and chaos, heredity and environment, and morality. In “Bricks and Mortar”, a review of *The Needle's Eye*, Joyce Carol Oates wrote that Drabble has “taken upon herself the task,
largely ignored today, of attempting the active, vital, energetic, mysterious re-creation of a set of values by which human beings can live”(34). I would take Oates’s statement one step further, by suggesting that Drabble reconciles the moral seriousness of nineteenth-century literature with the psychological depth of modern writing. This is a view that pervades the very structure of her early fiction, which exhibit a nineteenth-century scope of social commentary, with a modern depth of psychological examination, projected primarily through the self-analysis of her narrators or protagonists. Through her characterization of Clara Maugham, the heroine, Drabble pays tribute to the feminist accomplishment of higher education for women. Drabble has often been linked to a modern George Eliot, and just like her, she too is conscious of the reality that women had to prove their right to be educated in the first place, before they could even begin to fight for access to education, as the prevailing wisdom was that women were too emotional and so incapable of being rational. And again, just like Eliot, Drabble also seems to think that self-knowledge is as important as education.

Through her portrayal of Clara, Drabble demonstrates that one can adopt the ideals of feminism, while also remaining “traditional” in substance. Clara seemingly engages in all the feminist-advocated activities, like education, sexual emancipation, and tries for other “non-traditional” goals. Clara’s characterization then points to a basic failing in certain types of feminist ideology: the propensity to judge the degree of a woman's commitment to feminism by her actions, without considering her state of mind.

By studying such feminist literary critics such as Virginia Woolf, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Elaine Showalter, one can attempt to describe the growth of this particular feminist theory. Stated succinctly, these erudite scholars argue that female authors rarely benefit from the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, unlike in the case of male authors. So each new generation of women
writers had to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, resulting in each new female work to be treated as unique, divested of its context and tradition and so, vulnerable to criticism. By maintaining that each new female work is orphaned and vulnerable, the feminists were equipped with a ready-made defense against any criticism. And stripped of the advantages enjoyed by the works of men, namely, the tradition of continuity, the works of women automatically bestowed superiority because of their originality.

However, clinging to this image of the female writings as orphaned and susceptible, many critics of feminist literature have also tried to validate a female literary tradition. Nevertheless, ironically, the different readings of feminine literary history frequently appear to be misanthropic just as the male literary tradition is supposedly misogynistic. Furthermore, this female literary history reflects the same characteristic which feminists object to the male literary tradition: the pattern of delineating one sex as relative to the other. However, as men and women are in some ways similar and in other ways different, defining them as relative to one another seems fair and, thus, criticism of this tradition seems unjust.

S.B. Shurbatt’s reading of The Waterfall in “Margaret Drabble’s The Waterfall: The Writer as Fiction, or Overcoming the Dilemma of Female Authorship” offers this feminist literary tradition and historical perspective. According to the critic, Drabble undermines the patriarchal literary tradition as she perceives it to be inimical to women’s interests. I think that Drabble’s perception of the ‘Great Tradition’, which is made up of both men and women, is for the most part, pretty positive. None the less, this is not to say that the author is uncritical of the way women were presented in the past, but only to point out that her criticism extends to both male and female models. Furthermore, The Waterfall is less about scrutinizing the shortcomings of male narrative modes and representations than it is about literary authenticity. As a
matter of fact, in this novel it is evident that she attempts to reconcile the nineteenth-century novel with her consciousness of twentieth-century epistemology. To put it differently, she tries to revive the moral earnestness of the past and fuse it with the psychological profundity of the present.

In keeping with the feminist literary tradition, Shurbutt defines “work of art” as the product of a patriarchal literary tradition that is inherently inimical to women (284). The critic borrows Susan Gubar’s terms to exemplify her thesis that male literary tradition has produced the female in its own image, or rather, as it would like her to be – “pliable, responsive, and purely physical” (Gubar 292). Shurbutt’s hypothesizing is implanted in elaborate discussions of many theories proposed by others, which she employs as frames for or to draw parallels with her own theories, as she does with those of Susan Gubar.

Drabble presents an artistic couple in The Waterfall, Jane Gray who is a poet and her husband, Malcolm, who is a musician; they struggle to balance their artistic and personal lives regardless of their genders. In fact, Malcolm frequently is seen feeling guilty for pursuing his career while neglecting his family.

Throughout her essay Shurbutt repeats these “gender-specific” arguments as being common amongst most feminists. According to her, Jane Gray represents the fragmented psyche of the female artist. Shurbutt goes further and argues that “Jane Gray is a character who, in striving to become a poet, feels she must reject her female self” (Shurbutt 287). As Shurbutt observes, Jane’s rejection of her femininity is the result of “live[ing] a reality in conflict with the female image as portrayed by great fiction” (Shurbutt 285). This is a viewpoint which dates back to Gilbert and Gubar, whose views on this subject are famous: to put it concisely, they theorize that, since much of the Western literary genres are basically masculine, conceptualized by male authors to narrate male-oriented stories, the woman writer who tries to provides link
between her own gender and the traditional patriarchal storylines, will find herself hindered by irreconcilable differences.

One of the problems with some feminist ideologies, both in the literary and the political sense, is the presentation of “truth” with respect to the position of women in society, both in the past and at present. While maintaining an undivided treatment of truth, at the same time some feminists argue that the representation of women in literature and the predominant ideas about women in society, on the whole, are false because they are the creation of a patriarchal system whose first order of business is the protracted continuance of the status quo, which is a male-dominated society entrenched with a patriarchal mindset. And logically following from this argument, the question arises that, if patriarchal definitions of women are conditional and manufactured, why should feminist definitions of women be taken as universal and absolute? This question might have been answered, to some extent, by the sometimes implicit, and at other times explicit assumption underlying certain feminist discourses of truth, the assumption that any arguments a feminist counsels are “true” because of her gender. Such an assumption is fraught with the inherent contradiction that is best exemplified in one of the usual complaints leveled against feminists, that is, when a man attributes a woman’s view to her gender, it is perceived as sexist, whereas, when a woman bases something on the authority she gains due to her gender, it is viewed as feminist.

This latter proposition is based on the three-way equation drawn between power, knowledge and gender by some feminists over the years, the argument being that one of the principal means for women to take back personal, economic and political power is through education and the acquisition of knowledge. But, one weakness of this equation is the correct way to define the term, “power”. While there are plenty of educated women who think that knowledge is power, the way in which
such power gets manifested is not necessarily feminist. Though many women might hate to admit it, power and parasitism are perceived by many women as synonymous and not oxymoronic. To put it differently, there are women even today who use knowledge in an earlier “feminine” way: as an ornamental lure to attract men who will support their lavish lifestyle. And furthermore, contrary to the contention of some feminists, this residue of an earlier societal pattern does not necessarily indicate an incorporation of patriarchal ideas about female impotence; it is rather, a strategic attempt of some feminists to be able to claim victimization by men.

This sort of passive pattern is displayed by Margaret Drabble in all of her fiction. This theme is particularly prominent in her fourth novel, *Jerusalem the Golden*. She has described the protagonist, Clara Maugham, as her “most unsympathetic heroine” in her interview with Iris Rozencwajg, and in another interview she says, “She is going to turn into something fearsome” (Hardin 278). In her novel, she recognizes the restrictions women face; indeed, we see in the very first page, that Clara’s “only offences [as a young girl] were her existence and her sex” (*JG* 7). But, while Drabble’s inherent feminist facet addresses female restrictions, she also contends that personal ontogenesis can be achieved in spite of such restrictions; this is a bold stance, particularly when compared to the political debates in recent times. Though she is always vocal on social injustices against women, she occupies herself more with the main focus on the personal growth and morals of women.

Preserving the feminist tradition, Drabble thinks that knowledge should be a means for women and ideally for men too, to feel, and then help them to judge with feeling, in more efficaciously. Nevertheless, she does not try to dictate how this female sensibility should take form, unlike some feminists. In other words, while some feminists enthusiastically praise women to learn to utilize their long-repressed
feelings, and to recover their inner voice along with their self-authority, they also determine the forms of this repression. For instance, they attribute women’s greater availability and power in the job market and in the political field. Then, these same feminists express their sorrow upon the fact that career women are often forced to appropriate the very “male” characters of aggression, and insensitivity to become successful in the male-dominated positions.

Drabble, on the other hand, holds each of her heroines responsible for forging her own personal and individual morality. To achieve this, she plants a rather simple polarity between feeling and form. Clara Maugham, the heroine of Jerusalem the Golden, is born into the lower middle class family in Northam; she wills herself in order to escape from the squalor, but also manages to escape with a vengeance. Indeed, this motive to escape is the fundamental principle that decides how she views herself and the world around her. Given the oppressing, and hopeless familial background, it is not surprising that she wants to escape. Like all of women of Drabble’s, Clara too views education as a sort of deliverance, but unlike most, she does not think that the means do not justify the end. Her fierce determination to distance herself psychologically from her past as much as possible is apparent by such despairing intensity. Her own natural feelings become perverted and she accepts the value of the external.

As Clara admits, she is “drawn unquestionably to the appearance of things” (Jerusalem 88). She is the child on “unfertile ground,” the provincial north of England, and she describes it as a kind of spiritual wasteland (Jerusalem 27), weighed with the fact that she comes from the lower middle class, might in part, explain the merciless manner in which she severs all ties with her past. However, Drabble makes
it unequivocally clear that Clara’s origins do not mitigate her actions. Clara’s emotional cauterization gives her an edge, because she gains a psychological distance so that she is able to leave her childhood home without undergoing any of the usual “parting pains.” But, she becomes so immersed in “steeling” herself that she has very little energy left for personal growth. As the story unfolds, she “had no confidence that time would bring with it inevitable growth: she grew by will and by strain” (Jerusalem 26). The power to will something into existence, which is found frequently in Drabble’s fiction, is a kind of female self-improvement. Sarah Bennett is a positive example of this process, as she manages to avoid the bird-cage of female identity by imagining her escape from alternate worlds.

Clara, on the other hand, is so possessed by the idea of improving herself that she forgets to be herself. Clara’s aspirations are a bit like those of Louise Halifax: Clara’s Jerusalem resembles Louise’s tries to reveal – a great deal of superficial glitter with little gold. Clara is especially impressed by the hymn “Jerusalem the Golden” because its houses “spoke of beautiful things” (Jerusalem 32) – a pertinent description of Louise’s world. Both Louise and Clara, psychic sisters are driven by their apparent intellect and not by their emotions, and this emotional detachment transmits in the way in which they first try to imagine and then realize their ideal futures.

One of the techniques inherent in Jerusalem the Golden is apparent conflict between biblical references and social criticism. Clara’s remorseless pursuit of her golden dream is reminiscent of Blake’s “Milton”, which is prefaced by the short poem “Jerusalem”. Blake pronounces his need to escape from the materialistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, as he perceives it, and also a puritanical or repressive reading of Christianity. Similarly, Clara seeks an alternative to her own debilitating Methodist background, and she sees a substitute in the “golden childish worlds” of the hymn, in
which she searches “in vain” for the “true brittle glitter of duplicity” (Jerusalem 33). Although she does not talk about this matter but the reader does, and is motivated to question the quality of her perception of “gold”. The fact that her idea of Jerusalem is skewed is evident in the very first sentence of the novel: “Clara never failed to be astonished by the extraordinary felicity of her own name” (Jerusalem 7).

Contemporary feminists have reasoned that religion, and Christianity in particular, is a patriarchal institution contrived to perpetuate the oppression of women. The touchstone argument in Ellen Cronan Rose’s book The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures is that religion “institutes a duality between the self and the other, which is defined as God” (81-82). This polarization disperses power unequally because the self is considered worthless when compared to the other, to whom one may make redress by transcending – in effect, by denying one’s self. In women’s view, this is a metaphysical performance of sexual divisiveness of patriarchal society, since Christianity portrays God as an authorial male.

As a solution, some feminists propose a divine sex change. Rather than viewing God as a merciless man, they recommend viewing God as a loving woman. However, this redefinition of religion as a matriarchal institution, instead of a patriarchal one, is no Catholicism for the basic ideological weaknesses of religion. For instance, both men and women would still be dealing with an impossible unrealistic epitome of benevolence. Furthermore, this pronominal change does nothing to help with the troublesome nature of the way goodness is postulated by religious dogma.

This is evident in Valerie Myer’s essay on The Needle’s Eye (1991). Her thesis argues that “The Needle’s Eye is a daring statement of radical feminism in the theological sense” (72). According to her, what is radical about the novel is that the protagonist, Rose Vassiliou, is linked to Christ. Myer places Rose’s affinity with
Christ in the way in which she views motherhood: “Like Christ, she sacrifices herself for her children, for humanity” (80). But, though Myer’s feminization of Christ is a little unorthodox, her construct of motherhood and maternity is hardly radical; rather, it represents a disturbingly ancestral view of motherhood and maternity. To put it differently, the contention that Christ’s sacrificial nature is feminine is hardly radical; history shows that women have been sacrificing their lives for their children but unlike Christ they are not bestowed with admiration for their sacrifice.

Myer’s reading of *The Needle’s Eye* (1991) is in accordance with this line of knowledge, which argues that female inferiority is of orthodox religion. Nevertheless, this radical idea still introduces a dimension of benevolence which is beyond us as human beings. However, this radical divine sex change is not a remedy for the ideological failings of religion, particularly those of Christianity, which *The Needle’s Eye* deals with. Moreover, while trying to promote the feminist cause in terms of the usual “us and them” argument, Myer misses entirely Drabble’s attempt to focus attention to the common characteristics between the sexes, common lineaments which are formally exemplified in her inclusive views.

While the scope of the feminist essays discussed in this chapter from the traditional to the radical, is indicative of feminist criticism having widened its approach, this range also evinces that basic ideology remains. Perhaps the most disquieting contradiction is that while some feminists claim that they would like to redefine their own identity and terms, in which they want to live their lives, they also fix boundaries and borders in which they may do so. Furthermore, this attempt by some women to dictate terms to others is by itself a major obstruction to the progress of feminist thought. For example, Spitzer claims that Rosamund is not a genuine feminist because she is not sexually emancipated, but still, she is more of a feminist than Clara of the other novel is.
While some feminists tend towards a woman-centric culture from where they feel empowered enough to challenge the prevalent myths about “the second sex”, Drabble envisions a human-centric society in which both men and women work to subvert myths about each other. As *The Needle's Eye* sheds light on them, both women and men feel subjugated by the tyranny of social conceptions. Furthermore, contrary to what some feminists would like us to believe, Drabble demonstrates that men too are not happy with gender-based expectations of them. Further, she is a firm believer that self-examination is an indispensable tool for women who want to move beyond the restrictions of gender.

The philosophical basis for Drabble’s commentary on many feminist ideas is conventional humanism, because she bases her truths on human experience and not on any ideology, be it feminist or otherwise. As she has says:

I haven’t read as much feminist criticism as perhaps I should have done. I don’t read it because it rather confuses the mind when you’re writing. You do stop to think in terms of how this will be regarded. If I end with a marriage, it’s going to be seen as a mistake; if I end with a woman alone, it’s going to be regarded as a triumph. All you can do is writing about how it seems to you at the time. How it seems to you to be true to the characters at the time. I have, in fact, just finished a novel in which the woman does end up entirely alone, which may be regarded as a true, feminist tract and may be regarded as a complete failure. I don’t know and I don’t care. All I know is that that is what happened to this woman during the course of this book, and that it was true to her situation in life. The truth is more important than ideology.

(Rose, *Critical Essays* 21)
Furthermore, she also suggests that a “traditional” value system can be consistent with feminism, if it is adopted seriously, with room for improvement and does not run against one’s nature. Conversely, Drabble, considers that a seemingly “modern” moral system might be inconsistent with feminism, even when adopted seriously, and does not contradict one’s true nature. For instance, Rosamund’s rejection of contemporary sexual habits does not diminish her intellectual independence in any way nor her decision to pursue a career.

In spite of Drabble’s acknowledged ambivalence with regard to the representation of women, it is very clear that, for a woman to be a true feminist, she has to be honest with herself, even if it means accepting “traditional” values. She further suggests that women might seem to accept the ideas of feminism, just to hide a more “traditional” agenda. For example, though many of Drabble’s heroines appear to be independent and strong, they are not true feminists, but are actually traditional in outlook and values.

Though Margaret Drabble has been lauded by critics and scholars, especially feminists, as the most contemporary of novelists, who has precisely and insightfully studied the experience of being a woman in a man’s world, most of her readers seem to have failed to notice the ironic contradictions, and ambivalent allusions and comments that she has used skillfully to criticize certain facets of feminist thought. Early criticism of her novels was focused on the feminist shell of her early novels, evaluating the “truth-value” of her work against their own interpretation of female experiential “reality”. Obviously, these critics were correct in that Drabble focused on female experiences in her earlier novels. From A Summer Bird-Cage to The Needle’s Eye she examines the nervousness that exists within women who are intelligent and perceptive, along with an omnipresent intuition, arising out of the uncertainty of what
to do as a woman. These scholars are correct when they say that through the representation of her female characters, Drabble exposes the social, political and spiritual condition of traditional beliefs of self-fulfillment for the middle-class woman.

However, what many of these scholars fail to notice is Drabble also remarks on certain feminist prescriptions of self-fulfillment for women, which has been largely ignored not just by feminist critics, but by all critics in general. Moreover, though Drabble deals with the problems women face in contemporary society, she does not support the radical feminist view that there is a male conspiracy meant to subdue and oppress women. None the less, she does not deny the existence of sexual politics and even gender conflicts; however, she holds both sexes accountable for them. She considers sexual politics as an inescapable feature of any civilization, but she focuses more on the importance of personal moral effort than on the injustices done to women.

As Drabble critically reconsiders both traditional and modern portrayals of women in fiction and in society, she also reflexively reevaluates the representational powers and limitations of narrative methods, past and present. Literary critics have mostly viewed her work as fertile soil for the subversion of traditional and patriarchal representations of women, and have managed to virtually exclude her re-evaluation of modern female inscriptions.

One of the most important topics under discussion in this study is the impact of environment and the significance of Drabble’s Northern origins, her childhood memories and their impact on her novels. In fact, her work has been profoundly influenced by her childhood in Sheffield, Yorkshire, in the North of England. She herself cites the childhood tales she has been brought up on, and which helped to
shape her thought processes, but she transcends such archetypal women of her childhood tales by portraying her heroines in her works as strong, self-actualized women. A deeper scrutiny of these northern and childhood influences on the mental make-up of Drabble will help to understand her novels better. From her very first novel, she has amply demonstrated that a child’s life is very important to achieve proper growth and to become a productive and well-balanced adult. Of all her novels The Garrick Year and The Millstone, to a great extent, demonstrate how contemporary woman finds herself in situations where confronted by her desire for self-actualization and her duty powered by her love for her children. Marion Vlastos Libby says, “She understands, better than most novelists, the power of a single child’s nature to affect the individual adult experience of the parent, as well as the force of a child’s need in shaping his parents’ decisions and, if they are sensitive, their psychic development” (Libby 191).

Drabble finds great affinity with nineteenth century writers rather than with twentieth century contemporaries; these traditional authors interest her to a great extent. Her non-fictional works also provide some insights into the processes of her writing fiction. In reading her non-fictional works, I discovered that, while not limiting herself to the discussion of writers solely from the north of England, she has a distinct preference for Northern writers. She has penned a critical analysis on the life and works of William Wordsworth who also hailed from the Northern parts of England. Having been born in Cumbria, and having spent his childhood there, he returned to the North as an adult. We come across passages frequently in Drabble’s works, which seem to show her affinity for this writer. In A Writer’s Britain she comments, “Heaven lies about us in our infancy, wrote Wordsworth, and his words are true in more ways than one” (A Writers 247).
Clearly, Drabble thinks of Wordsworth as a wellspring of inspiration, and so incorporates the influences of childhood in her characters, and the women created by her see their own children as symbols of a renewal and reaffirmation of life. When, Julian in *The Garrick Year* drowns himself Emma Evans reacts by saying: “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 into the earth, I am terrestrial” (*The Garrick* 170). Children make an appearance in all Drabble’s novels, and the relationship between a woman and her child is central, even if at times unhappy. *Jerusalem the Golden* and *The Radiant Way* (1987), considered to be two of her most powerful novels, notably document the mother/child dynamics and also how some childhood influences can leave unforgettable impressions on young children. Significantly, the roots of both protagonists, Clara Maugham and Liz Headleand, are set in the industrial Northam, Sheffield which is in Yorkshire in the North.

In England, the North and the South are two separate entities even today, identified largely by regional accents. Originally, the Northern parts of Britain were peopled by the Celtic tribe called the Brigantes. As a historian puts it: “Down to the present day Brigantia has remained distinctive, a unit within a diverse whole-pig-country, cautious, suspicious, ever-hospitable, utterly Celtic in its strange quality” (Ross 15). The Romans came and the Celts were subjugated, and, after the departure of the Romans from Britain, Germanic tribes invaded. Different Saxon tribes claimed territories in the rest of the Southern and Western parts. The Anglican tribes had settled in the Midlands and Northern Britain, the Northumbrian and Mercian accents came from them which had inflections like the modern German language and which formed the basis for the present-day Yorkshire dialect. Northumbrian influences are quite apparent in Northern names of places and people.
Northumbria was conquered by the Danish in AD 865 and Yorkshire effectively became a colony of a Nordic empire. This invasion destroyed the flourishing culture in Northumbria which was a leading centre in Europe. Thereafter, the Southern English kingdom of Wessex under the rule of King Alfred developed as the hub of intellectual activity and culture. The invasion also added a new set of place and personal names to the North, and by the time William the Conqueror invaded in 1066, the basis of Yorkshire dialect had been well set (Waddington 10-16).

The above series of events serve to emphasize some of the differences between the North and the South of England. Until very recently, Yorkshire dialect continued to be looked down on, for social reasons. Drabble’s talks about her mother’s Yorkshire accent and her inability to speak Standard English as a weak point that could hamper one’s social life severely. In Yorkshire, as many middle class businessmen prospered, they wanted to smooth out the rough edges of their children’s accents. Families like Drabble’s parents who could afford it sent their children to boarding schools where they acquired social growth and a more acceptable pronunciation which would help them in the class-conscious British society apart from their education. Margaret Drabble was herself liberated from the North both by her keen intelligence and her adaptability.

Apart from this, since London is the power centre for Drabble, she herself, after graduation from Cambridge University, has lived in London for the most part. However, she has returned to the North to research many of her books, like her biography of Arnold Bennett and her novel Jerusalem the Golden, in particular it seems that this region has a potent hold over her imagination. Born not far away from Haworth, Drabble, like the many British writers, grew up with folk tales and fables as part of the fabric of everyday life.
Drabble’s first few novels *The Summer Bird Cage*, *The Garrick Year* and *The Millstone* had very little to do with the North but dealt with the vexations of marriage and motherhood. It was only with *Jerusalem the Golden* that she employed her own Northern roots to depict a protagonist desperately searching for an opportunity to escape the dreary North and flee to the bright lights of the radiant South. When such an opportunity does come, she realizes how easily it could have slipped through her fingers, in almost fairy-tale-like fashion:

She wondered only at the means of her recognition. The fact of it never ceased to astound her, and she would return over the ground constantly, searching for marks. for tracks and breaths and sighs and trodden grass and names and cloudy indications, because she could not forget that she had not recognized it at once, that it had required on her part some keenness of perception, some chancy courage, to see it. . . (*Jerusalem* 31)

Many of Drabble’s novels that followed have recurring references to the North, in varying degrees. Though *The Waterfall*, her fifth novel, is set in London, scenes involving the North are crucial to the story. Jane Grey and her lover James are travelling north when he hits against a brick and gets injured. After he recovers, he and Jane end up in Yorkshire, visiting a local landmark, Goredale Scar, which Drabble has referred to in her critical analysis of Wordsworth and in *A Writer’s Britain*. The male narrator of her sixth novel, Simon Camish of *The Needle’s Eye*, is also from the North of England; his mother used to tell stories in the regional dialect and she has capitalized on this to earn enough to support him as a child. Drabble’s next novel, *The Realms of Gold*, has connections with the Midlands and reflects her childhood memories of her maternal grandparents’ home there. The next work is called *The Ice Age* and is set mostly in the North, which is affected by economic depression and focuses on a property-speculating protagonist, thereby adding to the cold and gloomy image.
The Middle Ground, Drabble’s other novel, has disappointed her readers and has been pointed out by her critics as rambling and plotless. Phyllis Rose, formerly an ardent admirer of Drabble, writes in “Our Chronicler of Britain” (1980): “I would suggest The Middle Ground is not a case of artistic fatigue but of failed experiment” (2). This novel is the most prosaic of Drabble’s work and yet, even here, a turning point in Kate Armstrong’s life occurs during a visit to Harrowgate in Yorkshire.

The next novel was much better received. In The Radiant Way, Drabble presents us Liz Headleand who is a well-established psychoanalyst in the Harley Street in London. However, like Clara Maugham and Drabble herself, she too is originally from Northam; at the beginning of the story she has already reached the pinnacle of her career. Here we meet the self-actualized Clara Maugham. The Radiant Way is also one of Drabble’s most gripping stories, made all the more so because of the tension between North and South in it. Liz, who seems so powerful, is about to have her life transformed; to her such transformation corroborates something that she already knows, that she is “a fake princess, a scullery maid dressed up by a Cambridge scholarship and her own wits, and rescued by a dubious prince” (The Radiant 174). This novel is the first of the trilogy, and the second, A Natural Curiosity (1990), is even more entrenched in the North, giving greater prominence to two characters from the previous novel: Alix Bowen, a Northerner, who returns with her Yorkshire-born husband to live in Northam, and Shirley Harper, Liz Headleand’s sister, also residing in Northam. The Gates of Ivory (1991) is the third novel in the trilogy, and moves between the polar North London and Cambodia. Following its publication, Drabble declared that she would stop writing novels. However, in 1996 The Witch of Exmoor (1996) was published, set in the South of England.
Drabble was heavily influenced by Arnold Bennett in both her works, and also in her personality development. One of her very first works is a biography of *Arnold Bennett*. In fact, Drabble graduated from Newham College, Cambridge, with first-class honors, thanks to her project on Bennett. She has always been open about her admiration for Bennett. It was as a salute to Bennett, that Drabble gave the name Sarah Bennett to the heroine of her first novel *A Summer Bird Cage*. Joyce Carol Oates writes, “This book is no ordinary biography . . . it is also Margaret Drabble’s analysis of her own origins and her own tradition. . .” (“Bricks and Mortar” 34).

Drabble feels a special affinity for Bennett as her own maternal grandparents hailed from the same Midlands Potteries region of England. In her introduction to the biography, she declares:

> What interests me more is Bennett’s background, his childhood and origins, for they 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 to life and work were colored 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 are 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. So, like all books, this has been partly an act of self-exploration. (*Arnold* xii)

Drabble says that she always had a belief that she was related to Bennett. She has never earnestly researched the connection although she says, “My maternal great-grandmother was a Bennett and the families were potters from Hanley: “My great-grandfather Bloor worked at the Bloor Derby works. It is widely believed in the
family that there is a close family connection with Arnold Bennett . . .” (Arnold 24).
She has expressed her admiration for Bennett’s work ethic, particularly, something
she shares which is a part of their Northern heritage. She says this is a product of
Bennett’s Northern background which Bennett valued. According to Drabble part of
Bennett’s work ethics was a product of his religious notions and his Methodist
background, and she says, “If pottery was the industry of the district, Methodism was
its religion and the two together formed the Bennett inheritance.” The Community as
a whole was imbued with a faith in the virtues of hard work, discipline and self-help,
which regarded poverty as a moral failing” (AB 8). Methodism flourished in the North
and the remaining part of that inheritance seems to have remained on in Drabble’s
childhood. Mary Hurley Moran writes of Drabble:

    She grew up in the Yorkshire area, where Methodism with its emphasis
on “bleeding wounds and fountains of blood and loads of sin,” had
prevailed since the eighteenth century. Although her mother eventually
rejected religion and became an atheist, Drabble as a child was heavily
exposed to her maternal grandparents’ hellfire-and-brimstone beliefs.
(18)

Moreover, Drabble adds that one of the primary reasons behind Bennett’s rejection of
Methodism was that it was ultimately joyless and made the Northern provincial towns
seems even more dreary and bleaker. She herself expresses this joylessness in
*Jerusalem the Golden* where Clara Maugham’s Northern childhood is colorless and
bitter. It is in connection with this novel that Drabble very specifically refers to
Bennett:

    I should acknowledge at this point my own debt to Bennett, in my
novel *Jerusalem the Golden*, which was profoundly affected by his
attitudes, though as they are of course also a part of my own
background I can’t quite distinguish what came from where. The girl in *Jerusalem the Golden*, like Bennett’s first hero, is obsessed with escape, and she too is enraptured by trains and hotels and traveling: she feels she has “a rightful place upon the departure platform” of her hometown. There is a good deal of Hilda Lessways in her too, for like Hilda she relished adventure and irregularity, and like Hilda she is summoned to her mother’s death bed by telegram and does not respond in quite the right spirit. Perhaps it is irrelevant to mention these matters, but to me they are so much bound up together that my novel is almost as much an appreciation of Bennett as this book is meant to be. I don’t think I read any of Bennett’s novels when I was a small child, so I must have formed my attitudes before I came to him, but I do remember that reading him was a kind of revelation. (*Arnold* 47-48)

Drabble also admires Bennett for his capacity to focus on the ordinary aspects of life or, as she puts it, “the peculiarities of the ordinary” which, she thinks are exciting to him. (*Arnold* 280). Likewise, she too frequently focuses on the earthy and mundane aspects of life in her novels.

In *The Middle Ground*, Drabble seems totally obsessed with acquainting the reader with a veritable catalogue of everyday trivial details of everyday life. However, one noteworthy aspect of this book, as in many others, is the meticulous description of interiors, the other thing she shares with Bennett. In a statement that is equally applicable to Drabble, she writes that Bennett regards the North with “a mixture of love and recoil that so many exiles feel for their native land” (*Arnold* 144). It is a fact that Bennett too like Drabble left the North in early adulthood and returned rarely. In a very similar manner, her rejection of her own native origin and her identification
with it gave her the perspective to write about the region effectively. Ellen Cronan Rose also underscores the fact that it was only after Bennett left the Potteries and gained some distance that he could write about them artistically. She adds:

Between her third and fourth novels, Drabble herself made a number of discoveries: that in her first three novels she had been blindly inhabiting the district of her own experience; that in order to make that reality malleable as fiction, she would need to distance herself from it; and that art - particularly the art of Arnold Bennett - would make that possible. (Equivocal Figures 28)

Drabble in her interview with Diana Cooper-Clark declares that Arnold Bennett is an “androgynous writer who writes superbly about women and women’s pre-occupations, domestic life, worrying about furniture and peeling potatoes” (Rose, Critical Essays 19). She remarks, “The writers that I most admire are the people who strive to retain their links with the community and not indulge in their own consciousness to such a degree that they become very rarefied, like Henry James” (Rose, Critical Essays 25).

It is noteworthy to mention that Drabble considers social conscience as much more important than the range or scope of a novel. She thinks that George Eliot was a greater novelist than Jane Austen; more because of the smallness of the range of Austen’s novels. In her interview with Nancy Poland Drabble says, “Eliot is the one woman writer who really did have a good grasp of the contemporary scene. She wrote well of passion but at the same time she was very good on politics and morals, on social details: she was a good all-around novelist, and that is what I would like to be” (Poland, 263). Her extolling of George Eliot for considering on a very large range of subject and for having social conscience indicates her preference of Eliot over
authors like Jane Austen and it also reveals that why she is called “the George Eliot of her generation” (Rose, Critical Essays 23). Joanne Creighton in her book Margaret Drabble notes, “Her documentation of manner and morals, texture and detail, contains a recognition, drawn from the line of the British novel, that within the world of the ordinary are fundamental social and historical processes the novelist must grasp”(26).

Hailed as the “Chronicler of Britain,” Drabble has been celebrated from the outset mainly for the topicality of her fiction. Joyce Carol Oates declared, “It is doubtful that there is any single American writer who represents the diversity and near-chaos of our culture, as Drabble represents the tone of contemporary English culture” (“Bricks and Mortar” 35). But Drabble is not just a journalist, she is also an artist, and her fiction is punctuated by evocative imagery, as well as vivid realism. Her real subject is not just society, but its morality too, and she presents her moral themes by using not just realism, but also symbolism which heightens the impact of the message. Drabble’s social truths have been ignored by many critics both the underlying moral issues and the poetic imagery beneath the surface. This study will attempt to reveal the dominant realist accent on Drabble’s criticism with a more literary approach, focusing on her achievements as a writer with moral vision.

Although many critics have talked about the role of gender and other features of Drabble’s novels, no one has till date done a full-scale analysis of her particular philosophy of morals. Since the central concern of her fiction is human beings’ moral dilemmas, such an extensive investigation is called for. The purpose of this study is to examine the various forces that Drabble considers responsible for shaping and determining human beings’ lives. These include metaphysical forces, the influence of nature and landscapes on human beings’ moral responses, and the role of family and the methods of upbringing on their social reactions. All these forces act upon people and
keep them from being able to act freely and rationally. Furthermore, they contribute to the formation of a person’s identity, because, one is not free to become what one will or want, as existentialists contend, for there are many aspects of one’s identity that are non-rational. Drabble emphasizes these aspects, demonstrating that a human being is a cog in the universe, an instrument of nature, and a link in a family chain.

This chapter has rendered an assessment of criticism of Margaret Drabble and a reading of Drabble’s works to a certain extent. The different aspects of her fiction have been discussed, by Drabble’s critics, for example, Drabble as a feminist, novelist of maternity and as a historic chronicler. This chapter of my study seeks to present Drabble as a hybrid writer who makes use of the literary format and thematic mixture. The researcher tries to re-evaluate the novels of Drabble throughout this study because she believes that no one has sufficiently addressed the importance of Drabble’s moral vision yet.
Works Cited


