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**The Question Of "Englishness":  
Identity, Culture, Class and Gender in  
the Novels  
of Margaret Drabble**

By

Elizabeth Eastman Somerton

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
September 1998

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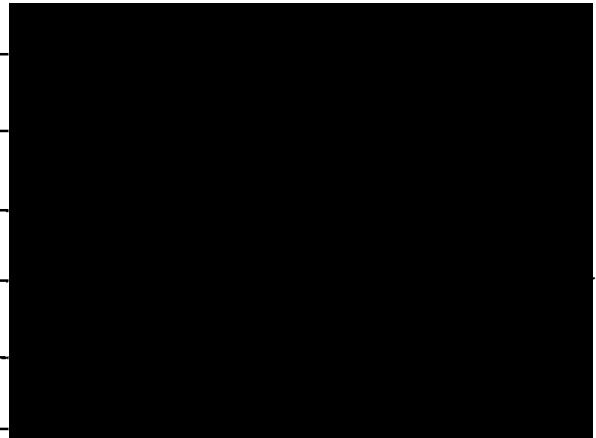
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by Elizabeth Marie Somerton

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Chapter 1: "Ghosts" of "Englishness"

The publisher's blurb for a recent book by David Gervais on "Englishness" and literary tradition notes that "[i]n our time Englishness has become a theme for speculation rather than dogma" and that "twentieth-century writers have found it an elusive and ambivalent concept" (Gervais i). There are, however, some writers of our time for whom the concept has had a more certain resonance. Delivering the Cheltenham Festival Annual Literature Lecture in 1980, Q. D. Leavis spoke confidently on "The Englishness of the English Novel." For her, there was nothing elusive or problematic about "Englishness" as a cultural or literary concept: collapsing "regional cultures" and all kinds of other differences (class and gender among them) into "a truly national literature" synonymous with "an essentially Protestant [national] culture" (318-20), she spoke eloquently of a homogeneous cultural/literary identity that she claimed was embodied in the "great tradition" of the English novel. In somewhat less lucid, but no less forcible, terms she spoke of the imminent loss of this tradition and wound up with a diatribe on the state of the contemporary English novel and, indeed, of the novelists themselves: "Our novelists," she said, "seem to have abdicated from moral responsibility, to have become sub-human" (324). In the course of her lecture it became clear that what most bothered Q. D. Leavis about these writers was that they were no longer confidently affirming the moral/literary values that she and F. R. Leavis placed at the heart of "Englishness"; and by thus wittingly or unwittingly questioning those values they were also challenging the literary/cultural superiority that she claimed for "Englishness" (implied in the equation of humanity--being human rather than "sub-human"--with taking moral responsibility and of both with

"Englishness"). For her, "Englishness" connoted an absolute or "universal" value, dependent upon a particular "history" (303) yet transcending it, the particular being, "in the English way" (306), a representation of the universal. In this account of the "Englishness" of the "great tradition" as a universal human norm--a standard by which other accounts must be measured and against which some may be found wanting--Q. D. Leavis was reaffirming the basic assumption (and presumption) of Leavisite criticism.

Distinguishing the universality of "Englishness" from internationalism, Q. D. Leavis reserved her most derogatory remarks for contemporary women novelists who all seemed to her, she said,

to be ... determined, forgoing their heritage as English novelists, to belong to an international women writer's movement, a movement characterized by a jargon that is the opposite of wisdom or maturity. (304)

She reproved contemporary English women writers for bringing to an end the formerly "unique" English "great tradition of women novelists," and castigated them for being indistinguishable in their concerns from writers who are "American or what used to be called colonials," for "fail[ing] to rise above" what were then current women's issues (325).

As for Margaret Drabble, Q. D. Leavis repeated the substance of "some awful crack" Drabble said F. R. Leavis had made about her work earlier and which Drabble took to imply that she was "beneath contempt" (Interview with Hannay 105). In Mrs. Leavis's estimation, Drabble's work was "simply an up-to-date variety of women's magazine fiction" (325) not even worthy of being called "novels" in fact. As Batsleer et al point out in *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*, the Leavises took over the value judgment implied in Henry James's "defense of the novel (as opposed, sharply, to 'mere' fiction) as an art form" (17), and, as we see here, this aesthetic standard became for

them an important part of the serious cultural/literary domain defined as/by "Englishness," from which a writer like Drabble could be excluded.

Not surprisingly, various critics have begged to differ from the Leavises. "Drabbleans" have differed from them in their estimation of the cultural and/or literary value of Drabble's novels. Some have even done so by emphasizing those aspects of her work which meet (or seem to meet) the "high standards" of the Leavisite conception of the "Great Tradition." Valerie Grosvenor Myer (who has written both the first book on Drabble and one of the latest) notes, as do most of the critics on Drabble, that Drabble's fiction is characterized by some form of "tension," the very presence of which, it might be argued, is an affront to the Leavisite notion of a unified, stable or assured identity, but she concludes: "Drabble's works are essentially English in that they are influenced by earlier literature, by history, by Protestantism and eclecticism." Focusing on Drabble's ambivalent attitude towards F. R. Leavis (who taught Drabble at Cambridge in the 1950s) rather than on the Leavises' uncompromising attitude towards Drabble, Myer concludes: "as well as hostility to [F. R.] Leavis, [Drabble] has expressed gratitude for what has moulded us, and she exemplifies his ideal of culture: literate, liberal, humane" (*A Reader's Guide* 165). This is puzzling. How can Drabble's work exemplify F. R. Leavis's "ideal of culture" and be "beneath [his] contempt" at the same time? How can it be "essentially English" and yet be excluded by Q. D. Leavis from "the Englishness of the English novel"?

Myer is one of the critics who recognize the tension in Drabble's fiction but do not examine the importance of it as a potential challenge to the Leavisite construction of "Englishness" as a homogeneous cultural/literary identity. Nora Foster Stovel is another critic who has read Drabble's equivocal statements about F. R. Leavis's "influence" upon her only in a positive sense that might make Drabble seem an undisputed heir to the "great tradition." In *Margaret Drabble: Symbolic Moralist*, Stovel seems to undertake a Leavisite

reevaluation of Drabble by arguing that she is "not simply a journalist" or "merely a popular" writer, but "an artist" whose work meets "the traditional criteria for evaluating quality in literature." The criteria Stovel uses—"moral profundity and imaginative artistry"—are recognizably Leavisite. Also Leavisite is her focus on the symbolism of Drabble's novels to reveal "the poetic imagination beneath the surface reportage" (2-3). Francis Mulhern argues that the shift in focus from "narrative" to "poetic" elements (such as patterns of imagery and symbolism) is an important strategy in the Leavisite "reevaluation" of the English novel and one which Leavis used for "silencing" narrative "anxieties" or for "repressing" the "unsettling" elements that appear in the course of most narratives, even those that effect closure ("English Reading" 256).

In the course of her examination of Drabble's work, however, what Stovel alerts us to is the fact that symbolic patterning need not, in itself, be the kind of "closure" that silences narrative anxieties. In "'A Feminine Ending?': Symbolism as Closure in the Novels of Margaret Drabble," Stovel distinguishes the "feminine ending" from the "masculine" and while arguing that "Drabble's version of the feminine ending does demonstrate closure," she shows that the combination of "an open-ended narrative" with "artistic and thematic closure" (81-82) is used by Drabble to achieve an "ideal 'feminine ending'" which is not, in effect, conclusive; rather, it supports a "profoundly equivocal" vision and allows Drabble to maintain her characteristically "ambivalent" stance (86). By using a Leavisite critical method, Stovel demonstrates, I think, a way in which Drabble's education in Leavisite criticism allows her to subvert one of its strategies for affirming the "Englishness" of the "great tradition": that is, Drabble uses "poetic" elements such as symbolic patterning not, as Mulhern says Leavis uses them, "to reorder the field of critical perception at the expense of narrative" ("English Reading" 255), but rather to prevent such a reordering and to reinforce narrative uncertainties.



Other critics have focused more closely on these postmodern and post-Leavisite tensions in Drabble's novels. Joanne V. Creighton, an American, asks, "Why does a writer who is in many ways so rooted and grounded in 'Englishness' have such an international appeal?" (Preface, *MD*) Creighton's answer is that "Drabble's fiction at its best is a virtual 'double-voiced discourse' exemplifying the tension experienced by many contemporary women who are struggling to define themselves within a patriarchal frame of reference" (*MD* 32); but, as she also notes, the equivocation in Drabble's voice reflects a "sense of crisis" characteristic of a number of contemporary British novelists (male and female) who, Malcolm Bradbury has argued, are involved in a distinctively English form of "fictional revisionism" as they "attempt to mediate between the traditional realism and humanism of the nineteenth-century novel and the epistemological problems of fiction in our time" (Creighton, *MD* 29).

One way to contextualize Drabble's work *vis a vis* "Englishness", then, is to examine it in relationship to other writers of her generation, particularly women writers, who express similar concerns. Drabble has identified herself as one of "a whole generation of young women writers ... who had been brought up to believe that the world was open to their talents. That they were free to go to college, pursue a career, have a job, marriage and children," but found to their astonishment that "the freedom was a mockery" (Interview with Kenyon 27). The other women writers she mentions are Edna O'Brien, Doris Lessing, Penelope Mortimer and Fay Weldon (Interview with Kenyon 28). Another way is to look at her work in terms of the pervasive anxiety of influence and it is the second approach which I have taken in this study.

When Creighton refers to Drabble's ambivalent attitude towards F. R. Leavis, she points out that while Drabble has expressed great admiration for him as a critic and for his version of the "Great Tradition", on the one hand, she has also questioned some of his

selections on the other. As Creighton says, Drabble has not only tried to revise the list of authors in the "tradition" to include Arnold Bennett but has also questioned the exclusive nature of the vision of some of the writers the Leavises placed at the heart of their "great tradition," accusing Jane Austen of "social snobbery" and Henry James of having a too "rarefied consciousness" (Creighton, *MD* 26).

In accusing these writers of social and intellectual snobbery, Drabble is also questioning the Leavises' claim for experiential "truth" in their "great" texts, suggesting that some of their chosen texts may exclude too much of life to be considered true to the experience of the whole of England. I would argue, also, that when she turns her attention on George Eliot—the bulwark of Leavisite criticism—Drabble goes beyond questioning Victorian morality to question Eliot's integrity as a writer by foregrounding the difference between the morality by which Eliot herself lived and that by which she had her character Maggie Tulliver (in *The Mill on the Floss*) act (Interview with Hannay 144).

It should be noted that, because of her anxiety about the Leavisite influence, Drabble has accepted and foregrounded in her fiction the Leavises' reductionist reading of these writers who are much more complex, and more troubled in their manifestation of conservative moral attitudes than the Leaviste model suggests. Drabble is so concerned with subversion of the Leavises' "great tradition" that she fails to read against the grain of Leavisite criticism and misses an opportunity to claim Jane Austen and George Eliot who, from a revisionary feminist perspective, might be seen as her precursors.

Drabble is even more provocative in a recent novel when she has one of her "parodic" characters raise the question of whether Joseph Conrad (another in the Leavisite canon) can be considered a "racist sexist swine" (*GI* 100) while another speculates that it may be "the cultural relativism of the poor whites that Conrad is attempting to expose [in 'An Outpost of Progress']" and that as "a Pole, writing a foreign language" the "problem

[may be] partly semantic" (173-74). Such speculation serves not only to question the authority of the authors of the "great tradition" but also to question their "Englishness." Again, Francis Mulhern provides us with a possible gloss when he points out in "English Reading" that "[o]f Leavis's three chosen novelists [for *The Great Tradition*], only one (George Eliot) was English,"<sup>1</sup> James being an American and Conrad being a Pole for whom English was a "third" language (254). What Mulhern says F. R. Leavis does in *The Great Tradition* is what Q. D. Leavis does in her lecture on "the Englishness of the English Novel" as well. The Leavises "reduce complexities of ... formation to biographical accident and ... 'naturalize' James and Conrad as exponents of a transcendent language [English] that must be understood as adequate, and finally as necessary to the novelistic exploration of 'essential human values.'" Mulhern notes F. R. Leavis's argument that Conrad chose to write in English and was able to manage its "'racy strength' ... because, his origins notwithstanding, his 'themes and interests' actually called for the English language rather than any other" (254-55). What Drabble has her characters say about Conrad in *The Gates of Ivory* questions the Leavisite claim for English as "a transcendent language" and as a superior medium for "the novelistic exploration of 'essential human values'.

It may be argued, then, that the central tension in Drabble's novels is this tension between her awareness of and respect for the Leavisite "Great Tradition," on the one hand, and her revisionary impulse, on the other. I should like to approach this tension from the angle of her questioning of "Englishness" as a homogeneous cultural/literary identity, particularly, but not only, as it is constructed by the Leavises. I have chosen to single out the Leavisite version of "Englishness" for two reasons: first, because of its importance to the study of English literature and the modern canon and, second, because of F. R.

Leavis's own influence on Drabble and her subsequent struggle to rid herself of that influence. At the same time, I shall be keeping in mind ways in which this version of "Englishness" intersects with other versions within the dominant framework.

There is currently an explosion of work—in social history and literary and cultural criticism—on the cultural constitution of "Englishness" in the modern and contemporary periods. One thing these critics and theorists agree on is that "Englishness" is a complex, shifting ideology which can twist and turn through different circumstances and disparate moments, changing in shape or appearance and finding new currents through which to assert hegemony and authority. Leavisite "Englishness" is only one of these currents, part of a larger movement responding to the emergence of mass culture in England, a movement which could include the Raymond Williams/Richard Hoggart version of a traditional or "authentic" working-class "Englishness," which is very different in style from the Leavises' more literary version. In "The Embattled Minority': Theorists of the Elite," Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith argue that

[t]he "shiny barbarism" of modern Britain, as Richard Hoggart was to term it in the 1950s could offend the anti-materialism of the public-school and Oxbridge tradition and those sectors of left opinion which saw mass culture as a debased substitute for popular culture or indeed as a conservative form of social control governed by capitalist production. (Miles and Smith 82)

When they go on to argue that "[t]his meshing of attitudes on the left and right gave elitist arguments the advantage of widely-conceded premises as far as opposition to mass culture was concerned" (82), they touch on one of the areas in which the Leavisite version of "Englishness" intersects with other versions in the postwar period and beyond.

It is very important to note, also, that the Leavisite discourse on "Englishness" is much more complex than the designation "élitist" suggests. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, Leavis did not appear to be élitist in the beginning. In fact, Williams initially

thought to "unite radical left politics with Leavisite criticism" (*Politics and Letters* 67), and he has explained that

[t]he immense attraction of Leavis lay in his cultural radicalism, quite clearly. That may seem a problematic description today, but not at the time. It was the range of Leavis's attacks on academicism, on Bloomsbury, on metropolitan literary culture, on the commercial press, on advertising that first took me. (66)

One of the things Williams is attesting to here is the massive influence of Leavis on English universities in the forties, fifties and sixties. The breadth and depth of that influence is attested to also by Francis Mulhern in *The Moment of "Scrutiny"* where he notes that, in addition to the direct, personal influence of Leavis on colleagues and students and, through them, on the educational system (some of the students became teachers in the schools), there was a less direct but possibly even more lasting influence of the Leavisite discourse through *Scrutiny* and the "mutations" it spawned. He argues that "while the journal itself was gradually starved of active collaboration, its moral 'politics' became widely diffused" (325).

Another point that Williams alludes to is the intersection of Leavisite critical methods with the "practical criticism" of I. A. Richards and the methods of the New Critics (which Mulhern mentions also in *The Moment of "Scrutiny"* 328). According to Williams, the method "always tends to become too dominant a mode, precisely because it evades both structural problems and in the end all questions of belief and ideology" (*Politics and Letters* 66). That is to say that Leavisism became dominant as an ideology within English studies by appearing not to be an ideology, by appearing to be a "pure," all-inclusive view with a universal applicability and appeal.

When he points out that Leavis tried to advocate both D. H. Lawrence and the T. S. Eliot of the *Four Quartets*, Williams touches on another way in which the Leavises made their discourse seem to be much more open than it was in actuality (*Politics and Letters* 68)

and indicates another way in which the Leavisite version intersects with other versions of "Englishness." In *Cinema, Literature and Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain*, Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith argue that

[i]n his adaptation of the boundaries of a select tradition of English literary culture, Leavis demonstrated the adaptive capacity of the hegemonic process to assimilate challenges to the dominant culture rather than to concede the possibility of a counter culture. To that extent Leavis was effectively engaged in renewing and revitalizing conservative traditions by adapting them to changed cultural conditions. (95)

Miles and Smith are referring to the expansion of the "great tradition" to include a contemporary English novelist like Lawrence, but this adaptive capacity is more striking when we consider that Leavis sought to replace what he saw as a moribund English "native" tradition (in "the vacuity of the Georgians") with the more modern work of expatriates like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (*New Bearings in English Poetry*). As noted earlier, there is a similar strategy at work in his choice of Henry James and Joseph Conrad for *The Great Tradition*.

The fact that Eliot and Leavis were to disagree over Leavis's inclusion of a working-class writer such as Lawrence in the mainstream of English culture points to Leavis's modification of the ideas of the writers he appropriated and to his positioning himself as an intermediary, negotiating and smoothing out differences which would otherwise reveal extreme divisions within English literary and cultural criticism. What this means is that Leavis was very adept at a strategy which recent critics on "Englishness" have seen to be at work in various of its currents or versions. A case in point is the one Anna Marie Smith makes in *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990* for the complex intersection of the Powellian discourse on race and the Thatcherite discourse on homosexuality. Smith argues that if a discourse is to "obtain a hegemonic status," it must give "the *appearance* of a centred position," of being "the 'tolerant' middle ground"

between extremes (18-19) and she says that this is the strategy which is at work in the parliamentary debates on Section 28 of the Thatcherite Local Government Act, 1987-88, a law prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities. Smith argues that an "imaginary promise of inclusion" (of "the acceptable good homosexual" as opposed to "the dangerous queer") had the effect of "centring" what was, in fact, "an extremist discourse" and of "re-coding an exclusion as a moment of 'tolerant' inclusion" (18-19). She goes on to argue that there is a similar strategy evident in Powellism, an argument which she supports with references to many studies of this discourse but most particularly to works by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Smith says that it was Gilroy's critique of "the Conservative party's invention of the good black entrepreneur figure" in *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack"* which prompted her analysis of "the good homosexual/dangerous queer distinction" in the Thatcherite discourse (21). One of the crucial points Smith makes about this strategy is that it seems to provide "a guilt-free British nationalism" (7).

Recent analyses of discourses on femininity in England during the interwar and war years suggest that there is also a similar strategy at work there. One very important point made in these studies is that the feminine, a previously excluded category, could be included in dominant versions of "Englishness" at that time. Alison Light speculates that the "strongly anti-heroic mood," identified by some commentators as characteristic of the 1930s, "produced a realignment of sexual identities" in this period which saw an also redefined domesticity become "a new locus for the idea of a continuous and stable national history" (*Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* 8; 211). Antonia Lant's *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* and the recent collection by Gilliam Swanson and Susan Gledhill entitled *Nationalizing Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* are particularly concerned with the fact that ideas of English femininity had expanded by this period to include an

active female sexuality which was then incorporated into "Englishness," or to use Swanson's term, into "the agenda of modern citizenship" ("So Much Money and So Little to Spend It On': Morale, Consumption and Sexuality," Gledhill and Swanson 84).

Another important point made in these studies, however, is that the inclusion of women, and particularly of the "sexual woman," in "Englishness" was also a way of containing what might otherwise have been a direct challenge to preferred notions of the national character. In *Nationalizing Femininity*, Gledhill and Swanson say that "[t]he [Second World] War can be seen as both a catalyst for changes already in the making and an incitement to energies directed towards preserving traditional gender differences" (3). What they are referring to is the "competing definitions of woman" in this period when "the term itself became 'mobile'" (5), and what they conclude is that

[t]his increased attention to women's concerns in British wartime cultural life is not simply a "reflection" of transformation taking place in the social fabric, but a sign of the difficulty involved in engineering new gender definitions and representations *within the parameters of existing and slowly evolving cultural traditions*. (5; my emphasis)

As they point out, the first part of the collection focuses on "legislation and policies which sought to mobilize women for the war effort while at the same time seeking to frame that mobilization in terms that would retain the conventional roles and meanings associated with women" (7) and Lant's "prologue" to the volume (also part of her book *Blackout*) "explores the concerted political and cultural campaign to align ... femininity and nationality" in such a way as to keep ideas of femininity within acceptable bounds. They say that what Lant reveals is

the imbrication of government legislation and social policies concerning women with cultural discourses and media representations which sought to mobilise women for the national good while needing to contain the tensions opened up in traditional definitions of the feminine--attempting for example to retain the symbol of woman as mother and wife and to ward off the threat of an independent female sexuality. (7)



In other words, custodians of "Englishness" felt that a now undeniable female sexuality (revealed publicly, for example, in the number of illegitimate births recorded during the war) had to be "regulat[ed]" or "regulariz[ed]" as a matter of "national" concern (Swanson, Gledhill and Swanson 71). In sum, Swanson argues that "defining women's sexual *disciplines* was the central feature of producing *well-regulated* modern femininity" (79; emphasis mine). These critics are very clear on the limitations that were placed on modern English female sexuality so that it could be fitted into the dominant culture and play a role in the restructuring of British identity.

Analyses of "women's films" in the post war period make the same point. Melinda Mash, in her essay "Stepping Out or Out of Step? Austerity, Affluence and Femininity in Two Post-War Films," says that popular cinema in the late 1940s and early 1950s was one of the various cultural discourses which attempted "to reconstruct and resituate dominant notions of femininity and female sexuality" in the period (Gledhill and Swanson 257). She argues that the films she discusses--*Dance Hall* (1950) and *Turn the Key Softly* (1953)--illustrate how "the representation of women in British films narrowed down the possibilities for audiences, resulting in a national cinema that offered only limited strategies for the exploration of desires and ambitions other than those in accordance with dominant attitudes" (Gledhill and Swanson 258). She says of *Turn the Key Softly* that it "reconstructs acceptable femininity by closing off possible choices": that is, it positions modern British women between "a pre-war, depressed Britain" and a post-war Britain in danger of being "Americanized" and between pre-war notions of an "asexual, 'pre-modern'" femininity "marginalized by modernity" and post-war notions of an unrestrained sexual, modern femininity, a "femininity exceeding the continuities and traditions of 'womanliness'" (260-63). The modern British model of "acceptable femininity" as depicted in these films is, then, neither of these extremes; rather, it is based

on a negotiation between the two. Once again, I think, we see the politics of the apparently "'tolerant' middle ground" at work in this moment of inclusion for some women which involves the exclusion of others.

This is a point brought out in several analyses of the film *Brief Encounter* which was set in the winter of 1938-39 in an intermediate moment between the pre-war period and the war but which opened in December 1945 at an intermediate moment between the war and the post-war period. Alison Light (*Forever England*), Antonia Lant (*Blackout*) and Carol Smart ("Good Wives and Moral Lives: Marriage and Divorce 1937-51," *Nationalizing Femininity*) all agree that the film dramatizes a moment of choice for Laura, "a choice," in Lant's words, "between emotional and sexual fulfilment outside marriage, and the obligation to her husband and family: a choice between risk and security" (155). Smart sums up what Light and Lant also see as the significance of Laura's choosing her husband when she explains that as "a moral tale in which, although the moral order might be questioned, the only good outcome was a return to the fold," the film reflected public policy: "[t]here was sympathy over the disruptions caused by the war, indeed almost a tolerance, but this could not be allowed to set a new moral norm and thus it was necessary to close the chapter" (102). In addition, Smart argues that the film "occupies and represents a particular moment of transition in the history of marriage and divorce in post-war England," that is, "a moment when women were desirous of greater freedoms, but when social and material constraints on their lives were redoubled after the war" (91). She concludes that "*Brief Encounter* ... operates to acknowledge this yearning but reinforces the sublimation of desire" (101).

These studies are important not only for what they reveal about the complexity of ideas of femininity in this period but also for what they reveal about the way in which contrasting and contradictory ideas were brought together so that some preferred notions of

English femininity were retained in a new form and ideas that smacked of the "Americanization" of English femininity were toned down, moderated and contained through being absorbed. I suggest that what these studies reveal about the official or dominant discourse on femininity in the immediate postwar period is similar to what Anna Marie Smith says is revealed about the discourses on race and homosexuality in the latter half of the century: that is, that in order to assert hegemony it had to appear to be the alternative between extremes, to be "the 'tolerant' middle ground," neither too traditional nor too modern.

These studies illustrate the thesis of a number of critics who have examined dominant versions of "Englishness:" that is, that "Englishness" is not the "natural propensity" it is made to seem by those (like the Leavises) who appeal to it in times of crisis or change; rather, they argue, it is a cultural making and remaking of a national identity which asserts hegemony and authority by "its ability to represent both itself to others and those others to themselves" through a complex "process of inclusion, exclusion and transformation of elements of the [diverse] cultural life" of Britain (Dodd, Colls and Dodd 2).

They illustrate also a point made by Alan O'Shea in "English Subjects of Modernity," that "[a]n engagement with the new frequently produces fear and anxiety, with many backward glances to the past" and that "the peculiarity of the British route through twentieth-century modernity has been [a] powerful, *classed* discourse of 'Culture' versus modernisation, framed through *nationalism*" (Nava and O'Shea 31). Writing of "the conflict of 'English values' and 'Americanism,'" O'Shea says that "social groups which have tended to be dominant in producing such representations in Britain have tended to move into the modern world looking backward" to "the imagined stabilities of the past" (31). Light makes the same point when she describes modern "Englishness" as a

"conservative embracing of modernity" which can "simultaneously look backwards and forwards ... accommodate the past in the new forms of the present," and be both " a deferral of modernity" and a modern form of conservatism (Light 10).

Appeals to the past often involve nostalgia for ways of life disrupted and changed by modernity, ways which are now disappearing. Gervais argues that in the period since the First World War, "Nostalgia has become part of [England's] staple diet, as available as takeaway food" and that as the gulf between "the private country of the mind and the real country" or between past (real or imagined) and present Englands widens, "Englishness has become a name for the effort to bridge it" (270-71). In "What a Day for a Daydream," O'Shea points to the way in which the Leavisite construction of "Englishness" intersects with other dominant modern currents in its nostalgia for "the mythic past of an 'organic community'" (Nava and O'Shea 258). On the same point, Gervais remarks that "[t]radition can be an effective weapon against present doubts and divisions" (1) and, noting the role Leavis played in it, he says, "Arguably, 'English' [as a subject or discipline] was born in response to a cultural crisis, as a rearguard action against 'mass civilization'" (133).

Critics have raised some disturbing questions with respect to the position of women *vis-a-vis* this desire within dominant versions of "Englishness" to negotiate between past and present in such a way that the values of the past are preserved, albeit in a modified form, in the present. These questions are very troubling for a contemporary woman writer like Drabble who was, early in her career, concerned with finding "new patterns" for women's lives ("A Woman Writer" 6). Some of the most interesting and provocative statements about "Englishness" have concerned the place of domesticity in it. Batsleer et al argue, for example, that while women have been a "subordinate" group within a predominantly male culture, they have in many cases accepted and, in the case of writers of the popular feminine romance like Barbara Cartland, contributed both to their own

subordination and to the existence of a dominant culture by their "concentration on the private sphere and the personal emotion." They argue that in such writing, "Englishness' operates ... as a common theme, in a form recognizable to all (white) women, placing families--rather than class wealth or enterprise--at the heart of the nation" which, while seemingly putting women at the centre of the story, is actually "reconciling them to a subordinate place in ... reality" (102-04) Lest we dismiss such writing as not worth serious literary consideration, both Batsleer et al and Light point out that its very popularity demands attention to the values it thematizes.

In any case, it is not only in the popular feminine romance that "Englishness" has been seen to operate in this way. Francis Mulhern has some interesting things to say about the Leavises in this regard. He describes Q. D. Leavis as one who was "proudly the working woman intellectual but just as proudly the wife and mother who never broke a cup" and one who, while "suffer[ing] conflicts of identity and interest from which her husband was largely exempt," nevertheless "emphasized the proprieties of gender and family" and placed the domesticity of women at the heart of English national culture. Mulhern accuses Q. D. Leavis of a "myopic truculently conformist femininity" in her attack on Virginia Woolf (in an issue of *Scrutiny*). Mrs. Leavis accused Woolf of lacking, in her words, the "valuable discipline" and sense of "genuine" values which domesticity, and only domesticity, provides. This "absence" rendered the intellectual Woolf's feminist concerns "tiresome and worthless" in her estimation. Citing both Leavisite criticism and "the story" of the Leavises' life together, Mulhern says that "[i]n such judgements the Leavises stood side by side" ("English Reading" 257-59).

Complicating this question even more is Light's extremely provocative thesis that, for women, the gaining of a voice within "Englishness" "must be seen as an ambiguous advancement," given the "imperial inheritance"--the codes, idioms and gestures of

"masculine" imperial culture--that it entails (211-13). Taking very seriously Batsleer et al's self-mocking contention that, after World War I and until very recently, England was "living out the dotage of an imperial culture, and ... its dreams [were] peopled by ghosts" (*Rewriting English* 10), Light argues that women have actively contributed to the presence of the ghosts of imperialism in "Englishness." Most provocative of all, Light argues that an increasing "privatisation of national life" between the wars was accompanied by "the domestication of the imperial idea ... and the elaboration of imperial fantasies within different kinds of national, private and indeed feminine contexts" (211). Though she is careful to use *feminine* rather than *feminist*, Light does not deny either speculating on links between this redefinition of "Englishness" and the British feminist movement of the 1970s or seeing in them common conservative elements.

The questions Light raises about the effect of imperialism and its aftermath on "Englishness" are raised also by critics such as Francis Mulhern, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Simon Gikandi. Unlike Light, however, these critics take race (rather than gender and class) as the central issue and argue that "Englishness" in its dominant forms is a discourse of ethnicity which denies the multiethnic character of Britain, past and present. In his discussion of the Leavises, Mulhern concludes that the "governing values of Leavisite discourse" are not only "(hetero) sexist" and "class-restrictive" but also "ethnocentric" and that "the guarantee of integrity" of those values is "the notion of an abiding self-evident Englishness" ("English Reading" 257-59). He argues that while F. R. Leavis's name and *Scrutiny* were associated with the "new 'provincialism' of British intellectual life ... widely observed, ... celebrated or deplored, in the 1950s," Leavis himself "was not subjectively 'post-imperial'" and that the "distinctive shape" of "Leavisite discourse in its high period" was the "transition" between "the old imperial literary culture" and "its 'provincial' successor" (261-62). Gikandi argues that Britain is still in that transition phase, still

dependent on "the notion of cultural crisis" which is maintained by a "dialectic of imperial affirmation and disavowal" (51-52), by a "view of empire as simultaneously desirable (the source of the greatness of Britain) and threatening (the 'natural' home of black immigrants)" (71). Hall points out that "in the present phase of globalization" which includes "one of the largest forced and unforced mass migrations" in recent history, "Western nation-states, already 'diaspor-ized' beyond repair are becoming inextricably 'multicultural'" (356); but those who see themselves as guardians of some "essentialist conception of national identity" in Britain have "construct[ed] ... a particularly defensive, closed and exclusive definition of 'Englishness' ... as a way of warding off or refusing to live with difference" (356-57).

It is the project of critics such as Hall, Gilroy and Gikandi to open up this definition so as to include in it the concept "Black British," a project which is part of a movement in contemporary (often interdisciplinary) cultural criticism in Britain which attempts to broaden the concept of British national identity to include those subordinated or marginalized by illusory consensus strategies designed to preserve some "pure" cultural essence that, in fact, has never existed. By foregrounding both differences in, and the complex intersection of, issues concerning gender, class and race, this criticism seeks to unmask the illusion of a unity of belief promoted by dominant constructions of "Englishness."

In *Literary Englands: Versions of "Englishness" in Modern Writing*, Gervais points out that while many of the late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century versions of "Englishness" have appealed to an idealized pre-industrial and rural past, others have problematized such appeals by examining areas and/or eras overshadowed in and by idealized versions. Though not mentioned by Gervais (his focus being male authors among the moderns and male poets among contemporaries), Drabble is one of the

contemporary authors who challenge dominant versions of "Englishness" which involve the survival of class and gender subordination in subtle forms. She told Creighton: "I'm not going to deplore the passing of a tradition in which I would have been a cook-housekeeper" (qtd. in *MD* 109). Reading her fiction, one is struck by her willingness to focus on those things that Gervais says "divide [English people] from a more general sense of [their] 'Englishness,'" things which he says must be taken into account if there is to be any hope of finding "an England in which the English can meet" (275). I have already mentioned that Drabble has raised objections to the Leavisite notion of the essential, all-encompassing "Englishness" of the "great tradition" by her questioning of the social or cultural scope of authors such as Jane Austen and Henry James, her questioning of the "cultural" sense of "moral responsibility" that the Leavises attributed to George Eliot and her questioning of the correspondence they argued existed between Joseph Conrad's ideas and the English language. It will be clear that in raising these objections Drabble has not only cast doubt upon Leavisite criticism--either the Leavises' critical judgement or their critical method seems at fault--but has also called into question the whole Leavisite notion of an unchanging "Englishness." That, as Gervais says, in "looking to the past for an authentic 'Englishness'," F. R. Leavis gave a "doctored" version of it (252) is something Drabble seems very aware of in her novels as, again and again, she makes readers aware of English life "on the margins" (*RW* 18; 90), whether those margins be related to gender, class, region or country of origin.

This is not to say that Drabble's critique of "Englishness" is some external, transcendental, Archimedean view from elsewhere (or nowhere); it is an immanent critique, a critique from *within* "Englishness" which acknowledges the burden of influence and, in fact, emphasizes how very difficult it is to shake off one's own social and cultural formations. The difficulty that Drabble has had in doing that at various stages of her life is



reflected in her criticism of characters who find themselves in equally paradoxical positions, often repeating old patterns in new ways. In each of her novels Drabble uses the point of view of a character or a narrator who has moved far enough beyond the character(s) reflected in the novel to allow for the ironic distance that is necessary for her to critique her own "Englishness" and theirs and to engage in one of her main strategies of subversion—a politics of guilt. As will become clear presently, the guilt which Drabble insists upon bringing to our attention is not the guilt of sexual transgression which we find in Leavisite "Englishness" (as well as in other dominant versions) and which is related to the notion of a sacrosanct domesticity. Drabble focuses on the guilt of being privileged in a social structure which she knows is unfair, a guilt which she and her characters find is impossible to get rid of as long as that social structure remains dominant.

Born in the northern industrial city of Sheffield to first-generation university graduates whose university degrees provided them entry into the professional middle class, Drabble was well placed to know that there are regional, class and generational differences that run through "Englishness" and well aware of the effects of class-consciousness on people caught in a "middle-ground," as it were, between working-class or lower-middle-class origins and middle-class aspirations and even more acutely aware of the damaging effects of such middle-class insecurity upon children in these homes. She has spoken often in interviews of the problems in her own childhood caused by her mother's anxiety and depression, the result of her mother's inability to make an easy transition to middle-class life, and she has said she "thinks there is more of that in English life than one would believe possible, more scars from social encounters" (qtd. in Creighton, *MD* 20-21). In her fiction, Drabble has made repeated attempts to understand this troubled relationship between herself and her mother in terms of the difference between her social position as a woman who came of age in the postwar period and that of her mother who

was born a generation earlier. In her insistence that the problems were caused by social conditions, Drabble anticipates some of the more recent work in social history and cultural studies on this question. Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* is especially helpful in bringing out both the position of young women like Drabble who found themselves poised between classes, gender roles and modes of "Englishness" in this period and the position of women like her mother who had been born a generation too early to benefit from the state interventions in health and education which promised the daughters lives that would be different from their mothers'.

Steedman's concern in *Landscape for a Good Woman* is with "lives lived on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretative devices of [English] culture don't quite work" (5), and she is particularly concerned with telling the story of her mother's sense of "the terrible unfairness of things," and of her "subterranean longing" for the things she could not have (8). Steedman wants to admit these desires to the "political reality and psychological validity" denied them in conventional accounts (109). According to Steedman, her mother "was a woman who finds no place in the iconography of working-class motherhood" depicted either in Jeremy Seabrook's *Working Class Childhood* or in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (6). In sum, she argues that neither she nor her mother can be fitted into either the "fiercely moral ... tradition of cultural criticism" in England or the working-class autobiographies of childhood written by men (8; 16). She says she delights in using her mother's story to "subvert" those nostalgic accounts in which a mother's "ungiving endurance is admired by working-class boys who grow up to write about their mothers' flinty courage" (17). She describes her mother's story as "a sad and secret story" of "unfulfilled desire," experienced by "many women driven mad in this way" (22).

The figure of the (usually) house-bound and clinically depressed or anxious mother causing strained domestic situations appears over and over in Drabble's novels, some notable examples being Clara's mother in *Jerusalem the Golden*, Simon's in *The Needle's Eye*, Kate's in *The Middle Ground* and Liz's in *The Radiant Way*. For Clara and Liz, these sad stories are literally secret stories, only uncovered at the time of their mothers' deaths, which, in Liz's case, does not occur until after she is herself a grandmother. Drabble's focus on these women is a contribution to the subversion of a tradition which, Steedman argues, "has, by ignoring feelings like these, given us the map of an upright country" (8). In her treatment of this figure, Drabble has foregrounded generational, gender, class and regional differences that reveal differences between the "margins" and the "centre" of English culture (differences about which Liz, the daughter of one of these mothers, is very aware) (*RW* 18). Liz's mother, Rita Ablewhite (a parodic surname?), is an especially good illustration of Drabble's focus on these ghosts of "Englishness." In a phrase which reflects her characteristic "teetering on the brink between parody and sincerity,"<sup>2</sup> Drabble refers to Mrs. Ablewhite as a "domestic ghost" (*RW* 90). The description is fitting in a number of ways for this victim of class and gender differences: a former housemaid, a position which still haunts her and her daughter Liz (who fears that she is really "a scullery maid dressed up by a Cambridge scholarship" [*RW* 183]), she is literally a ghost of a domestic, but she is also figuratively the ghost of a marginalized class haunting the idealized domesticity of the centre and the ghost of a subordinated gender—a woman soured by disappointment in a far-from-ideal marriage.

Steedman claims for her mother's story "a politics of envy" (23) which has been excluded from the "[f]iercely moral" dominant tradition of cultural criticism in England (8), but which is related to a marginalized tradition of English cultural criticism, that of

radicalism (23). It is in radicalism that Steedman finds a vocabulary for expressing her mother's envy and longing, "a language for expressing ... a political understanding of the unfairness of things" (118). Where I would disagree with Steedman is in the implication that because radicalism allows for envy as "a political motive," it is not a "moral" tradition (8), since this tradition can include not only the Great Society and the Land Chartists but also the Ranters, Quakers, Diggers and other Dissenters. What unites them is an uncompromising belief in *complete* equality: a religious belief in the equality of all before God and a political belief that the things of the world belong to all and should be shared equally, a belief which Raymond Williams has traced back as far as the Great Society of poor peasants in the fourteenth century whose motto was "All things under Heaven ought to be common" (CC 42-43). This is a stubborn and an unyielding--an *extreme*--position not willing to enter into negotiations and make the compromises that are necessary in order to be absorbed by the dominant tradition which, as Anna Marie Smith argues, depends on such negotiations for its apparently "centred," "'tolerant' middle-ground" position.

Drabble is in the paradoxical position of having been schooled both in this radical tradition and in the dominant tradition. She told an interviewer that her father wanted her and her sister (Antonia Byatt) to have good schooling but that he didn't want them to become "snobs" and so he chose a Quaker school as a "compromise." She said that at the school they were taught that "there is the light of God in everyone" and that this belief in human equality has survived her loss of belief in any conventional notion of God (Interview with Wachtel). The effect on Drabble of this schooling in a radical tradition of dissent is a tremendous sense of "guilt" about being privileged and having more than her fair share of good things, including the Oxbridge education which followed (Interview with Wachtel; Interview with Hardin 288). The point I want to make is that Drabble's obsession with guilt may also be seen as an expression of a political perception of the "unfairness of

things" which is at the heart of this English radical tradition. If, in the case of Steedman's mother, "exclusion is the promoter of envy" (Steedman 111), then in the case of Drabble, inclusion is the promoter of guilt, and what we find in Drabble in place of "a politics of envy" is a politics of guilt. From her first novel (*A Summer Bird-Cage*) to her latest (*The Witch of Exmoor*), Drabble forces us to confront and, she hopes, to share her awareness of the guilt that is present in apparently "guilt-free" versions of "Englishness," and having forced it upon us, she refuses to mediate it in the narratives.

Drabble's characters who live within the parameters of a dominant "Englishness" are never able to free themselves completely from old patterns of class inequality or the guilt that it entails. A very good example of a character pursued by guilt, as if by the Furies, is Rose in *The Needle's Eye*. Rose thinks that she can get rid of the guilt associated with being an heiress by giving away most of her inheritance to build a school in Africa and by living in a poor neighbourhood in London, but Drabble makes it clear that even without the large inheritance, Rose is still privileged by comparison with others around her and still guilty of maintaining class inequalities. Drabble has said that she deliberately presented Rose with a "profound moral dilemma," which means that she is caught in "the conflict between old fashioned concepts of virtue and the claims of the self as against the claims of other selves" (qtd. in Creighton, *MD* 79), and unlike the traditional "English" heroine, she is unable to satisfactorily resolve this conflict. The novel ends on a highly ambivalent note with Rose returning to an abusive marriage. As willing to revise her own perceptions as she is to revise those of the tradition she inherited, Drabble has since gone beyond this ending by mentioning, in a later novel (*The Gates of Ivory*), changes that occurred in Rose's life after *The Needle's Eye*. The conflict, however, remains unsolved.

By contrast with this serious treatment of the guilt associated with social privilege,

Drabble's treatment of the traditional notion of sexual transgression is parodic. As pointed out in other studies of Drabble, marriage in her novels is almost always less than ideal. This is especially the case with first marriages (perhaps because Drabble was unhappy in hers). In any case, first marriages in the novels are often depicted as the locus of unsatisfied desires, of frigidity and violence, from which contemporary women feel they must free themselves if they are not to turn into those domestic ghosts from the past. Quite a number of young married women in Drabble seem to flaunt their differences from the women of the past and particularly from that "impressively intransigent maiden," the "Protestant heroine," that Q. D. Leavis placed at the centre of "the Englishness of the English novel." According to Mrs. Leavis, these heroines, "though modest, sensitive and domesticated, are in any crisis prepared to act in defiance of the conventions of their society if their sense of what is just prompts them to do so" (318). Like Emma (in *The Garrick Year*), who is described by one critic as "irresponsible, selfish and immature" (Myer, *A Reader's Guide* 31), Jane (in *The Waterfall*) is willing to defy more than conventions: she defies traditional morality itself and she is prompted to do so not by a sense of what is just but by her own desires. She may be seen as the Leavisite traditional heroine's other, or repressed, self, as an "English" woman who has given up "the sense of personal [or 'true moral'] responsibility" that Q. D. Leavis said distinguished "the histories of the heroines of English novels" from those of "classical French novels and ... all Italian novels." Jane shares the foreign heroines' susceptibility to passion. Speaking of a comparable situation in one of Stendhal's novels, Q. D. Leavis said that to be overcome or ruled by passionate feeling "is surely to be sub-human and the fact that such a situation would have been impossible for an English novelist (in the past) to record admiringly is one proof that our novelists had a more mature and civilized tradition to work in" (318-19). One might have thought that such a narrow attitude on female sexuality had been laid to rest long ago, but

as we saw earlier in the analyses of ideas of femininity in the interwar, war and postwar periods, something of the notion of what is an "acceptable" expression of "English" female sexuality survives to reappear like a ghost in reformulations of "Englishness." This specter prevents English women from going to extremes and becoming like the "mad modern woman" of Drabble's imagination (Interview with Hardin 281).

The Leavisite "English" heroine does appear in Drabble's novels but only to have her "well-established, traditional English morality" (*The Millstone* 121) challenged. The signal for the appearance of this heroine is "the ghost of a rose"--a traditional symbol of a pure England which bypasses "thousands of years of interbreeding," as Drabble notes in *A Writer's Britain* (114). Both Rosamund of *The Millstone* and Rose of *The Needle's Eye* are named for this symbolic association (Interview with Milton 55), and the beauty of at least one other "thoroughly English person" (Alison of *The Ice Age*) is compared to the English rose (*IA* 91; 33). Rosamund has the highly developed sense of what is just that Q. D. Leavis admired, but Drabble described her as suffering from a "dryness of spirit" and a lack of human warmth (Interview with Cooper-Clark 25). Deconstructed, her morality is found wanting (*M* 135). She is a modern English woman who manages to combine pursuing a career with motherhood, but at the cost of a vibrant sexuality about which she has "Victorian" fears.

It is generally agreed that in *The Needle's Eye* Drabble begins to widen her focus to take in not just the condition of women in England but also the "state of the nation" itself (*IA*). As she does so, she may be seen to be inscribing but also questioning the prevailing nostalgia of "Englishness." It almost seems as if, like Gervais, she has taken to heart what George Santayana wrote in *Soliloquies in England*:

So everything in its ruin, seems in England to live a new life; and it is only this second life, this cottage built in the fallen stronghold, that is English. (qtd. as the epigraph to Gervais)

Drabble's novels are filled with such cottages and in interviews she has pointed out some of their more subtle and devious variations, devious in the sense that the characters who reconstruct them are, at least initially, unaware that they are repeating old patterns. She has said, for example, that in giving away most of her inheritance and moving to a working-class neighbourhood in search of purity and innocence, Rose is able to replay the "lady of the manor" in a very subtle way and retreat from responsibility to a larger community which includes her immigrant husband (Interview with Preussner 566). Of Kate in *The Middle Ground*, Drabble has said that she sets up a form of the "cozy little cottage" in the midst of London (Interview with Hannay 146), and in the novel she suggests that it is not only a retreat from unpleasant realities within England but also a defence against the world outside the ambiguous retreat that England itself seems to provide. While her friend Hugh wonders "will anyone ever again be able to write with confidence a book that assumes the significance of one culture only, will anyone ever again be able to stand upright in one nationality?" (*MG* 170) Kate tries to do just that. Having said "To hell" with Ted and Mujid who have, respectively, caused her Freudian and Marxist "nervous breakdown[s]" (107) and having refused (at least for the time being) to venture outside England with Hugh, she manages to convince herself that she is still the Mrs. Dalloway-like "centre of a circle," a notion about which the narrator herself seems ambivalent though she knows "there is no language left to describe such things, we have called it all so much in question" (268).

Drabble's revisionary use of these cottages as retreats that can and yet cannot be viewed as the "centre" of contemporary England also contains her response to the idealization of the rural past, particularly in the contemporary best-seller accounts of country childhood that she mentions in *A Writer's Britain*, accounts similar to those Q. D.



Leavis treasured for "show[ing] the English gift for recapturing the formative experiences of childhood--something that has been an important element in the English novel--and the English attachment to and understanding of a locality" (Q. D. Leavis 321). Of contemporary accounts, Drabble says, "We seem through them to glimpse a world that is rare, precious, vanishing" and she relates them to children's fairy tales, pointing out that whereas one usually finds there "a safe little world," her preference is for those which show that "beauty was mingled with terror" (*AWB* 247-56). By contrast with the idealized accounts, Drabble's fictional versions reflect her own childhood loneliness and sense of insecurity and the "particular kind of dour northern life" that she says she was raised in (qtd. in Myer, *A Reader's Guide* 57).

One of the most interesting attempts to recapture a vanished rural ideal is contained in *The Ice Age* where Oxbridge-educated Anthony Keating, who has lately become a property speculator destroying old properties in order to build new ones, buys a large country estate and has dreams of replaying "lord of the manor" using the profits he thought he would make in speculation (Sadler 112). This apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that Anthony is attempting to recapture the imperial past, a time in which, Raymond Williams has argued, "[m]ore significantly and more ritually than ever before, a rural mode was developed as a cultural superstructure, on the profits of industrial and imperial development" (*CC* 283). It is a similar connection between "culture" and "islands of money" that, as Brooker and Widdowson point out, E. M. Forster advocates in *Howards End* (137) and it is *Howards End* which provides the basis for Drabble's revision of the "country-house" literary tradition in *The Ice Age*. Her treatment of Anthony suggests that she would agree with Batsleer et al about England "living out the dotage of an imperial culture" and its dreams being "peopled by ghosts." In the course of the narrative it becomes clear that Anthony is caught in a gap. For all he thinks that he has become "a

modern man, an operator, at one with the spirit of the age," he knows that he is haunted by the spirit of the past, that he is "a child of a lost empire" who has been conditioned for an England that is gone (*IA* 260). Part of what concerns Drabble is that old beliefs die hard and their ghosts remain to haunt those who were raised or educated in them. It is as a result of those ghosts that Anthony ends up in prison in Wallacia. In the interview with Hannay, Drabble explained that though Anthony is reading a Le Carré novel at the end—an ending which some have compared to Le Carré's—he is there because of other books he read in his youth and the institutions which helped to mould him.

In the same interview Drabble compared herself and Anthony (132), reminding us of something she had Sarah, her first protagonist and an aspiring writer, say in *A Summer Bird-Cage* about the voice of her Oxbridge education giving her nothing but "the ability to think in quotations" (44). Drabble has also said of her own writing that she has to be careful not to take everything that comes to her in the way of literary allusions, not to accept without question the views and patterns of the literature she knows so well (Hannay 130-33). As I have argued above, one of the central concerns in her novels is the difficulty of thinking and acting in new ways, of freeing oneself from the powerful influence of "tradition." Though Drabble speaks of her own Cambridge education (a double, started first in English) as having given her the confidence to write, she also speaks of the "destructive" atmosphere created at Cambridge under Leavis and says "it was just good luck that he did not stop [her] completely" from writing novels (Interview with Firchow 105). No wonder, then, that her attitude toward Leavisite "Englishness" is ambivalent at best and that she seems at times to be deliberately deconstructing it.

Drabble becomes increasingly disturbing in her questioning of "Englishness" as she attempts to deal with "numbers" and a global consciousness (*GI* 138) as opposed to "the individual self" and the self-consciousness "encouraged" in her case, as in that of her

character Alix Bowen, "by her education and her reading" (RW 76). In "Fragmented Bodies/Selves/Narratives: Margaret Drabble's Postmodern Turn," Roberta Rubenstein points out that Drabble's novels since the mid-seventies "reflect--and reflect upon--a problematic, violent, and arbitrary universe" and that "the narratives themselves have become structurally fragmented, mirroring the author's evolution from a focus on domestic manners towards a more socially and politically sweeping and 'disruptive' (Drabble's term) form that experiments with postmodernist narrative structures" (136). She also points out that the "deliberate disjunctiveness in narrative structure" is accompanied by "narrators who subvert realistic conventions by intermittently commenting directly on the text we are reading" (137). Following Rubenstein's lead, another critic argues that, in *The Gates of Ivory*, there is "a seeming lack of closure," "a diminishing sense of character," and a "fragmented" form, and that "the notion of reality fades away until one is left with an endless chain of substitutions; a deferral of meaning" (Knutsen 580). One could say that Drabble's "postmodern turn" is a questioning of the morality of insularity through a questioning of the conventional (or traditional) narrative form: in *The Gates of Ivory*, Drabble has her narrator say that "such a narrative will not do .... A queasiness, a moral scruple, overcomes the writer at the prospect of selecting individuals from the mass of history, from the human soup" (GI 138). This from a novelist who early in her career told Bergonzi that she did not want to be "experimental," preferring to "be at the end of a dying tradition, which [she] admire[d] than at the beginning of a tradition [she] deplore[d]" (Bergonzi 65). I would argue, however, that the revisionary impulse was there from the beginning, that even in search of something other than "[s]hapeless diversity" (MG 225) Drabble was looking for "new patterns" (my emphasis) and that when she suspected she was remaking the old ones, she critiqued her own "Englishness."

As various critics have pointed out, Drabble's novels are autobiographical in the

sense that they almost always deal with main characters, especially women, who are near in age and experience to Drabble at the time of writing and she herself insists upon the importance of an author's biography (Interview with Parker and Todd 171). Drabble began writing, in part, as a response to finding herself domesticated--marriage and pregnancy preventing her from pursuing a career in acting--and it was on domesticity that she focused her attention in the early novels. Her first five novels, written in the sixties, are concerned with women, haunted and hindered by ghosts of domesticity, struggling to create "new patterns" for their lives and, in the case of Sarah in *A Summer Bird-Cage* and Jane in *The Waterfall*, for their writing. As the children grew, Drabble was able to move out of the house and into the city and other parts of England to work (on her novels, on reviews, articles, bits and pieces of journalism, on committees and panels), and her next five novels reflect this expansion in her life. In these middle novels she is concerned mainly with the "state of the nation" as it is reflected in the experience of a growing number of characters, male as well as female, haunted and impeded by the ghosts of rural England and a lost empire, searching for new patterns for the nation as well as for themselves. Since that time Drabble has continued to widen her experience by taking advantage of opportunities for world travel offered by the British Council and her later fiction reflects her growing global awareness. What begins as one novel describing social conditions in Thatcherite England during the eighties turns into a trilogy as characters either break, or are thrust out of what they had thought were the regular patterns of their lives to wander into "unknown" spaces (NC 141), the most distant being Cambodia. In her latest novel, Drabble returns to England for the main setting but widens the focus to include immigrants, particularly blacks, trying to bring into being an idea of "Englishness" broad enough to cover England's hybridized culture. The expansion in subject matter is reflected in technique as Drabble moves from mimicking and mocking the psychological moral realism

of the Leavisite "English" novel and its successors in her early novels to embracing Dickensian profusion and "romantic realism" in her middle ones and, finally, to using hybrid texts with touches of "magic realism."

Here it must be said that Drabble is very late in expressing any sustained awareness of the racial tensions evident in Britain throughout the periods she examines in her fiction. Except for isolated passages in her middle novels and in the trilogy, racial inequality does not enter as a central concern in her critique of "Englishness" until *The Witch of Exmoor*, her latest novel. When she does address racial inequality, though, she shows it to have the same importance as the gender and class inequality with which she challenges what she views as the illusion of equality within dominant, supposedly democratic versions of "Englishness" based on consensus. In this area, too, there is an expansion in her work from a focus on mainly insular anxieties about gender and class to a focus on global anxieties about nation and nationality

## Chapter 2: "An Unacceptable Excess of Identity"

Looking back at the focus of her novels of the sixties from the vantage point of the wider perspectives she was exploring in the seventies and eighties, Drabble said she thought that in these early novels she had "a very narrow vision" resulting from "a very narrow life" (Interview with Milton 49), and that she dealt with the effects of domesticity on a particular group of women because she herself "was writing out of a narrow domestic situation" which prevented her from pursuing interests outside the home (Interview with Kenyon 37). Drabble knew at the time she wrote these novels, however, that there was more involved than just a realistic depiction of "[d]omestic squalor and domestic strife" (Interview with Kenyon 28) since it was through this depiction that she questioned traditional English assumptions about gender and domesticity. In "A Woman Writer", she says,

There is no point in sneering at women writers for writing of problems of sexual behaviour, of maternity, of gynaecology--those who feel the need to do it are actively engaged in creating a new pattern, a new blueprint. This area of personal relationships verges constantly on the political: it is not a backwater of introversion, it is the main current which is changing the daily quality of our lives. The truest advantage of being a woman writer now is that never before, perhaps, have women had so much to say, and so great a hope of speaking to some effect. (6)

There are two things here that proponents of "Englishness" would have found disturbing. The first is the dissatisfaction with traditional patterns for women's lives which not only reveals some of the discontent and disunity within England in the sixties but also problematizes appeals to "tradition" as a way of dealing with the present crisis; as Drabble has pointed out, such questioning had the potential of becoming a subversive force (Interview with Poland 259).

The second disturbing thing, and even more of a threat, is the movement of the

personal and the private into the area of politics and vice versa. As late as 1985, Batsleer et al write,

it remains characteristic ... of British life in general that it represents culture—even or especially in its narrow sense of books, theatre, music, entertainment—as having little or nothing to do with the serious business of politics and practical life .... Removing politics from the semiotic domain of signs, images and meanings, it segregates it from the lives and interests of 'ordinary people,' who are in turn induced to accept the representation of themselves as incapable of, and bored by, political reflection and action. (7)

They single out the women's liberation movement as having challenged these traditional separations among culture, politics and everyday life by "an insistence on the permanently and radically political character of everyday experience and private life, expressed in the phrase 'the personal is political'" (7-8); but they also argue that this kind of "oppositional thinking about cultural politics" has "remained marginal to ... the political consciousness of most people." According to them, it "is in part a problem of 'Englishness'" that, while those on the margins (including Irish, Scottish, and Welsh, black people and women) all know in one way or another that "politics is a question of language, consciousness, identity, history," and not separate from everyday life,

the ruling culture of Englishness—white, male and (whatever its electoral habits) conservative—remains profoundly mistrustful of politics, as of culture, and resistant to its infiltration into everyday life. (9)

It is evident from what she says in "A Woman Writer" that even in the early sixties Drabble recognized that writing is a form of cultural politics and that it might be used to oppose an "Englishness" which would like to prevent just such a recognition on the part of "ordinary people." Evident also is her awareness that if women were to overcome the obstacles to

their participation in English institutions, they would have, first, to call into question the emphasis within "Englishness" on the value of domesticity and the privileging of "masculine" over "feminine" concerns.

According to Drabble, the women's novel of the sixties was the expression of "feelings of rage" by young women who unexpectedly found themselves in conflict with deeply entrenched gender-based differences in their society (Interview with Kenyon 27-28). Of her own early novels, she said,

There were undercurrents of rage, though they were veiled .... My protests were mild, but I felt I had to express them .... Later in the sixties, the wit grew sourer. Men traditionally can have both a domestic life and outside work; our greed for both had been awakened and was not being satisfied. (Interview with Kenyon 45)

Drabble's heroines were to discover that the tradition which allowed men to enjoy a combination of domestic life and career depended on women finding identity in being wives and mothers and providing men with the domesticity that men enjoyed. When the "middle-class women with ambition" that Drabble writes about in the sixties aspire to this traditionally privileged position of men, "they find conflicts in their family" (Interview with Creighton 25) and feel, as Drabble said she felt, "caught in a trap" (Interview with Kenyon 28). Out of these feelings of frustration came novels which challenged appeals to "tradition" and to "Englishness" as a unified and superior national culture, for if it was that, why was it so difficult for women to contribute to it? Why did it seem as if women had to sacrifice something in order to be deemed worthy to participate in their country's institutions?

When within a week of leaving Cambridge with her "starred" first in English Literature and the ambition to be an actress, Drabble married an actor (Clive Swift), she did not expect to be repeating old patterns, but she found herself trapped in them nevertheless, playing only supporting roles in her career and in her marriage. Having turned down the



offer of a summer job in order to go where her husband's job took him, Drabble found that the only work offered her was walk on or understudy roles (Interview with Hardin 291). Add pregnancy and the conflict between her career and her children to the conflicting career interests of her and her husband and, Drabble says, she found herself in a position not so very different from women of the nineteenth century who wrote because "[i]t was the only job they could do." Writing, she said, "was [her] way of refusing to be sentenced [to silence] because [she] was prevented from doing a lot of other things ..." (Interview with Parker and Todd 165). Ironically, Drabble was "driven into what [she] happened to be good at" (Interview with Poland 257) and was able to use against itself the tradition which had driven her into this traditional compromise. When Drabble told Kenyon that the women's novel of the sixties "built on the traditions of the nineteenth century, and took a new shape" (28), she provided a clue to the interplay in her own novels of the sixties between her awareness of traditional patterns and her desire to create new ones.

The new shape Drabble spoke of did not go unnoticed by custodians of "Englishness" such as the Leavises who thought possibly either to silence her or to undermine her protests by sneering at her work. What may have particularly irked the Leavises about Drabble was that, thanks to having studied under F. R. Leavis at Cambridge, she was so aware of the Leavisite version of "Englishness" and of "the great tradition" the Leavises chose to support, that she was able to question from within and to use the tradition against itself in a subtle kind of postmodern parody which involves the tradition in mocking itself.

#### *A Summer Bird-Cage*

It is clear even from her first novel that Drabble was not merely mimicking the moral and aesthetic values of Leavisite "Englishness," but also questioning them. When,

in *A Summer Bird-Cage*, she focused on the relationship between two sisters, named them Bennett and involved them in the marriage theme, she was openly alluding to, and inviting comparison with, texts belonging to "the great tradition," particularly Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, but she was not seeking to repeat these old patterns. Nor was she using these authors, as the Leavises did, to remind readers of some superior version of "Englishness" in danger of being lost. In response to an interviewer's observation that her novels "clearly echo with the literary heritage of England," Drabble agreed but pointed out that while one is perhaps necessarily influenced by one's reading and education, one can also allude to the past in order to focus on differences between past and present and on the need for new patterns. Drabble uses allusions to traditional literary patterns as a way of showing that "women today are finding themselves in situations, physical and emotional situations for which there are *no* literary guidelines" (Interview with Cooper-Clark 22; my emphasis): that is, she uses "tradition" to challenge the appeal to "tradition" as a way of coping with present anxieties and uncertainties.

As the epigraph and the title *A Summer Bird-Cage* (which comes from the epigraph) indicate, the subject of Drabble's first novel is marriage and the ambivalence of the heroine-narrator to it. To Sarah, as to the character in John Webster's *The White Devil*,

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

Sarah recoils from marriage and domesticity when she considers the women she knows who have had their wings clipped by it, but she also desires to express her sexuality and, haunted, as she says her sister Louise is not, by "little whispers from the past ages of morality" (142), she thinks that marriage may be the best way to do that, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

That evidence is rather staggering: first, there is "poor brave twittering Mama,

pretending everything had always been so lovely, ignoring the facts"—one of which is a husband who is "a bit of a brute" and a "reactionary" when it comes to "women and servants"—covering up her "courage and desperation" with "nonsense and fuss and chirruping" (21; 30; 21); then there is Sarah's friend Gill whose marriage for love to the artist Tony seemed to promise freedom from domesticity but ended soon after she refused to "put the kettle on" (41); and there is Louise's friend Stella who, like Drabble, got married the year she and her husband came down from Cambridge, "a week after the end of term or something dotty," and who, when last seen by Louise, was surrounded by "wet nappies" and a "screaming" baby and full of abuse for her husband who had interests and contacts outside the home (204-05); there is Louise herself married to a well-known wealthy novelist, Stephen Halifax, and seeming to Sarah to have become his possession, looking like a Greek sculpture in order to fit the "subtle Greek decor" of his house (122), "a novelist's wife" being "all she is" (137), or so Sarah thinks before Louise ends up at her apartment having been locked out of the house by Stephen after he found her in the bathtub with his best friend John; and, finally, there is Stephanie "blandly smiling her smooth English smile" and living an equally bland "smooth life" (86-87). No wonder Sarah sometimes thinks, "Oh, I didn't want it, any of it. I felt frightened and ill" (188).

The wide-ranging questioning of marriage and domesticity in *A Summer Bird-Cage* is in clear opposition to the attitudes towards marriage expressed in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*. As noted in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Drabble, *Pride and Prejudice* ends with the marriages of the two eldest Bennet sisters, "an indication of their subsequent happiness" (787) and in *Middlemarch*, "the importance of marital loyalty is ... widely illustrated" (647). Drabble's novel begins with the marriage of the elder of her Bennett sisters and ends with its violent break-up and with the continuing doubts of the other sister about whether "marriage means anything, and

whether one should have children" given the widespread family squabbling of "the English middle classes" (136-37).

Drabble's attack on the representation of the family as the locus of important national cultural values is embodied also in the rivalry and mutual distrust of her two Bennett sisters. Sharing a very rare evening meal with her sister Louise and listening to some music, Sarah is "struck ... by the charming convention of the scene ... sisters idling away an odd evening in happy companionship" and she thinks that "[i]t was like something out of *Middlemarch* or even Jane Austen" (171); but she is soon made aware that Louise was only killing time before meeting her lover John after the theatre and was priming Sarah to go along as "an audience to build up the striking wicked image of themselves" (182).

There are other clear echoes of *Middlemarch* in Drabble's novel--like Dorothea, Louise marries a rather pedantic man of doubtful sexual orientation and on their honeymoon in Rome discovers what a mistake she has made--but the similarities merely serve to point up the differences. It is noted at the end of the entry for *Middlemarch* in *The Oxford Companion* that its "status as one of the greatest works of English fiction was confirmed by Leavis (*The Great Tradition* 1948) despite his doubts about the indulgent portrayal of Dorothea" (647). If he had doubts about that he would certainly have thought the portrayal of Drabble's Louise quite shocking, for unlike Dorothea who remains faithful to Casaubon, only declaring her love for the cousin, Ladislaw, after Casaubon's death, Louise marries Stephen fully intending to carry on her passionate love affair with his friend, and despite "feeling a real Old Testament chill" upon hearing of Louise's adultery (140), the narrator Sarah comes to admire her sister for transgressing against circumscribed roles.

She especially admires Louise for turning tradition upside down and making it work in her favour, at least for a time. Sarah thinks that in marrying Stephen, Louise may

have "succumbed to social pressures .... But on her own terms" and that "she's getting her pound of flesh from society" for not letting her live as the person she is, an "intelligent" and "sexy" woman (149). When she accompanies Louise to the theatre to meet John she thinks

that what Louise was doing was a reversal of roles: she was taking the man's part, calling at the theatre instead of being called for. She was in the tradition but she had reversed it .... To force marriage into a mould of one's own while still preserving the name of marriage--it seemed an enterprise worth consideration. (180)

Behind Sarah's admiration for the skill with which Louise manipulates tradition so that it works in her favour, we glimpse something of the pleasure Drabble takes in her own parodic skill as she remains *in* the tradition of English novelists but uses it to illustrate widespread dissatisfaction within and with traditional patterns. Drabble, too, gets her pound of flesh from a tradition she admired but was beginning to question particularly with regard to its constraining effect upon women's lives.

It is with a mixture of parody and sincerity that Sarah says of her sister that she is "far too intelligent to do nothing, and yet too beautiful and sexy to do all the first-class things like politics or law or social sciences" (149) and that she herself gave up the ambition of becoming a don because "you can't be a sexy don" if you are a woman. She explains:

It's all right for men, being learned and attractive but for a woman it's a mistake. It detracts from the essential seriousness of the business .... You'd soon find yourself having to play it down instead of up if you wanted to get to the top, and when you've only got one life that seems a pity. (184-85)

Sarah's comment on the essential seriousness of English studies mimics F. R. Leavis's claim in "Literature and Society" for the enormous value to society of "the literature that the literary critic finds significant" and of the value of "minds of some real literary education" in "thinking about politics and social matters" (*The Common Pursuit* 192-93). The claim

is, however, repeated by an educated young woman who feels that her "lovely, shiny ... new degree" from Oxford is "useless" (7) since she is prevented from participating in the "first-class" professions by the fact of her sex. Drabble is alluding here to the effect of the institutionalization of "Englishness" in disciplines within the Oxbridge universities and particularly to the establishing of "English" as "an autonomous academic discipline and learned profession" which, Brian Doyle has argued, led to the masculinization of the profession (69). Sarah's comments imply that, for women, participation in institutionalized "Englishness" involves denial or repression of sexuality. A profession that allows for a sense of wholeness for men demands a split from women whose sexuality is viewed as a threat to "seriousness." It is something that cannot be accommodated within a discipline which, Doyle argues, "had been rendered synonymous not only with the central moral force of the 'national character' but also with the moral worthiness of the scholar-critic (living or dead)" (88).

Asked in 1979 about Sarah's comment that a woman "can't be a sexy don," Drabble said she thought it was still "a problem" in some professions in England and that it was so much of a problem at the time she wrote the novel in the early sixties that "the women who were more interested in work put on protective colouring and went about their work very, very quietly" (Interview with Creighton 28). Sarah is not more interested in work than she is in her sexuality. Though we leave her still a "confused" girl (Drabble's description of her in the Interview with Hardin 294), she has the potential to become "wild and dangerous," "a mad modern woman"<sup>3</sup> willing to defy traditional English morality in order to express her sexuality which she sees as an important and undeniable part of who she is. Mary Hurley Moran argues that it is through Sarah's reflections that "Drabble's celebration of the flesh is best expressed" and as illustration she quotes Sarah's

half-humorous, half-serious question about what possible social use or justification one might find for "all this lovely body one was obliged to walk around with," for "Skin and limbs and muscle, all glowing and hot with life and energy and hope" (Moran 47). Sarah's conclusion is that "[t]here simply doesn't seem to be any moral place for flesh" though it exists and *is* herself, not an excess that can be sloughed off: as she stands looking at herself in the mirror she remarks, "Myself stared back at myself in a paroxysm of vanity. I hugged my own body in my own arms. My own flesh. Indisputable. Mine" (*SB-C* 168). Clearly Sarah is not willing to deny her flesh; more to the point, she claims she is not *able* to deny it as she stands there, flesh hugging flesh.

What Sarah says challenges a bedrock assumption of Leavisite "Englishness," that there is "a certain measure of spiritual autonomy in human affairs," that "human intelligence, choice and will do effectively operate, expressing an inherent human nature" (F. R. Leavis, "Literature and Society," *CP* 184). For Sarah, anything characteristic of human nature is inevitably bound up with the flesh and she doubts that the individual has the power to control either biological or social forces. Even from her limited experience Sarah is

vaguely aware of a hinterland of non-personal action [in most people and in herself, she says], where the pulls of sex and blood and society seem to drag [one] into unwilled action, where the race takes over and the individual either loses himself [or herself] in joy or is left helplessly self-regarding and appalled. (71)

The fact that this passage sounds very Lawrentian is no coincidence: characteristically, Drabble is using an author favoured by Leavis to challenge his assumptions. Sarah's reflections on the pulls of sex and blood are clearly meant to remind us of Lawrence's description of the life of "blood-intimacy" of the Brangwen men at the beginning of *The Rainbow* (3) about which Leavis has this to say:

It belongs ... to that aspect of his genius which has made him in general

repute (however absurdly) the prophet of the Dark Gods--the partisan of instinct against intelligence, the humane and the civilized. (99)

He goes on to call this a "fallacy" and to argue that "the life of 'blood-intimacy' ... is, in the novel, a necessary and potent presence to be transcended," and that the "theme" of the novel is "the urgency, and the difficult struggle of the higher human possibilities to realize themselves" (99). These higher possibilities adhere, Leavis says, in what Lawrence calls "the spoken world beyond" the farm, the world of men "raised ... above the common men" by "education and experience" (100-101). What would irk Leavis about the treatment of the life of "blood-intimacy" by Drabble is, first, that she transfers it to a woman and, second, that she does not see it as being in opposition to the "spoken world" to which Sarah, an aspiring writer, belongs. What "blood-intimacy" *is* opposed to, in Drabble's view, is the world of institutionalized "Englishness" to which Leavis, an English don *par excellence*, belongs and from which Sarah is excluded.

The question of what an "inherent human nature," separating the human from the sub-human, might be is made mock of in a conversation between Louise and Sarah on their cousin Daphne who is less well-endowed than they are with either beauty or brains. It is a travesty of the kind of discussion one might expect from two who have been educated, as Louise notes they have, to express judgements "lit. critically" (*SB-C* 198). According to F. R. Leavis, only minds trained in "real" literary criticism have access to the "terms of value judgement" found in "significant" literature ("Literature and Society," *CP* 193), and only these are capable of "making the essential discriminations" necessary to appreciate such judgements ("The Logic of Christian Discrimination," *CP* 251). Louise and Sarah, as "intense" (9) and "serious" (151) as any Leavisite heroine, author or critic engaged in self-scrutiny need be, display their ability to discriminate between themselves as human and those like their cousin Daphne who belong to "a different species" (164), but it is not on the



Leavisite basis of a sense of moral responsibility that they claim to be human and superior to the "Daphnes of this world" (167). The measure of their intensity and the mark of their human nature is the extent to which they can make use of the inequalities that already exist in a society based on distinctions, on notions of class and rank. Louise tells Sarah that it is "pointless" to worry about being privileged:

"London wouldn't be London if it weren't for the provinces. Oxford wouldn't have been Ox if it hadn't been for Redbrick. School wouldn't have been school if it hadn't been for secondary moderns. What can you do about it, except make sure that you come out on top every time?" (166-67)

Louise's point is also that if one comes out on top one need not feel guilt about it or sorry for those who do not: of Daphne, she says, "There's really no point in pretending that she's a human being like me because she so obviously isn't. She reminds me of those tame shabby animals in zoos ... docile and herbivorous" (164). It does not bother Louise as it does Sarah that, if they are "the opposite of Daphne," in terms of this analogy they are like "carnivore[s]." Louise is pleased to number herself among "the flesh eaters" who "feed off" types like Daphne (165). She bluntly spells out to Sarah the meaning couched in the metaphor:

"If you mean that my way of life--our way of life--exists through the existence of theirs ... well, yes, I suppose one does ['feed off them']. It is a minority way, isn't it, Sal? Money, theatres, books ...." (165)

She goes on to say that even without money, Sarah "can't pretend that [she's] not one of the most exclusive of all ... the most predatory ..." and she ends with the observation that the "predators" need the "herbivores" or the privileged need the underprivileged in order to exist: "We live by our reflection in their eyes," she says (165).

Besides being a travesty of the process of discrimination and othering that commentators on "Englishness" see as being central to it, this conversation illustrates Drabble's awareness that what one thinks of as "new," subversive or revolutionary ideas

may turn out to be nothing of the sort. Neither Louise nor Sarah sees any way of escaping from a tradition in which a sense of identity is based on the perception of difference between self and other, though Sarah hopes it is not the case that she can be who she is only by comparison with "incomplete creatures" such as Daphne (167). The best that Louise can do is make the tradition mock itself in the reversal of gender roles in marriage and sexual relationships. Sarah points out that Louise "was, after all, striking a blow for civilization in her behaviour, not, as it first seemed, for anarchy" (180) and even when Louise seems to have control of "the game" (180), there are indications that Stephen may be using her as much as she is using him. In conversation with Sarah on the night Stephen finds her in the bathtub with John and locks her out of the house, Louise says,

"I've recently begun to think that Stephen's in love with John himself, and won't admit it, or else has admitted it to John and been told what John the darling would immediately tell him. So when he saw that he had a chance of getting me, when I was what John wanted, it must have seemed to him a chance of evening a lot of old scores, and of getting a kind of vicarious satisfaction at the same time." (200)

If Stephen is homosexual or bisexual, and indications are that he is one or the other, then he, too, has been using marriage to constrain or cover up a potentially disruptive sexuality.

The question we are left with at the end of the novel is what will become of the various potentially subversive sexual energies glimpsed in it? Sarah seems to think that traditional morality will be reasserted in the case of her friend and her sister: that the wanton Tony "will be making overtures" to Gill soon, and that Louise, who is now living with John, "may even marry him in the end" (207-08). As for herself, Sarah claims to be "waiting to see whether or not [she has] kept faith" with her fiancé Francis who is now "somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic on his way home to [her]" (207). Indications are, however, that she will, as Drabble said in an interview, get married "in that blind and foolish way" as soon as Francis gets back (Interview with Myer 12). In her censure of

Sarah, Drabble was also criticizing herself for giving in to social pressures when she was Sarah's age. She explained to Myer: "I got married in 1960, and everybody got married, you see; you just rushed from university to the wedding ring and then huddled your babies in and out of the cradle ... " (12). The fact that the situation was not the same at the time of this interview over a decade later is due in no small part to writers like Drabble whose early fiction reads as a corrective revision of the value attached to marriage in the Leavisite "English" novel.

Of course Drabble is neither the first English woman writer to question the domestic ideology of "Englishness" nor the first to use and subvert traditional narrative patterns. In *Patterns of Ambivalence: The Fiction and Poetry of Stevie Smith*, Catherine Civello says that Smith is a precursor of novelists such as Drabble and Doris Lessing, and, certainly, I think, there are similarities between Smith's *Novel on Yellow Paper* (her first) and Drabble's first novel; particularly, Sarah's ambivalence about marrying Francis echoes Pompey's ambivalence about marrying Freddy and her chatty, impudent tone recalls Pompey's. Drabble's use and subversion of traditional texts is also reminiscent of Smith's "tell[ing]" and "retell[ing]" of the popular romance which, as Laura Severin points out, Smith does "in a way that undermines and eventually transforms its cultural messages" (*Stevie Smith's Resistant Antics* 34).

A writer even closer to Drabble in technique is Rosamund Lehmann. In her critical biography of her, Judy Simons says that "[t]he reworking [in Lehmann's fiction] of traditional narrative patterns, crucially revised in the light of a twentieth-century consciousness, ... forms a bridge between Lehmann, other women writers of her age and those both of the past and in the future" (25). The women writers referred to by Simons--Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson, for example--are not ones admitted to *The Great Tradition*. They are, as Simons points out, women whose

work "has frequently been read by the literary establishment as odd, possibly interesting but essentially slight" (29). The same is true of Smith, even more so. As Laura Severin notes, "Smith's experiments in the novel form have been largely neglected even in feminist recovery work" (24). Another English woman novelist whose work has been largely neglected is Penelope Mortimer. In *Boundaries of the Self*, Roberta Rubenstein points out that Mortimer is "a contemporary of Doris Lessing in age and of the early Lessing as well as of Margaret Drabble in subject" and she argues that several of her novels "deserve to be included among those of her more widely read and critically analyzed peers who fictively explore the lives of women in marriage, domesticity, and motherhood" (15). Particularly relevant for Drabble's early novels are Mortimer's early novel which, Rubenstein says, depicts "the domestic and emotional imprisonment of most of [her] female characters" and the "conflict" they experience "between domestic fidelity and erotic license," "between duty and freedom" (18).

What these comparisons speak to is the persistence of the domestic ideology of "Englishness," its ability to change shape and appearance so as to survive in times of crisis. As I have illustrated above, recent studies of ideas of femininity in both the interwar period and the period following the Second World war illustrate that these were times of tension in the definition of femininity, times when femininity had to be re-coded in the wake of women's increased participation in work and their experience of sexual freedom during the wars; but while these redefinitions modulated the dominant discourse on femininity, they did not obliterate it. It survived in a re-coded form. This explains the similarity in texts from different periods that are resistant to traditional notions of femininity. Through compromise and what Anna Marie Smith (using a Foucauldian and Nietzschean framework) terms the "differentiation [of] difference against itself" (20-21), the dominant discourse can (as Melinda Mash points out in "Stepping Out or Out of Step? Austerity,

Affluence and Femininity in Two Post-War Films") "reconstruct and resituate itself" (Gledhill and Swanson 257).

Drabble's early protests were the more effective for being expressed in a consciously equivocal manner. For *A Summer Bird Cage* novel she chose what one critic describes, somewhat disapprovingly, as a "rather arch style ... reminiscent of [Jane] Austen's playful wit" (Stovel, *MD* n5, 41). It is clear from the context that the critic considers this to be a weakness in the style of a young writer's first novel, an affected or artificial imitation of Austen's lightness of touch which can be put down to Drabble's immaturity as a writer. On the contrary, I think that Drabble is quite aware of the archness of Sarah's playful, sometimes flippant manner and that the tone mocks as it mimics Austen's wit. It seems to me to be a deliberate parody of Austen's moral tone, of the polite but scornful wit that was to come in for more open criticism in the last of Drabble's novels of the sixties. By exaggerating that style in her first novel in order to celebrate a disruptive female sexuality, Drabble was more subtly reflecting in technique her questioning of the moral/aesthetic values of "the great tradition" and the "Englishness" which the Leavises traced to and from Jane Austen. In some ways, reading this novel is like reading Jane Austen and Stevie Smith at the same time, a combination which hints of the hybrid forms to come in Drabble's later novels.

### *The Garrick Year*

*The Garrick Year*, Drabble's second novel, contains a fuller treatment of the effects of marriage, motherhood and domesticity upon a woman who aspires to be something else in addition to being a wife and mother. It begins with some traditional assumptions on the part of David, Emma's husband, about male and female roles: that his "career" takes precedence over any plans Emma has for a job, that her desire even for a part-time job as a

newscaster is motivated by "vanity" and "selfishness" while his own desire to be an acclaimed actor is motivated by his family responsibilities, and, finally, that looking after the children should be fulfilling enough for her (*GY* 16-17). He seems to be completely unaware of the "conflicting responsibilities" to herself and her family which she feels and which she hoped to balance by the part-time job she is forced to give up when David's job takes him to Hereford and she, mockingly self-described as "self-willed, distinct, determined Emma Evans," agrees to go too (20). The domestic quarrel that ensues when Emma resists David's arguments ends in violence with David putting his fist through the bedroom wall (18), the first sign of the increasing severity of the violence that is characteristic of the marital relationships in Drabble's early novels.

One of the most interesting aspects of this novel is that Emma is torn between the expectations of "Englishness" and her desire for a "wildness" (26) opposed to those expectations. Ironically, when she married David, Emma thought to resolve this conflict. She no more expected to be repeating old patterns than Drabble did when she, too, married an actor. Emma thought that she was breaking with tradition and making a new pattern which might turn out to be "a nightmare, an adventure, but whatever else exciting" (25). It is a mixed marriage in terms of class and both she and David believed that in marrying they had "voluntarily exiled" themselves from their classes, she from the middle-class professionals of "that lush Cambridge garden" and he from the workers in "that sour four-roomed cottage in North Wales" (26). Seeking, in their differences, escape from traditional patterns of domesticity, whether they be at the centre or on the margins of English culture, they find "[p]assion choked by domesticity" none-the-less (26). Emma soon finds herself "appalled by the filthy mess of pregnancy and birth" and although she says the child she "had dreaded as the blight of [her] life turned out to be one of its greatest joys" (27), the birth also caused her to feel trapped in the marriage which had turned a

potentially passionate woman into a frigid one who connects love-making "with babies. And being tired. And wanting to go to sleep" (131). Instead of the "living" that she thought would be hers Emma has what she considers "a barren waste" (82), and she wonders why it is that she did not fulfil the career predictions of "certain small exclusive circles" for "the once famous Emma" (108). She concludes that the odds against her now, "bending over a washing machine to pick out a button or two and some soggy wet cotton," are such that she will never do anything deemed significant, and her "fury with David ... increased and smouldered" (122).

Not all of Emma's problems can be attributed to David. Part of her problem is that she expects of herself what "Englishness" would expect of her: that she be the perfectly competent and practical wife whatever else she might want to be and that, whatever her impulses or her passions, she be able to exercise self-restraint. With respect to competence, she is "white with fury" when she discovers one of her Liverpool ware teapots broken due to an error on her part in packing it. She recognizes that this is a problem and says, "It is frightening how little I can bear the slipping off of my own perfection" (44). This expectation may be traced back to Emma's childhood and her early admiration for Mrs. Scott whose personality and lifestyle reflect the redefinition of domesticity which Alison Light says took place in the inter-war years and continued to inform the dominant version of "Englishness" in the period after the Second World War. According to Light,

something happened to middle-class femininity after the Great War which sees it taking on what had formerly been regarded as distinctively masculine qualities: in particular the ethics of a code of self-control and a language of reticence .... Ironic dismissal, worldly wisdom, brisk competence and heroic disavowal could all be part of [the] reaction to the legacy of representations which had seen ladies as the softer and the frailer sex, the medium of the emotions and of "higher things." (210)

In the inter-war years, middle-class women wanted to be, and were, seen, Light says, as

"icon[s] of Englishness," as "the staunchest and most typical expressions of the national character," exercising a form of heroic restraint, found now not in response to public crises but in response to potential crises in domestic life, the emphasis being on the "ordinariness" of these expressions (208). According to Emma, Mrs. Scott "was one of those mild-faced professional women, whose even features denote a deliberate evenness of life." Emma remembers "that despite the lavishness of their means and the careful comfort of their home [Mrs. Scott] managed to avoid any suggestion of extravagance" and Emma "always got the impression that their household was governed by a mild and firm economy" (50). Trying to understand why she was drawn to her as a child, Emma thinks that it was "the extreme refined ordinariness of her" and the fact that she had "the kind of face that could never grow on a woman not born to professional command." Emma says she has "seen such faces on headmistresses, on committee women, on doctors and dons, and never ... on the underprivileged"; by contrast, she has seen her own mother's "vivid, bony" face on "many a barmaid and in many a back street" (52). Through this contrast we glimpse something of the middle-class insecurity from which Emma suffered as a child. Though she was brought up in the "professional comfort" of that lush Cambridge garden (13), Emma was yet conscious of a difference between her home and the Scotts' which caused her some anxiety about her background. Because her mother was an invalid, suffering all her life from tuberculosis (52-53), Emma was the object of the "lurid pity of others." As a result, she says, she came away with "a certain fore-ordained distance from and attraction towards people like Mrs. Scott, who had herself, it is quite easy to see, been some sort of mother-substitute" for her (53).

Although there is a physical cause for the illness that makes Emma's mother "an exotic, miserable woman who lived from time to time in sanatoria, and from time to time in bed upstairs at home" (53), she is an early version of the ghosts of domesticity that are to



come in Drabble's novels, those shadowy figures of depression and anxiety haunting the memories and lives of their adult children. Having had more to drink at the gathering where she encounters the Scotts than Mr. Scott thinks is good for a nursing mother, Emma wonders whether the Scotts had known that her mother "besides being an invalid, drank. Not heavily, just more than was good for her, or more than would have been good for her had she been able to lead a normal life" (53). There is a suggestion here that even had she not been an invalid, Emma's mother would not have had the confidence or the competence of a Mrs. Scott and her home would likely not have fitted the pattern designated as "normal" for her class. Even now a visit from Mary Summers, the Scotts' married daughter and an old school friend (who had gone on to university and taught "in a good girls' boarding school") causes Emma to feel "those old anxieties" about her aspirations and her lifestyle which seem, "in the cold light of [Mary's] eyes, ... paltry, vain and valueless, ... nothing but an extension of that undergraduate longing for notoriety and disruption with which [Emma] had alienated her so many years ago" (75-76).

Emma's more considered view of Mary and her mother is summed up in her judgment of Mrs. Scott: "she left too much out" (53). What they and their version of "Englishness" left out was any element of "risk" or uncertainty, and even as a child Emma knew that she preferred that element to the uniformity and regularity espoused by the Scotts. She says she "knew that [she] was not one of the professional classes," that she would as an adult, as she did as a child when swimming on a seaside holiday with the Scotts, want to go "out of [her] depth," "just for the fright of it" (80). The metaphor indicates Emma's desire to be independent in thought, free of the cautious class-conscious professional attitudes of the Scotts.

Emma traces this desire to an incident in an English literature class at her first school in Cambridge when she was eleven or so. Having liked, and learned with

enthusiasm Tennyson's "Break, break, break" for a class assignment, Emma was shocked to find that every little girl was able to mimic the "sanctimonious sorrow and world-weariness" of the poem and that they all treated it "reverentially" as if it were a "magic incantation." Emma recalls that each recited it from memory "just as printed in Palgrave's Golden Treasury" including a misprint and that she, faced with the ludicrous spectacle of all those young tongues thoughtlessly uttering Tennyson's inability to utter his thoughts, was moved to rebel:

I said to myself there and then that unless I could utter the thoughts that arose in me I would try to keep my mouth shut ....This is the first instance that I can remember of my own revulsion from what I most liked, and my first desire to give it a good kick in the teeth for the sake of human independence. (81)

Characteristically, Drabble has the rebellion take a parodic form with Emma using some of the words of the poem including the correction "mouth" for the misprint "heart" to declare her independence from it. That early revolt helped to distance Emma from institutionalized "English" and kept her from going on to university though she had been expected to do so and "to have had the independent and faintly intellectual career" that Mary Summers had (76). The fact that it is the staid and insipid Mary Summers and not the rebellious and lively Emma who manages to find a place within England's institutions questions the institutions themselves and the extent to which they perpetuate outdated attitudes. Emma rejects the study of English literature for much the same reason that Sarah rejects the teaching of it: she sees it as being opposed to "living" and, like Sarah, she thinks that it is a shame not to embrace one's life.

What "living" means for Emma becomes clearer when she attracts, and is attracted by, the theatre director Wyndham Farrar. Only then does she realize that she has been repressing an important part of who she is: "I personally, I myself, the part of me that was not a function, and a smile and a mother had been curled up and rotten with grief and

patience and pain" (90). Frightened by the power her feelings can exert over her, however, she criticizes herself according to expectations of "Englishness" for lacking the moral strength to repress them: "I was about to be chained to a passion so arbitrary that it frightened me, to a passion so accidental that it confirmed nothing but my own inadequacy and inability to grow" (90). Measured against the standard of an "English" heroine, who would be governed by her moral sense, Emma thinks of herself as immature and she has trouble accepting the "blind rashness" that she nevertheless feels at times she is: "This was me, this was myself, this hungry bony bird who was ready from some unexplained famine to eat straw and twigs and paper" (90-91). Starved for the passion and excitement she craves, Emma professes herself willing to destroy her home as a famished bird might its nest, but vacillating again she wonders whether she is "right to pay such attention" to her flesh: she asks, "for what was it that responded in this way [to Wyndham] but the physical rubbish of me, the blood and skin and so forth, and a whole heap of romantic notions picked up from our tatty sexual decadence?" For the time being, however, she concludes that she cannot reason herself out of it: "Because reason as I might, and as I did," she says, "it was this part, this dark and wanting part, that seemed to have reality, that seemed to tug and suck and pull at the rest of me with overriding need" (103). This is the part of the self that an "English" heroine would be expected to repress or control, not without difficulty, since the greater the degree of difficulty, the greater the "restraint" the heroine has to exert and, thus, the greater is seen to be her "moral strength" (Light 210). That Emma does exert control over her passion, limiting the affair with Wyndham to kissing and petting, has nothing to do with moral restraint. She does so because, as noted earlier, she associates love-making with childbirth and exhaustion.

Emma's affair with Wyndham does not turn out to be the kind of "sublime passion" that characters in a later Drabble novel (*The Waterfall*) will enjoy. It ends because Emma

thinks that the concern for their children that she and David share is necessary for the children's well-being (171). The novel even seems to want to end on an idyllic pastoral scene affirming the values of "Englishness": the Evans family enjoy a country outing on Ewyas Harold Common which Emma describes as "beautiful, all bracken and buzzing creatures and sheep" (171). The idyll is undercut at the end of the outing, however, when Emma notices the snake clutching the belly of the sick sheep and the novel ends with Emma thinking,

"Oh well, so what" ... the Garden of Eden was crawling with them, too, and David and I managed to lie amongst them for one whole pleasant afternoon. One just has to keep on and to pretend, for the sake of the children, not to notice. Otherwise one might just as well stay at home.  
(172)

What might have been an affirmation of the idyllic vision of the country invoked by David earlier when he was trying to convince Emma that moving to Hereford would be good for her, is actually a questioning of it, of whether such innocence as he evokes exists. What Emma thinks implies that there is no possibility of a retreat from present difficulties into enclaves of "Englishness," whether they be conceived of as the home or as country life: only by pretending not to notice the violence can one continue to see either domesticity or rural life as an ideal.

Even had she not seen the snake clutching the sheep's belly, Emma would not be content with this version of "Englishness." She had earlier rejected David's appeal to it, saying that she preferred London for "its noise and human beauty" over the country with its "greenery, cows, silences" (18). This preference is the opposite of what Raymond Williams identifies in the English pastoral literary tradition which, he says, invests the country with "an essential isolation and silence and loneliness," viewed as necessary for the survival of "nature and civilization" (CC 131). This usual view of the difference between country and city within "Englishness," the view which Emma's recalls by contrast, is

expressed by E. M. Forster in *Howards End* where he writes that London has "no pulsation of humanity. It lies beyond everything: Nature ... comes nearer to us than do these crowds of men" (116). In Drabble's revision, it is the city which pulses with human life and the country which does not come near Emma.

Emma also rejects the appeal to the "country-house" version of "Englishness" evoked by Wyndham when he takes her to see his aunt's large early eighteenth-century manor house with its gardener's cottage on twelve acres of land situated at Binneford village. Wyndham's nostalgic view of this house is an obvious appeal to the "Englishness" of "the great tradition"--to that "structure of feeling" associated with a Jane Austen-style "country-house England, a class-England," which Williams argues was "re-creat[ed]" by George Eliot in her late fiction and of which, he says, Leavis "is the most distinguished modern exponent" (CC 180-81). Binneford village with its manor house, its cottage and its church on the hill is reminiscent of the "country village" as it appears in the novels of Jane Austen, cited by Q. D. Leavis as illustration of the "English model" for the novel focusing on "a community" which is a "microcosm" of the nation as a whole (313): "[t]he traditional English life of the countryside, one of great house, parsonage, chapel ... and cottage united in a local culture and centring economically on the market-town and spiritually on the cathedral close ..." (321). The point Drabble makes, however, is that such a village is far removed from the experience of a majority of English people who live in more densely populated areas. "Where on earth is this?" Emma asks when Wyndham stops the car, as if he had transported her to somewhere foreign, so that when he answers, "This is a village" (113), it is as if he were exhibiting an anthropological find and one is struck by the cultural differences between generations (Wyndham is much older than Emma), between past and present, between city and country. As she stands by the River Wye which runs at the bottom of the garden, Emma begins to "feel cold, and then to feel

frightened," and she explains:

There was nothing within reach that I understood. Here I was in the midst of all that greenery that I had mocked at with my friends in London, and I was unnerved by it. It seemed more real than London, the river and the trees and the grass, so much profusion, so much of everything, and not a human being in reach, not a person to watch it. (114-15)

What impresses Emma is not the great house and the values it once stood for but the scenery, in response to which she feels something akin to the awe of the Wordsworthian sublime; however, when Wyndham asks if she does not "like it better" than London, she says, "Not really. I think I like London better. I feel out of place here" (115).

Emma is not really interested in hearing about Wyndham's pleasant privileged childhood there or in hearing what the great house standing "after the war" meant to him. Even in the cultivated part of the garden, she finds "a wet and rotten apple" lying where it had fallen a year ago. For her it is indicative of "the course of nature" rather than of human habitation and civilization: "the other thing, ... the picking and the eating and the selling, was a much later development," she says (115). For Emma, then, the "excursion" was a journey in time as well as in place, and she had no desire to stay in the past. Such houses and villages are not for her, as they are for proponents of "Englishness," microcosms of a superior national culture in imminent danger of being lost (this house and land is up for sale), but rather the remains of a past of which she and many others have had no first-hand experience.

The other point Drabble makes, and this is a point made also by Williams in *The Country and the City*, is that however appealing it may be, the manor house on acres of land is indefensible in a small country with a large population. It is clear from *A Writer's Britain* and from interviews that Drabble approves of Emma's response, that she, too, is torn between appreciation of natural beauty and of privacy, on the one hand, and awareness that it is available only to a privileged few, on the other. She told Hannay,

... there are far too many people [in modern Britain] to preserve the kind of beauties that we think of as being typically English .... I suppose I, like

everyone, feel sad when something I've particularly liked disappears. But I am also very perplexed by the idea that I quite often like something simply because no one else is there, and it's secret, private, beautiful because it's unknown. How can one justify feeling like that when everyone else has got to live in ugly places and high density? (134)

It is Drabble's view that one cannot justify the preservation of unpeopled spaces of the past in a country presently experiencing housing problems.

It is also her view that the rural town or village is just as likely to be made up of factions as not, another view which she shares with Williams (CC 166). Emma finds no evidence of the Leavisite "organic community" in the small town of Hereford. Early in her year there she had taken an amused look at the absurd "guerrilla warfare" between the town dignitaries and the actors at the civic reception held for the company by the town: "two whole separate worlds crowded into one room and not touching at any point" (44;46). Reflecting on this division later as she wanders aimlessly about the town, she thinks, "And the town itself, which seemed to outsiders to be a unit, was made up of pockets of people, all as unrelated to each other as actors to farmers, or as farmers to Teds in blue jeans. All that connected people was buying and selling." She sees the cathedral, the theatre, the market and so forth as "all little disconnected cells," each with its own "laws, and habits, and a prescribed language, and prescribed jokes" and she thinks that she "perhaps hate[s] the place so much because of its so fully occupied and classified air. Unlike London, it left no room for the placeless ..." (121). There is clearly no sign here of "the consistency of English traditions" or of the "interpenetrated society" that Q. D. Leavis claimed for England as opposed to the "mutually incomprehensible" and "hostile traditions of religion, government or language" in "many European countries," suffering also from "the stratified class structure of the Continent" (320-21).

What, then, are we to make of Emma's comment that it may have been only "the myth of his greatness" that made her respond to Wyndham Farrar's name "with the respect

that [she] usually reserve[s] for those of more solid achievement, for Angus Wilson, for Dr. Leavis, and those others who have really done real things" (48). The comment is usually taken as evidence of Drabble's great respect for Leavis, but it seems to me odd that Leavis should be coupled with Wilson as an example of people "who have really done *real* things" (my emphasis) when Wilson would later be dismissed by Q. D. Leavis as writing novels that "deal with *artificial* worlds, inhabited by *cardboard* characters whose behaviour is arbitrary" (324; my emphasis). Balancing as it does the high seriousness of Leavis against the provocativeness of Wilson, Emma's is an equivocal statement reflecting the tension in Drabble's writing between her awareness of the impact of Leavisite criticism, particularly of Leavis's *The Great Tradition*, on English literary criticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, her impulse to revise it so that it admits the possibility of writers like Angus Wilson and herself, both of whom try out patterns within the English novel that are opposed to Leavisite "Englishness."

### *The Millstone*

*The Millstone*, Drabble's third novel, has lent itself to extremes of interpretation, ranging from Virginia K. Beards's view that "Rosamund successfully defines herself in relation to values other than the male-superiority/female-dependency ones of patriarchy" to Ellen Cronan Rose's view that, contrary to what Beards says, "Rosamund is no feminist heroine" and "does not define herself in relation to non-patriarchal values," that "[l]ike the fathers, she is 'successful' because she puts mind over matter" (Rose, *The Novels* 21). What Rose points to is the fact that Rosamund accepts and reinscribes values of a hierarchical "Englishness" even as she escapes definition in terms of female dependency.

Unlike Sarah who gave up the idea of becoming a don of English literature because she would have had to suppress her sexuality, Rosamund is so bent on becoming a don



that she has repressed hers to the extent that she fears "the very idea of sex" (17) and goes to great lengths to avoid it, even devising a "system" of dating two men at the same time and allowing each to think she is sleeping with the other in order to avoid sleeping with either (19). When she finds that she is pregnant after her only sexual encounter (with a third man) she thinks, "it would serve me right ... for having been born a woman in the first place. I couldn't pretend that I wasn't a woman, could I, however much I might try from day to day to avoid the issue?" (16) Joanne Creighton reads this as an example of the way Rosamund's attitude has been influenced by her mother who, Rosamund says, "was a great feminist" and "brought [her] up to be equal," who "made there to be no question, no difference" (*M* 28-29). I agree with Creighton that, "[w]hile such an upbringing undoubtedly spurs Rosamund's admirable career interests, 'to be equal' seems to her mind to necessitate a denial of her femaleness as if it were a debility to overcome" (*MD* 52).

This raises the question of the effect of "Englishness" on the British feminist movement of the late sixties. Rosamund's attitude supports Alison Light's argument that insofar as the movement was an attempt by middle-class women to gain the right to represent England in its institutions, it was also a taking on of "masculine" attitudes towards the "feminine" and the alienation of these women from women of the lower classes to whom were attributed the "feminine" qualities that ambitious middle-class women repressed or denied in themselves (210-11; 215). Drabble seems to me to be quite aware of this danger and to confront it in this novel. Rosamund, with her revealing name, is one of Drabble's "English" heroines, heir to "a well-established, traditional English morality" (145) and "at heart a Victorian" (18). At the same time, she is a modern young woman with the ambition to be an English don. Oddly enough, her Victorian morality and the brand of feminism passed on to her by her mother do not conflict as one might expect they

would: both distrust female sexuality and both elevate that which used to be deemed "masculine" over that which used to be deemed "feminine" in a hierarchical structure of values.

Rosamund clearly thinks in terms of these dualities. As Patricia Waugh points out, "[s]he idealizes rationality as an essentially male mode and ... dissociate[s] herself from what she perceives to be the weaker, female emotionality" (129). She is quick to clear up any misconceptions the reader may have about her becoming "feminine" as a result of deciding to give birth to the child: "I do not wish to suggest, as perhaps I seem to be suggesting, that the irrational was taking its famed feminine grip upon me. My Elizabethan poets did not begin to pale in insignificance with the thought of buying nappies" (68). While we sympathize with Rosamund's determination not to allow the child she carries to dominate her thinking and interfere with her career interests, we may be uneasy about the superior mocking attitude she takes towards the "irrational" and the "feminine" and wonder if she is not made to mock herself when she speaks fondly of the subjects of her Ph. D. research as if they were her first children and not to be displaced in her affections by the birth of another child. There is clearly a correspondence between Rosamund and the "Rosamund character" in the novel her flatmate Lydia is writing. Lydia writes that the character is living in "the academic ivory tower," her "obsession" with her research being "an escape route, an attempt to evade the personal crises of her life and the realities of life in general" (94). As Rosamund herself will come to realize, the traditional English morality she has inherited from her parents involves just such an evasion or "avoidance."

Due to her pregnancy, Rosamund is temporarily forced out of her privileged retreat and into contact with people not of her class or social standing. The close contact makes her recognize the realities of life for the underprivileged and it makes her aware of her own privileged position. When (because she is short of money) she chooses to go to "a surgery

so evidently seedy that it could not exist but on the National Health," she is made aware of "a population whose existence [she] had hardly noticed," including "foreigners," "old people," "depressed and oppressed" mothers "uniformly worn out," and she wonders "where all the others had gone," the others being the privileged and well-dressed people she "had been used to seeing on [her] home ground." When she answers herself that they are "[s]itting in Harley Street, no doubt, just along the road," readers are forced, as Rosamund is, to confront the social inequality that exists side by side within "Englishness" (37-38).

Rosamund's initial response to this formerly unacknowledged group is to try to maintain her sense of distance from them, to not identify with them. Of the women at the Ante-Natal Clinic she says,

And there we all were, and it struck me that I felt nothing in common with any of these people, that I disliked the look of them, that I felt a stranger and a foreigner there .... (58)

Doubly privileged by being born into the upper middle class and by being educated, Rosamund fears contact with "all those bloated human people" with whom she would rather not have to admit being kin (59). Her use of the word "bloated" to describe the pregnant women from the lower classes is telling. The word connotes an overabundance or an overindulgence and suggests that Rosamund sees these women as incontinent, as representing an excess of the female sexuality she has tried to deny in herself.

At the same time, she is becoming aware of herself as "human" and that--contrary to what she, a Cambridge graduate in English literature, may have imbibed from Dr. Leavis--means coming up against human limits, particularly the limits of "free will." In her comments on the women at the clinic, Rosamund goes on to say, and yet I was one of them, I was like that too, I was trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life, and I was going to have to learn to live inside it. (58)

Rosamund makes the point clearly when she says of her unwanted, unplanned, unexpected and near-miraculous pregnancy,

Really, it was a question of free will; up to that point in my life I had always had the illusion at least of choice, and now for the first time I became aware of the operation of forces not totally explicable, and not therefore necessarily blinder, smaller, less kind or more ignorant than myself. (67)

Here again Drabble challenges the Leavisite claim for "Englishness" as the effective operation of "human intelligence, choice and will" on human life and history. What Rosamund says questions the "spiritual autonomy" Leavis attributed to individuals ("Literature and Society," *CP* 184) since the forces she speaks of exist, if they exist, outside human consciousness and understanding, "totally removed from ... the exercise of free will" (67).

Other determinants affecting Rosamund's choice to have and rear the illegitimate child herself rather than give it up for adoption are material. Rosamund knows that it is her class and social status which allows her to choose with impunity:

And here I must make it clear that had I not been who I am, and born and reared as I was, I would probably never have dared: I only thought I could get away with it, to put it briefly, because those ambulance men collected me from a good address [her parents' posh flat] and not from a bedsitter in Tottenham or from a basement in ever-weeping Paddington. So, in a way, I was cashing in on the foibles of a society which I have always distrusted; by pretending to be above its structures, I was merely turning its anomalies to my own use. (111-12)

Rosamund's situation is not presented as a new pattern that could be followed by all Englishwomen. Only because she is privileged by her class and education can she make the choice she does without endangering the child's "social position" and bringing disgrace upon herself (111). Like Sarah and Louise in *A Summer Bird-Cage*, Rosamund does not get beyond making tradition mock itself in support of the irregularity of her own behaviour. She does nothing to change either the hierarchical system of values or the hierarchical class structure of "Englishness." Rather, as she points out, she takes advantage of the existing

inequalities and thereby contributes to the continuation of a social organization in which she has never placed any trust.

The persistence of class-consciousness and class barriers in England is brought into focus a number of times in this novel, notably in episodes involving children. The first incident is the one Rosamund remembers as "a milestone of some kind" from her own childhood when she and her sister Beatrice happily fished in the park with two "nice boys" not knowing that the boys were from the lower classes. Although the boys neither attacked them (as Rosamund and Beatrice feared) nor showed the "contempt" for them that the girls thought they deserved, Rosamund says she knew they would not see the boys again once the class differences had been revealed: "An hour like that in a lifetime is quite as much as one can expect," she says (86-87). The incident is significant in making Rosamund aware of her privileged position by giving her "evidence of the way that others lived." Until that time, Rosamund's upbringing by "labour-voting parents" who "grumbled incessantly but ... did not go without" had "made [her] believe in the poor without being of them" (84). Seeing the young boys eagerly eat the crusts the girls had been given to feed the "fat and overfed" ducks, Rosamund is made aware that there are people who do have to go without and that, by comparison, she is "rich" (86).

The second incident focuses on the way Beatrice, now married with children of her own, treats the young "daughter of one of the menials" at the research station where her scientist husband works. Beatrice drives the girl away from the gate and says she cannot allow her own children to play with her because of her "accent" and the "silly, horrid childish vulgar words" she teaches them. Rosamund, who witnesses the incident and is critical of her sister's actions and attitude, is left with recurring thoughts of the child "square and yelling" and of "what a pity it is that resentments should breed so near the cradle, that people should so have had it from birth" (90). Both incidents serve to remind

readers of the class-consciousness which separates English people from each other and privileges one group over another. At the same time, they remind us of middle-class insecurity. The ultimate reason Beatrice gives for not allowing her children to play with the little girl is that they would be ostracized by the children of the other middle-class professionals at the station because "the other parents [would]n't put up with it" even if Beatrice did (89). The implication is that class-consciousness is so entrenched in English society as to be almost unassailable by individual women.

This point is made starkly by the woman Rosamund meets at the hospital when visiting her child Octavia who has undergone a heart operation. Rosamund and this woman are the only mothers allowed to visit their babies, Rosamund because she had, uncharacteristically, a fit of hysterics and the woman because she got her husband to use his influence at the hospital. Rosamund admires the woman for her willingness to assert herself over and over again in aid of her children. The "traditional English morality" of self-denial or self-restraint would require pretending that pain and misery do not exist or that one has the moral fortitude to bear it in silence for the sake of "other people's feelings." The woman tells Rosamund that she "do[esn't] care who sees [she] cares" because she is "fed up" and "tired of pretending" (139).

This woman's assertiveness might have translated into more than the "cool human sympathy" with which, we are told, she treats others; it might have been used to help "all the others" who are not in a position to assert themselves (140); but the struggle just to see that her own children survive has been such as to "mould and pin and clamp" the woman's "nature" so that it is now "warped" in that direction (139). When Rosamund asks whether she worries about those others who are "without money," "without influence" and "who would not dare to have hysterics," the woman answers that she used to worry about them at first but that she became indifferent to them when she realized that her own children

"wouldn't survive" unless she put them first and [let] the rest ... look after themselves" (140).

Rosamund accepts this woman's views, which she thinks are "put forward as a result of sad necessity" (141), but Drabble does not approve of them. In an interview with Valerie Grosvenor Myer, Drabble said the novel did not show Rosamund changing in the way that she had intended her to change:

I intended that book to show her changing from this hard, cold, self-involved person into a loving, tender, outgoing person. But, in fact, I haven't done it, because she's just the same at the end as she was at the beginning. (16)

Later in the same interview she described Rosamund as "a typical frigid English Miss" (18). Rosamund herself recognizes at the end, when she has let the opportunity pass to tell George that Octavia is his child as well as hers, that "love [of the child] had isolated [her] more securely than fear, habit or indifference" (172). As Creighton says, Rosamund "desires to establish with Octavia a cosy little world of two" (*MD* 54). For Rosamund, then, the mother-child relationship places on her a responsibility for her child's welfare which excuses her retreat from involvement in the pain of others.

Rosamund seems caught in the selfishness that she recognized and criticized in the case of her parents when they, too, sidestepped social responsibility on the "suffering and sacrificial" bases of parental concern. Their attitude when they allow Rosamund to have their flat (which they could have let "for a lot of money" while they were away) is "not pure kindness, but partly at least a selfish abstinence from guilt," according to Rosamund (9). The same may be true of their acceptance of the invitation to go to Africa for a couple of years. They are among the many people in Britain who, Drabble says, "do feel guilt, undoubtedly, and a desire to make restitution" for Britain's "past part in colonial disasters," but she says that while she "rather admire[s]" such people, she also thinks it is sometimes

"safer" for people to "go abroad and work a couple of years and feel tremendously virtuous and come back" than it would be for them to try to work on aid projects in England (Interview with Hannay 135). Certainly Rosamund has now seen enough of the poor and underprivileged in England to make her question whether her father (a professor of Economics) or the England he represents is "on the right track" (9).

She also questions "whether or not they were right" to decide to go on to India and stay another year when they learned about her having a child (144). She believes they did so because "[t]hey did not want to cause [her] or themselves pain, embarrassment, or even mere inconvenience by their return ..." (144), and they wanted her to know this. The effect upon Rosamund is to make her question the morality of their actions:

Such tact, such withdrawal, such avoidance. Such fear of causing pain, such willingness to receive and take pains. It is a morality, all right, a well-established, traditional English morality, moreover it is my morality whether I like it or not. But there are things in me that cannot take it, and when they have to assert themselves the result is violence, screaming, ugliness, and Lord knows what yet to come. (145)

By their withdrawal and avoidance "they think that they can remain innocent," Rosamund says, but "[f]rom another point of view, a more warm and fleshly point, they are perhaps as dangerous and cruel as that father in *Washington Square*" (145).<sup>4</sup> It may be that the Staceys, who want their daughter to know that they have her comfort and convenience at heart, are engaged once again in "a selfish abstinence from guilt," maintaining their negative innocence and virtue by not becoming actively involved in their daughter's now somewhat messy life.

Earlier in the novel Rosamund said, "Sometimes I wonder whether it is not my parents who are to blame, totally to blame, for my inability to see anything in human terms of like and dislike, love and hate: but only in terms of justice, guilt and innocence" (84). Except in her relationship with her child whose "uncritical love ... left [her] free to bestow



love" (115), Rosamund still suffers from this inability at the end. The novel ends on a renunciation scene in which neither Rosamund nor George can get beyond the reticence of "Englishness," beyond the "civilized communication" (170) which allows them to mask behind teasing banter what George calls "moments of weakness" when they would reach out to each other (171). True to her traditional English morality, Rosamund mocks her desire for George even to herself:

I felt myself on the verge of tears and noise, and I held hard onto the arms of my chair to prevent myself from throwing myself on my knees in front of him, to beseech from him his affection, his tolerance, his pity, anything that would keep him there with me, and save me from being so much alone with my income tax forms, from lacking him so much. Words kept forming inside my head, into phrases like I love you George. Don't leave me, George. (170)

By turning George into a mere accountant who might straighten out the "mess" of her income tax, Rosamund ironically belittles her emotions and distances herself from them as "Englishness" would have her do, but there is a further irony in the scene since if the "passion" (172) is made to seem ridiculous, so is the heroic restraint Rosamund claims to exercise in giving it up. Rosamund herself knows that her restraint results from force of habit: she had "restrained" herself, "had endured and survived and spared him so much sorrow" for so long that she cannot now change the pattern and tell George that she cares (169). Like her parents, Rosamund wants to spare others and herself any "embarrassment, or even mere inconvenience" and so, like them, she continues to practice the "withdrawal" and "avoidance" demanded by their "traditional English morality."

We leave Rosamund with her Ph. D. thesis finished and at the publishers and with other work in hand, looking forward to both the "good job" she has been offered "at one of the most attractive new universities" (155) and to motherhood. "What more could anyone want?" George asks (171). When Rosamund answers obliquely that "some people might want a nice husband too," George tells her she "can't have everything" and we are

reminded of what Sarah said in *A Summer Bird-Cage* about a woman not being able to be both "sexy" and a "don." Unlike Sarah, who sacrificed her desire to be a don to the potential expression of her sexuality, Rosamund sacrifices the expression of her sexuality to that well-established English morality of self-denial and self-restraint which an English don would be expected to uphold.

### *Jerusalem the Golden*

*Jerusalem the Golden*, Drabble's fourth novel, directly challenges the notion that "Englishness" is a unity of culture and that "tradition" is a timeless arbiter of essential human values. In her biography of Arnold Bennett, Drabble said that he influenced her greatly in the writing of this novel. By writing about the same region and about the same desire to escape from its repressive culture as Bennett did, Drabble was challenging the notion that regional cultures are variations on a unified national culture, as expressed in a national literature. She has said of the novel,

It's about being culturally deprived and it's also about the particular kind of dour northern life that I was brought up on .... I still have this feeling that something in me was permanently squashed by that environment and those attitudes. (Interview with Myer 14)

We are made aware of the harshness and narrowness of life in a northern town through Clara Maugham who is determined to escape it. To Clara, "Northam [is] ... the very image of unfertile ground," (27) the very opposite, then, of the "organic community" the Leavises saw celebrated in the "English" tradition, and yet it is a town governed by "the weight of tradition" (30). Northam tradition scorns the very things that Clara thinks make life worth living: beauty, pleasure, displays of emotion of any kind—all are condemned as "insincere" (29). Mrs. Maugham, Clara's mother, represents the rigid and severe moral attitudes of the town: "her dislike of the insincere ran so deep that she would rather publicly

disclaim all grief for her dead husband than be accused of insincerity" (29). In her biography of Bennett, Drabble called this "hypocrisy" and, in allusion to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "double-thinking" (AB 277). Even as a child Clara knew that there was something wrong with this attitude and at her father's funeral, she "burst suddenly into a loud hysterical weeping ... for the meanness and the lack of love, and for the fear that she would die in so ugly a hole, and so unloved" (28). At home after the funeral, she abhorred the family's determination not to show any emotion. She "had a vision of some other world where violent emotion could be a thing of beauty" by contrast with the non-visionary world represented in the deliberately stone-like behaviour of her mother and aunts who deny any human warmth: "they sat there like stones, and their one aim was to sit there like stones, so that no one could tell if they cared or did not care, so that there should be no difference between caring and not caring" (29). Clara refers to this show of reticence as "domestic duplicity" and years later she will think of Northam as a "world where brutality presented itself as sincerity" (197). Clara's vision of some other world indicates "her lonely belief that there was more than one way of life in England" (8), a belief which challenges the notion that there is an essential "Englishness" which is available to, and right for, all who live in England.

Before receiving vindication of this belief in the form of a State Scholarship Allowance (8) which will let her escape to London, Clara finds refuge in "[t]he world of the figurative" (32). What is particularly interesting is that like other early heroines in Drabble's novels, Clara makes the traditional work for her against itself: the hymn "Jerusalem the Golden" conjures up for her "not the pearly gates and crystal walls and golden towers of some heavenly city, but some truly terrestrial paradise where beautiful people in beautiful houses spoke of beautiful things" (32), and while the books she read as a child "preached the lessons of moderation, cleanliness, simplicity, self-denial and

humility" (33), Clara manages to see in them something of "moral ambivalence," especially in those fables contained in *The Golden Windows*. Her attraction to the title story of this collection is sometimes taken to mean that Drabble supports its intended moral and believes that home and childhood are the golden worlds the characters seek (see especially Stovel, "MD's Golden Vision" 8), but, as Drabble has Clara explain, the story appealed to her *despite* its intended moral and because "it carried with it inseparably, the real sadness of the fading windows and the fact that those within the house could never see them shine" (34): that is, it is only from the outside that the windows seem "all of gold" and then it is "merely a reflection of the sun" having nothing to do with what is contained or, more likely, hidden inside the house (34). Clara's own house appears to her to be part of a "whole dazzling ... smoky lay-out" when seen from a distance but Clara knows of the "small impossibilities" within (40), of the Maughams' "domestic life" being the locus of emotional deprivation (56), of the house being filled with "family bitterness and domestic conflict" (117).

In the collection of stories, Clara likes best the one called "The Two Weeds" which hints of the possibility of a view of life like Clara's own, which seeks "beauty and extravagance and pleasure," as opposed to the traditional Northam view of life which sets its sights on "mere survival." "Incredibly enough," Clara thinks, this story seemed to be open-ended: "it seemed to end with a choice" between the tall beautiful weed which "dies content" after leading a short but colourful and glorious life and the low brown weed which lives till the next year because it "conserved its energy" and led an inconspicuous, seemingly humble, life (34). Clara is both shocked and profoundly satisfied on "finding the new contained and expressed in the framework and terms of the old." "In such a context, between such gilt-lettered cloth-bound boards," she gloats, "the concession was nothing less than munificent" (35). By reading traditional texts against the grain, Clara—like Drabble writing parodies of the Leavisite "English" novel—revises them so that

they are made to admit values opposed to the traditionally correct ones they mean to support.

Clara will do just about anything to avoid becoming like her mother who is another early version of the ghosts that haunt "Englishness," a woman embittered by the self-sacrifice she has made to marriage and domesticity. Not until close to the end of the novel does Clara fully recognize that her mother too suffered from deprivation and learned to maintain her characteristic "stony frontage" as a defence against disappointment. The pictures of her mother and the notebooks belonging to her that Clara finds in her mother's dresser when her mother is near death tell a story of disappointed hopes for a life filled with beauty and vitality. The early pictures of her mother alone, aged twenty, show her "smiling bravely, gaily, a smile radiant with hope and intimacy" and are in stark contrast to the later pictures, particularly the wedding photographs, showing her "rigid misery." The notebooks from "before her mother's marriage, before the end of her hopes," containing those hopes expressed in prose and in verse, are evidence "of so much deception, of so much disappointment, of a life eked and spent and drawn and withered away" (195-196). As Lee R. Edwards points out, when she is "[a]wakened to the knowledge that her mother once had dreams and aspirations of her own, Clara is also awakened to the terror of waste, the possibilities of uncertainty and loss" (332).

At an earlier point, Clara did become aware that her intelligence which is "so grudgingly deprecated" in Northam, "making her an object of ridicule and contempt" there, is shared by her mother, the difference being that her mother had "sourly disowned" hers in order to fit in: "She had merely crushed and deformed and dissembled what gifts she had once had in deference to what? To a way of life perhaps, to a town, to a suburb of a town in the North of England" (8). The significance of the narrowing of the authority to which Mrs. Maugham pays respect by sacrificing her gifts becomes clear when we realize that

Clara is describing "tradition" in ever narrowing terms. It is in deference to a tradition which scorns intelligence in women that Mrs. Maugham has dissembled hers. Reduced to "a suburb in a town in the North of England," this particular "way of life" seems to have little authority. When it is further reduced to the "self-erected authority" and the "many foibles, ... many fixed and rigid rules" of the "colossally inconsistent" Mrs. Maugham herself (43), "tradition" seems ludicrous: witness the slop basin laid on the table every meal time "not ... for its decorative value" (Mrs. Maugham professes herself to be against such "extravagance"), "nor for the fact that it is often used" (for even Mrs. Maugham is "not unaware that it was something of an anachronism"), but because it can represent "tradition." To Clara, it was "an indictment of a way of life" with its "joyless name," and "she hated to see an eccentricity erected into a symbol of the traditionally correct" (44-45). When an eccentricity can be erected into a symbol of the traditionally correct, where is the authority for "tradition"? As in her focus on regional differences, so in her focus on the absence of authority for the traditionally correct, Drabble is questioning what "Englishness" is and making it difficult to appeal to it as an authority for unchanging values.

The "aristocratic" world of the Denhams that Clara eventually finds in London is a sharp contrast to her childhood world. As Clara perceives it portrayed in the Denham house with its quantities of continental gilt and gold and ornate antique pieces and in the family album, "[i]t was a small rich world, a world of endless celebration and fame .... Advantages blossomed ... and it seemed at moments as though love (and why not?) might be a forced plant, an unnatural flower that could not grow in thinner soil" (111). Used only to "family bitterness and domestic conflict," Clara does not quite know what to make of the open displays of mutual affection in the Denham family, displays encouraged by the mother. Struck in particular by the demonstrative sisterly affection of Clelia and her younger sister, Clara thinks that the people of Northam "would have considered such

affection unnatural, and probably perverted, if not wholly insincere, and there was something in herself that could not help but suspect it" and yet, she is aware, "displays of passion had always compelled her." As a precedent she thinks of "the passionate and erotic relationship" of the sisters described in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (117).

*Jerusalem the Golden* is in part about Clara's attraction to "the eternal devious possibilities of the human passions" (121) in a direct challenge to a traditional English morality which would oppose and seek to curb or control them. Clara "liked areas of doubt" such as homosexuality (121) because they suggested alternatives to marriage and "Domesticity [which] appalled her" (36). When her friendship with Clelia whom she resembles blossoms into an adulterous affair with Clelia's brother Gabriel, Clara is the more pleased for the cloudy aura of lesbianism and incest that surrounds it. When Gabriel rings her at her mother's house (the Biblical echoes seem intentionally provocative), Clara feels "safe and warm once more, back at home in the realm of human treachery and love and infidelity" (203) and the novel ends with Clara looking forward to an earthly paradise: all of it running into her head, all the years of future tender intrigue, a tender blurred world where Clelia and Gabriel and she herself in shifting and ideal conjunctions met and drifted and met once more like the constellations in the heavens: a bright and peopled world where there was no ending, no parting, but an eternal vast incessant rearrangement .... (205-06) From her own point of view, Clara has been successful in breaking out of a traditional pattern that would have seen her bound and fixed in the "domestic duplicity" of Northam with no outlet for "her friendly spirit" or the "affection in her" (55), a pattern of deprivation which would have "managed to sour [her] nature considerably" as it has that of her sister-in-law Katie, "after two children and the passage of time, and marriage to Alan" (124-25).

The question, however, is whether Clara has managed to escape "Englishness" and

the answer seems to be negative. In the interview with Nancy Hardin, Drabble indicates that she sympathizes with Clara's desire to escape the values of her parents and with her search for a new pattern, saying that she had the same problem, but she has doubts about the pattern Clara finds:

... One has to escape from one's own family and find substitute families or substitute patterns of living ... One had to find some image of liveliness or colour or love that was different from what one had been brought up on .... I certainly do--did, I think--look for other mother figures .... What one is looking for is just patterns of living in other people. Clara Maugham is certainly looking for another pattern of life that she can go into, and in the book I have ambivalent feelings myself about whether she's found a good one. Clearly not. She's found something that suits her. She's going to turn into something fearsome, I think. I rather dread her future. (278)

Citing this authorial ambivalence, one critic has argued that Drabble thoroughly disapproves of Clara as a "moral failure," for rejecting the "revelation" that "the true golden realm lies not in future goals, but in one's past roots, in the home which one has left behind and returns to with a shock of recognition." In support of this reading the critic says, "In her discussion of "The Golden Age" in *A Writer's Britain*, Drabble makes it clear that she believes the golden realm lies in the past" (Stovel, Schmidt 8-9). What Drabble makes clear in the last section of *A Writer's Britain*, and in novel after novel, however, is that she does not believe that there ever was such an age. Far from being like those contemporary "fictional or factual memoirs" which, she says in *A Writer's Britain*, "tend to look back on childhood as a golden age" (249), Drabble's writing seeks to reveal the class and gender inequalities covered up by such accounts.

As a matter of fact it is what she elsewhere calls this "golden age thinking" (Interview with Preussner 564-65) that causes Drabble to question whether Clara has found in the Denham family a "new" pattern that could serve for others or merely an "old" pattern which suits her better than the one into which she was born. Drabble said of Clara in the Rosencwajg interview that "she's an elitist at heart" (338), and in the novel she makes it



clear not only that the childhood world of the Denhams that attracts Clara "was gone and past sharing" but also that it was "a small rich world" which paid no attention to the misery and suffering in the larger world outside (111). Phillipa Denham, Gabriel's wife, presented through Gabriel's point of view as a "neurotic" with "a social conscience" (142), once told him of the cause of her debilitating neurosis: "that she could not bear to have more of anything than anyone in the world and that misery seemed to her to be a duty" (143). It is through Phillipa that we are given glimpses of the world of the "dispossessed" and of the "cold facts of poverty" which the Denhams pretend do not exist: there is the lonely Indian student who sees in Phillipa a fellow-sufferer and follows her from the underground to the corner of Regent Street where he tells her "of his loneliness ... and of the tediousness of his life, and its hardships, and its solitary endurance" (146) and there is the old couple who own the chemist shop and who need the money the shop could bring in but who are too feeble to keep it open (158). It is the Denham family's disregard for the misery and suffering of others that makes Phillipa criticize their incestuous love of each other. When Clara, thinking of the contrast with her own family, comments admiringly that the Denham family "always seems to be rife with incest," Gabriel says, "That's what Phillipa says ...; she doesn't like it; she thinks we are all self-indulgent, self-erected saints, that we do it all ourselves, that this marvellous world we think we live in is just an image that we impose upon the rest. She hates it, she calls it vanity." (170)

Through the Denham family Drabble makes a three-pronged attack on "Englishness": first, she questions the prevailing nostalgia for an England that is "gone and past sharing"; second, she pinpoints divisions between rich and poor within England; and, third, she uses the contrasts in culture to illustrate the difficulty of freeing oneself from tradition and thinking in new ways. Even Gabriel, who fails to understand Phillipa's concern for outsiders, knows that the family home is a "golden nest" which does nothing to

prepare family members for the culture shock in store for them should they venture out of it: "Look at Amelia," he tells Clara, "she went mad through the shock of waking up in the world outside, out of the golden nest ..." (170). The shock Amelia suffered is balanced by the disorientation Clara feels as she moves in the opposite direction. On her first visit to the Denhams,

Clara felt as she felt at the end of some long and erudite lecture in a foreign tongue; her mind would no longer pay attention. Whole concepts, whole reorganizations of thought swam drunkenly through her head, and lurched and revolved. (106)

Although Clara does gradually manage to accustom herself to the cultural world of the Denhams, her recurring bouts of stomach upset and vomiting suggest that she does not feel at ease in it (106; 107).

Clara has been affected by her upbringing to such an extent that even her attempts to escape its narrow repressions trap her in its emotional void. Emotionally deprived as a child, Clara "grew by will and by strain" (26), all of her creative energy focused on her obsession with escape. Clara herself sums up the effect of this obsession:

"I am all nerve, I am hard, there is no love in me, I am too full of will to love" ... "Oh lovely Gabriel, I love you, I love you," [she said] and lay upon him and kissed him, her fear and her need combined. Because love, desperately, eluded her; she had not been taught to love, she had lacked those expensive, private lessons. (165)

Determined to find some place which "support[s] beauty and extravagance and pleasure at the expense of mere survival" (34), Clara has first to survive and that means never being able to relax her guard: even after two years in London "[s]he was so constantly braced, her will so stiff from desire, that she could not sleep at nights" for fear "she might lose her determination" and "wake up alone in her narrow bed .... where for so many years she had lain and dreamed her subversive dreams" (27). Of her intelligence, we are told, Clara "never learned to take a simple pleasure in her own abilities; they remained for her a means

and not an end, a bargaining power rather than a blessing" (9). The same applies to her body which she uses to attract first boys and later men who can help her to escape and connect with "other worlds" (53). Early on she "drew the appropriate moral—the possession of big breasts, like the possession of a tendency to acquire good examination results, implies power" in places outside Northam (46) and she uses them coolly: grateful to Walter Ash for giving her a glimpse of another society, she "allow[s] him to undo her brassiere strap without a word of protest" (55), even though she is not attracted to him and cannot respond to him (53). Even Gabriel who is everything she has ever wanted in a man—good-looking, well-bred, educated and charming—is only "a means of self-advancement" for Clara (204).

What, then, has Clara achieved? Perhaps nothing more than a pattern of deferral of pleasure, of struggling not to end up back in Northam. The terrestrial "Jerusalem the Golden" that Clara imagined seems to be there for the taking in the Denhams' "golden" world since, as Drabble pointed out, that world "suits" Clara who is attracted rather than repelled by its exclusiveness, and yet Clara cannot take a simple pleasure in it. Even in the relationship with Gabriel she is still so taut with anxiety that she cannot heed the advice of an earlier Drabble heroine and "lose [her]self in joy" to "the pulls of sex and blood" (*SB-C* 71). We may say of Clara what Drabble said of herself, "that something in [her] was permanently squashed by that environment and those attitudes," and in Clara's case it is the ability to actually taste the pleasures of the flesh so long denied. When at the end of her week in Paris with Gabriel, Clara feels liberated from Northam, she uses metaphors which perfectly describe the situation:

And she felt, as she waited [to board the plane], that she had perhaps done to herself what she had been trying for years to do to herself: she had cut herself off forever, and she could drift now, a flower cut off from its root, or a seed perhaps, an airy seed dislodged, she could drift now without fear of settling ever again upon the earth. (189)

Her thoughts suggest that the relationship with Gabriel (which she thinks is over) was a means to an end, a means of freeing herself from the stifling mores of Northam. She is, however, brought back to earth immediately upon her arrival at her flat in London where she is greeted by news of her mother's serious illness for which she feels responsible. Even the knowledge that her mother is dying does not free Clara from the struggle to survive. That "she would survive" is repeated four times in the last two sentences of the novel indicating that Clara is still so obsessed with surviving that she cannot take full pleasure in the present moment.

### *The Waterfall*

Not until *The Waterfall*, the last of her novels of the sixties, does Drabble depict a woman who learns to enjoy the present moment. In order to do so, this woman has, she thinks, to find or invent a "system ... a new meaning," a view of the world or of human nature, opposed to that in which she was born and raised, for that view would neither "admit" nor "encompass" her as she is (46). The distance between Jane Gray, who is revealed as both heroine and narrator/author of the adulterous, quasi-incestuous sexual-love story she is telling, and the "English" heroines and women writers in "the great tradition" is indicated the first time Jane steps into the novel as author and says, "I cannot judge myself, I cannot condemn myself ..." (46). With that statement Jane denies feeling the "personal"/"true moral responsibility" that Q. D. Leavis saw as distinguishing "English" heroines from those of the Continent, and later Jane denies having the "free will" to choose (50) that F. R. Leavis saw as the proof that "a human nature" exists, as illustrated in his "great tradition." In fact what Jane finds herself doing is pleading the case for the unacceptable "other woman" (67) of "Englishness," the one who would, by virtue of her obsessive passion, be considered "sub-human" by Q. D. Leavis's standards, the one

*against* which a Leavisite "English" heroine should define herself and her "Englishness."

But the fact that Jane is in search of "a new meaning, having kicked the old one out" (46), does not mean that she is not still haunted by ghosts of "Englishness," her husband Malcolm being one and James's wife and her cousin Lucy being "that other ghost" causing her to feel guilt despite herself (85) and reminding her of the traditional morality she is defying in her passionate love affair with James. Reminded of that, Jane is reminded also of her parents who had brought her up to believe in it and of the anxieties caused by her inability to either accept or openly reject the values they professed. The anxiety led her to what she thought would be a lifetime of repression and denial of herself, particularly of her sexuality, that part of her which their morality would not admit, and as a result, Jane has felt "split ... or divided" for most of her life. It was not until the birth of her second child that Jane became fully aware of the "division" she "could no longer support." "I think," she says, "I could feel that I was coming together again, that my flesh and mind must meet or die" (104).

The meeting of the flesh and the mind in a sense of identity is not easy for Jane, however, as the division between the "she" and the "I" of the narration reveals. The novel begins in the third person with Jane the writer (the "I" revealed later) at a conscious remove from Jane the passionate woman and heroine (the "she") of the love-story Jane is telling. Having told part of the story in the third person, Jane then switches to first-person narration to analyze it. The fact that she stops to do this indicates that Jane is capable of the self-scrutiny demanded of an "English" heroine and that, although she has already decided not to take moral responsibility for the affair, she is still anxious not to appear to others to be guilty. She continues to switch back and forth for the remainder of the novel, but whereas at first the division is between what the "I" calls "that schizoid third person dialogue" between Jane and James in "that isolated world of pure corrupted love" (130) and

the analytical first-person narrative in "real life ... the outer world" (135), by the end of the novel the "she" and "I" have changed places so that the "I" identifies herself less with the part of herself given to self-scrutiny and more with the passionate "other" she had tried for so long to deny (207).

Jane was born and raised at the centre of a traditional English morality whose roots she traces back to Jane Austen so that her questioning of this morality is also a questioning of the values of "Englishness" which the Leavises located in "the great tradition" of the English novel and which they also traced to Jane Austen. According to F. R. Leavis, Jane Austen "not only makes tradition for those coming after, but ... creates the tradition we see leading down to her" (*GT* 14), so that without her, it seems, there would be no "great tradition." Drabble's Jane is heir to this tradition. Her parents, she says, "came from such genteel middle-class descent that Jane Austen herself could have described their affiliations with ease" (54). Despite her name, however, Drabble's Jane is no Jane Austen and what she proceeds to do is to strip this genteel society of its civilized veneer so that the gentility is revealed as "insincerity" or hypocrisy (55), the apparently charming and gracious manner only a malicious mask. Presented from the point of view of Jane, an insider, Jane's parents are shown to be "obsessed by the notions of class and rank" though they pretend in public to be vehemently opposed to such distinctions, just as they pretend publicly to think "marriage and family warmth ... so important" while viewing each other privately "with a thinly disguised contempt" and practising a "civilized" violence: "devious forms, secret forms, underhand attacks and reprisals, covered malice, discreet inverted insults, painful praise" (57). What Jane says about her parents calls into question the "civilized" values of the English middle-class professional family:

My mother's sister, Lucy's mother, married, rashly, a man in trade, the only one in the family; but she refined him and cultivated him until he was quite at home with his professional relatives, and as capable of verbal malice

and sound and useless principles as they were. (57)

That this also challenges the moral superiority claimed for "Englishness" and "the great tradition" of the English novel is clear when Jane expresses her intense dislike for Jane Austen to whose "desperate wit" and "moral tone" her family's mocking wit and "flippant malice" may, she says, be traced (56-57).

Also traced to Jane Austen is their acute class-consciousness: Jane says that she had always wanted to declass herself and "to deny the distinctions [she] had been reared in, the Jane Austen distinctions of refinement and vulgarity, of good and bad taste" (93). Because even at that time a woman's class still depended on the class of the man she married and because vulgarity and bad taste, which Jane preferred to the bogus refinement and good taste of her own professional middle class, were attributed to the lower classes, Jane sought to marry beneath her class. Believing that the gulf between her and "the workers [she] aspired to admire" was such that she could never find "a working man" to marry her (93-94), Jane married Malcolm whose parents were of the lower middle class and lived in suburbia. Jane says that sometimes she thinks she married into this family "through social masochism" (93). Her marriage to Malcolm is a fairly courageous move given the upper-middle-class anxiety and sense of insecurity she had to overcome: "there are few emotions more ignoble, more contemptible than the terror that seizes such as myself when we drive, quickly, past [the] net curtained windows" of suburbia, Jane says (93). Of course Jane did not expect to become one of "those suburban people" (93). Like Emma before her, Jane expected that she and her husband would together break down class barriers: she thought, she says, that they would meet "in the middle, both in a sense exiled from [their] past, united by [their] isolation, by [their] artistic efforts, by [their] lack of identity with [their] own history" (92).

In the case of Jane's and Malcolm's parents, "the difference in class went down

surprisingly well," Jane says, but only because of "the acute consciousness with which both parties observed [the social gap]" even though the gap was not a large one. Jane's parents did not feel threatened by the Grays who were "so unmistakably ... of the lower middle class" and so "well aware of their good fortune in meeting with such an easy parade of graciousness" that they "did not presume on the acquaintance" (96). In other words, there was no danger that the Grays would attempt to rise and wipe out some of the "false distinction[s]" (94) between the lower and upper middle classes: the Grays "acknowledged that the equality offered to them was not true equality, but some amazingly indistinguishable counterfeit of it, that would not pass for true coin in any other transaction" (96).

Jane notes that a detached observer would think the acute class-consciousness "ludicrous" given the narrowness of this social gap. No less ridiculous is Jane's family's attitude when the gap is wider as it is between them and their "domestic help." Jane remembers one Christmas Eve at Lucy's mother's house when her mother and Lucy's managed to maintain in the face of every probability, a deep amazement at the fact that their char-ladies--treacherous, fickle women, all of them--would not work on Christmas day, and this amazement spread as usual into reminiscences of past betrayals, about char women falling sick on the eve of dinner parties, about butchers failing to deliver vital joints of beef, about gardeners deserting for more lucrative pastures and more tasteless rockeries. (62)

Jane's amazement at their amazement is a fine stroke since it makes attitudes held at the centre of "Englishness" seem odd and downright silly and readers are likely to feel alienated from them as a result. One can see here also the way in which imperialistic patterns can be domesticated: the way in which the working and lower classes are denied subjectivity, or any identity other than that of the servile role they play in the well-run middle-class household, just as "colonials" were denied any identity other than the part they



played in a well-run empire.

It is not just the middle-class professionals who are made to reveal the extent to which maintaining a sense of a superior identity depends on the denial of subjectivity to others. The attitudes towards immigration of Malcolm's lower-middle-class family are held up to scrutiny and shown to be equally ridiculous and equally degrading. The "hostile" attitude of Malcolm's father and aunt toward Asian immigrants, which is at first hidden behind an "overtly sensible line," is exposed as

the aunt, an irritating and very stupid woman, ... eventually started to argue that the immigrants were ruining the health of the country, giving true British people not only smallpox and tuberculosis but also other diseases she did not like to name.

Jane says she "could tell that Malcolm's father agreed with [his sister] in spirit, though he was too finical and logical a man to support her shocking reasoning" (94-95). Drabble's fine touch here is to have Malcolm's usually quiet mother risk a "bird-like frail defence" of the Asian immigrants not by countering the shocking reasoning but by turning it back on the aunt:

with much coughing and self-disparaging swallowing, in a voice so watery one could hardly hear it she finally said, "I don't suppose they much like having smallpox either, you know." And as this remark fell into silence, she bravely followed it up. "All the Eskimos died, you know," she said, "when the white people got to them. They all died of common colds." Silence continued. "The Red Indians, too," she said, gently, almost inaudibly. (95)

The aunt is so far from affording subjectivity to any but the white people mentioned that she "could not make the connection," could not see that if "true British people" were being infected by new immigrants (the aunt's outrageous statement), then it is only what the English did to "true" North Americans when they emigrated.

Jane thinks that there is little if anything to choose between the two English families depicted in the novel and she prefers the Otfords, particularly James's Norwegian mother whose "disreputable" lifestyle and continental "extravagan[ce]" (203) is so much in contrast

to English "[r]esponsibility" (50). It is not just her "voluptuous" beauty and glamorous clothes (53) which Jane, "starved" for "glamour," admires (202) but also her maternal warmth (58). Jane says of her own parents that they "brought [her] up well and conscientiously," doing all that their sense of duty demanded (58); and from this we gather that Jane, like so many of Drabble's heroines, was emotionally starved as a child. It is characteristic of Jane's mother that she is both envious and contemptuous of Mrs. Otford's lavish style and "her gay social whirl" (58). Obsessed as she is by the notion of rank and unable to disprove Mrs. Otford's "claims to distinction" as the daughter of famous parents, Jane's mother can only voice her resentment in whispered family or village gossip sessions. Jane says,

Our family, who had always lived in the country, and expressed, in most circles, deep moral horror at the thought of living in town, were faintly outraged by the idea of [the Otfords'] ménage [in a small house on an expensive street in South Kensington, London]. (53-54)

By contrast, Jane's parents "lived in a large house in a small village," and, according to Jane, they lived in this small narrow Leavisite enclave of Jane Austen-style "Englishness" "in order to appear the better as large fish in a small pond" (58-59).

In this novel and her comments on it Drabble makes her most penetrating critique of the two women writers at the centre of Leavisite claims for "Englishness" as a superior culture. Asked in an interview whether she would repudiate Jane's comments on Jane Austen, Drabble replied:

I don't wholly repudiate them. No, I go along with them. I do think [Austen] is narrow. Still they were comments of a character in a situation; as a critic I wouldn't say it at all, but as a human being I say it. You know, from my situation or from the situation of the character in the book, I feel it very strongly. I think she's a pernicious and terrible influence, Jane Austen, sort of malicious and exclusive and socially unjust, really. The social injustice of which her books reek: people might say that this isn't historically accurate but I don't care about the accuracy. It's the feeling or response, the human response. I couldn't write a literary essay in these terms on Jane Austen, because one has to be fair when one writes

something critical, but as a writer, as a person responding to them I feel this very strongly. (Interview with Firchow 106)

These are harsh words coming from one who was educated in the Leavisite "great tradition," but their harshness is not out of proportion to the situation Drabble refers to here, the situation Jane finds herself in as a result of having been raised in the Jane Austen "tradition." Although Jane's situation eventually "resolve[s] itself into comedy" (233) and although we laugh with her throughout at what she sees as the ridiculous elements of her adulterous affair with James, her situation at the time the affair began was far from humorous. Jane will later deny that she was as hopeless or as helpless as she made herself appear to be at that time (226-27), but her denial will be followed by a reiteration of "certain facts that remain":

It is a fact that I lived alone and lay there alone, that I spoke to no one, that I was unable to confront the sight of a human face. It is a fact that I regarded James as a miracle, and that when he touched me it was as if I had another body, a body different from the one I had known. Perhaps I had always possessed it: but without him, where would it have lived? What shadowy realms would it have inhabited? A body must take on flesh for us to know it. And without James, where would it have been, where would have lived the woman who writes these words? ... but for him, where would I now have been? Alone and mad, perhaps: or reunited with Malcolm, more likely, dragging out his days in endless faint reproach and sick resentment. (228)

These facts reinforce the impression we get of Jane early in the novel where she seems close to becoming one of the ghosts of domesticity that haunt "Englishness."

Jane recalls that almost immediately after her marriage to Malcolm, a guitarist, she "sat there in those dusty rooms [of the large Victorian house] like a ghost, like a shadow" while he practised upstairs or went out to work (99), and the inactivity led to her almost complete withdrawal: "All women are isolated to some extent by marriage and small children," Jane says, "but in my case the tendencies of the situation were fulfilled with grotesque elaboration" (107). She says there were weeks when she hardly spoke to

anyone and she had reached a point where she found it difficult to leave the house even to buy food. Drabble said of her in an interview that at the beginning she is "the dottiest, the nearest to madness of all the [women] characters [in her early novels] .... [S]he has got in such a narrow world that she is more or less unable to face the outside world" (Interview with Hardin 290-91). When Jane did make an effort at social contact, as she did for the sake of her young son Laurie when she took him to the nursery group, she compared herself to the other women who seemed, from what Jane says of them, to be like those "icon[s] of 'Englishness'" described by Light. Jane felt excluded from these dominant English women by virtue of her anxiety and her uncertainty about who she is. By contrast with this "collection of insincerely cheerful middle-class women"--"[p]roper people, the people of the real world [who] seemed to claim their identities so easily, to step into them with their professions, to wear with defiance the uniforms and voices and faces of themselves"-- Jane "felt herself to be nothing, nebulous, shadowy, unidentifiable," to be "flutter[ing] inside borrowed garments," one of the "frail ghosts" that she thinks must haunt each such group of women (140-41).

Jane reaches this state of debilitating social phobia not only because of marriage and children but also because of a lifetime of repression and denial of her sexuality. She repressed herself initially so as not to hurt her parents who claimed, publicly, to believe in the values the Leavises saw embodied in Austen's novels. According to Jane,

They believed, or so they said, ... in a whole host of ... unlikely irreconcilable propositions: in monogamy, in marrying for love, in free will, in the possibility of moderation of the passions, in the virtues of reason and civilization. (50)

Even as a child, Jane was unable to identify herself with those values and had her "own contradictory hallucinatory light" giving her "fitful dark illuminations," but she "tried hard to believe" and failing in that she "pretended to believe." Because she could not, she was

in an almost constant state of fear, fearful that her "distrust was called out by [her] own wickedness" (50) and fearful that her parents would learn of her distrust and "see themselves condemned" (51). Afraid of hurting her parents she felt it was "better to renounce [her]self than them." Also, although she was not able to accept their morality, Jane was yet in search of the "virtue" claimed as its goal: "so what could I do," she asks, "but seek in abnegation, in denial, in renunciation, that elusive quality?" (51-52). Knowing that there are things in her which are opposed to the traditional English morality of her parents, Jane thinks that the only way for her to avoid hurting them is to spend her life repressing herself:

I thought that if I could deny myself enough I would achieve some kind of innocence, despite those intermittent nightmare promptings of my true nature. I thought I could negate myself and wipe myself out. (52)

Her motives for marrying Malcolm were mixed but one was that she thought he would "share this conspiracy" (51) and help her pretend to be like her parents, "[her] life a mockery, a parody of theirs" (50). She saw marriage to Malcolm as an act of self-denial which would free her from the guilt of not being like heroines in "the Jane-Austen tradition." In other words, Jane married Malcolm because she was not sexually attracted to him, because in marrying him she was "denying something" in herself (97). Ironically, when they turn out to be as sexually incompatible as she had hoped, Jane feels weighed down by an increased sense of "failure and guilt" (100). She says she "know[s] now that the fault was partly his," that "having got [her] he did not really want [her]", but at the time she "thought that all the not-wanting ... must be hers" (100). It was not until Malcolm suggested that she might be a lesbian that she began to suspect that he had doubts about his own sexual orientation. While her suspicions are confirmed for her in a stereotypical equation of Malcolm's "delicate" features and liking for "camp" with latent homosexuality (101;105), they are based on the, for her, "pointless and painful" sexual relationship and

on his "slight shrinking from [her] own more desperate attempts" (100-01). She and Malcolm carried on this psychologically damaging relationship for years before it ended with Malcolm hitting her "hard across the face" and beating her head against the bedroom wall (111), capping the domestic violence depicted in these early novels.

Jane did not become fully conscious of how important her sexuality was to her until James told her she was beautiful:

She shook her head and smiled incredulously: but at the same time she knew that he was right, she was beautiful, with a true sexual beauty, she had always been so, with a beauty that was a menace and a guilt and a burden: her whole life had been overcast by the knowledge of it, so studiously evaded, so nobly denied, so surreptitiously acknowledged. It seemed to her a cruel and disastrous blessing, a responsibility, wild like an animal, that could not be let loose, so she had denied it .... (37)

While this passage illustrates what Drabble said of Jane in an interview, that she "is over-sexed obviously" (Interview with Hardin 294), it also illustrates the trouble Drabble said she had finding a "language" to describe the experience of romantic passion, the problem being that "the language was undercutting itself the whole time" (*TWF* 107), and it illustrates also, then, why it is that Jane cannot find her identity in the Leavisite-style "Englishness" in which she was born and raised. Like Drabble, Jane as author is hampered by the "language" of "Englishness" to which she is heir. Jane says she "can't describe ... the world [she] lived in with [James]--the dusty Victorian house, the fast car, the race tracks, the garages, the wide bed--it was some foreign country to [her], some Brussels of the mind ..." (84).

It is significant that when she compares her experience to that of authors and heroines of English literature, Jane finds her closest affinity to be with Charlotte Brontë and her character Jane Eyre. By declaring this affinity, Jane (and Drabble through her) removes herself from "the great tradition" and aligns herself with a novelist who was not admitted to it. F. R. Leavis dismissed Charlotte Brontë as being of only "minor" interest,

"claiming no part in the great line of English fiction," it being "significant that she couldn't see why any value should be attached to Jane Austen" ("Note: 'The Brontës'," *GT* 41).

Drabble's Jane is as critical of the absence of passion in Jane Austen's fiction as Charlotte Brontë was:

How I dislike Jane Austen .... Her moral tone dismays me. Emma [in Austen's novel of that name] got what she deserved in marrying Mr. Knightley. What could it have been like in bed with Mr. Knightley? Sorrow awaited that woman: she would have done better to steal Frank Churchill if she could. (57-58)

Jane is also critical of George Eliot who was, according to Leavis, extremely important in passing on the moral and aesthetic values of "the great tradition." Although Jane admits that there is some of "the Maggie Tulliver in [her]," some of the capacity for "infinite self-sacrifice," and although she sees the similarity between herself and Maggie, who also "had a cousin called Lucy and ... fell in love with her cousin's man," she is really interested in noting the ways in which she is different from Maggie:

Perhaps I'll ... drown myself in an effort to reclaim lost renunciations, like Maggie Tulliver .... She drifted off down the river with [Stephen Guest], abandoning herself to the water, but in the end she lost him. She let him go. Nobly she regained her lost honour, and ah we admire her for it: all that super-ego gathered together in a last effort to prove that she loved the brother more than the man. She should have, ah well, what should she not have done .... Maggie Tulliver never slept with her man: she did all the damage there was to be done, to Lucy, to herself, to the two men who loved her, and then, like a woman of another age, she refrained. (153)

Like Jane, we may wonder about the point of the final renunciation after all the harm had been done. Is Maggie who drowns in the river and regains lost honour really more admirable than Jane who drowns in her passion and becomes fully alive? An even more probing question is implied in Jane's comment that Maggie was "*like* a woman of another age" when she refrained from sleeping with Steven (my emphasis). Maggie *is* a woman of another age compared with Jane, of course, so that the differences between the two are understandable, if not acceptable to Leavisite "Englishness", the point of the comparison

being that the "old" morality that Maggie's suicide supports and which demands some such "poetic justice" or retribution is no longer acceptable to women in the England of the present. What, though, are we to make of the implication that Maggie was "like a woman of another age" when compared with women of her own age and particularly when compared with her creator, George Eliot? In an interview Drabble made her intentions clear:

*The Mill on the Floss*, yes; there is the idea of being swept helplessly down the current. In terms of fate, Maggie Tulliver resists and doesn't go off with Steve, whereas George Eliot and George Henry Lewes did go off with one another. In a way I was trying to say that Jane and James couldn't have behaved as Steven and Maggie Tulliver did and neither could Steven and Maggie Tulliver have behaved as they did if they really felt what Maggie Tulliver appears to feel. She would have said yes as George Eliot did and got on with it. (Interview with Hannay 144)

Questioning George Eliot's integrity as a writer, Jane is questioning the "integrity" of the Leavisite "great tradition" and calling into question the bases for the survival of the "old" meaning (46) and of the "old-fashioned artistic view" (132). As Jean Wyatt points out, it is "[b]y working Eliot's imagery of currents and tides into flows that originate within Jane's body [that] Drabble finds a way of imagining an active female desire" and "[t]he language of active female desire ... subverts the gender positions of the romantic plot, and indeed of Western narrative discourse, in which a man is the active seeker, woman the recipient of love" (135-36).

When Jane compares herself to Charlotte Brontë she makes one important change in the wording: Jane says, "Reader, I loved him: as Charlotte Brontë said" (84). It was Jane Eyre (in the novel of the same name) who said of the maimed Rochester, "Reader I married him" (*JE* Chapter 38). By this comparison the reader is reminded of the differences between English women of the Victorian age for whom marriage was the only socially acceptable alternative to repression or denial of sexuality and those of the latter half of the



twentieth century who are in revolt against that traditional morality. Although it was condemned at the time of its publication in 1847 as "unfeminine" and praised by feminist critics of the 1970s for its spirit of "hunger, rebellion and rage" (Brontë 439; 476), *Jane Eyre* maintains, as pointed out in Drabble's edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, a "strict adherence to conventional moral standards" of sexual conduct (505). Whatever its unsettling elements, *Jane Eyre* ends by promoting the virtues of "Englishness" at the expense not only of the Creole Bertha but also of Rochester's continental mistresses.<sup>5</sup> By the time Jane triumphantly announces her marriage to Rochester, both she and he have been tamed considerably and Jane now embodies all the virtues of fidelity, moderation and restraint that those other women lacked. By contrast, in *The Waterfall* Drabble's Jane gets James only by betraying those same virtues.

At one point in *The Waterfall* Jane says

If I need a morality, I will create one: a new ladder, a new virtue. If I need to understand what I am doing, if I cannot act without my own approbation--and I must act, I have changed, I am no longer capable of inaction--then I will invent a morality that condones me. Though by doing so, I risk condemning all that I have been. (52-53)

This statement indicates the nature of the tension Jane is under for much of the story and the reason for it. Having thus far been confined to inactivity by her attempt not to come into conflict with the old "virtue," she is yet uncertain about the nature of the "fitful dark illuminations" she has experienced since childhood and is still thinking in terms of needing a contesting "system" of morality to empower her to act. Jane knows that stories of passionate love, and particularly of adulterous passion, traditionally conform to a pattern in which "passion is that overwhelming of moral sense" which ends in renunciation or in the tragic death of one or both of the lovers (Interview with Hannay 144). She knows that the story she wants to tell does not meet Leavisite moral/aesthetic standards, and that, judged

by those standards, her story would be pronounced, "dishonest" and "inartistic" given that she did not make it end in some tragedy which would have supported traditional morality or the "old" meaning (46). Having experienced passion and having been saved or "delivered from a state of near madness by it," Jane cannot view passion as a tragic failure of free will and choice. For Jane, as for Drabble, it is a matter for celebration that something repressed or denied for so long should erupt and challenge traditional morality and traditional forms of fiction, neither of which can encompass Jane's "unacceptable excess of identity" (104).

Knowing that she will be judged and condemned by Leavisite-style criticism, Jane incorporates it into her text, and near the end of the novel she clearly voices the Leavisite critical stance:

We should have died, I suppose, James and I. It isn't artistic to linger on like this. It isn't moral either. One can't have art without morality, anyway, as I've always maintained. (232)

Then she proceeds to end in a "much more cheerful" way, as both she and James and their affair are seen to linger on after the car accident (from which Jane escaped unscathed and in which James was injured but not fatally) and they come, as yet at least, to no "finale so grand" as expected (232). Leavisite-style criticism, then, is made part of a text which breaks with the literary "text book pattern of relationship" (232); it is disarmed by being made part of "a broken and fragmented piece: an event seen from angles where there used to be one event and one way only of enduring it" (46). The Leavisite moral vision becomes one of the fragments, one of a number of irreconcilable views. According to Jane, she has

often thought ... that the ways of regarding an event, so different, don't add up to a whole; they are mutually exclusive: the social view, the sexual view, the circumstantial view, the moral view, these visions contradict each other; they do not supplement each other; they cancel one another; they destroy one another. They cannot co-exist. (46)

As Creighton points out,

traditional liberal morality and traditional realistic fiction are both shaken by

this observation. Even though Jane Gray (and Margaret Drabble) sees her life within the context of a tradition of literary and real heroines who precede her, her story is finally fundamentally different: the old patterns are broken, however nostalgically we may look back to the old epistemological and moral certainties--and the female limitations--they embodied.

Asked about Jane's comments in an interview, Drabble said that she hoped it was not true, but, she said,

Sometimes that seems to be true and from Jane's point of view this was true ... and I think this can be true. I don't know if there's a final truth in Freudianism, or in religion or in Marxism or in any of these interpretations or creeds .... It's much easier to interpret the world if you believe in one of them and one only, but as you have probably gathered, I dabble in all of them and believe in little bits of all of them. And whether they add up to a whole truth I would love to know. I'm hoping I'll find out one day. But certainly if you listen to an adherent of any faith, they do cancel one another out, they don't add up, they're directly contradictory to one another. (Interview with Creighton, Schmidt 29-30)

Jane is like Drabble in still hoping that there might be some way of reconciling the various views she mentions though she can see no way to do it. Early in the novel she thought to solve the problem by setting up sexual passion as a contesting system of morality, where what is "dishonest" and "inartistic" according to the "old" morality is "a virtue ... in the moral world of love" (46), but this attempt fails and she "can't make the connections" between the world of love and "the real air" of England in which she lives (85). That air seems to be so permeated with the morality of "Englishness" that it cannot admit any other, and when Jane tries to make it admit a "sexual passion" that is, as Drabble said, "particularly violent" (Interview with Hannay 145), that is also quasi-incestuous and even vaguely lesbian (Jane wanting to be Lucy) she cannot "join it up" without admitting "guilt" (W 85).

Not until Jane relinquishes the concept of "virtue" itself and recognizes and accepts that sexual passion is an amoral force "as unwilled and foreordained, as the sliding of mountains, the uprooting of trees, the tidal waves of the sea" (152) is she able to accept

herself as she is. Against "such obsessive, arbitrary powers" as human passion, the individual is seen as helpless. Again Drabble directly calls into question the Leavisite notion of the effectiveness of the operation of human intelligence, will and choice on human affairs. Jane says that she has no control over her passion and no way to escape its control over her:

My sexual salvation—for as such I saw it—merely stressed for me the dreadful, sickening savagery of what, for want of a better phrase, one could call human nature .... When offered a chance of salvation I had taken it .... And yet I do not accuse myself of weakness of will. There had been nothing else to do. There had never been a question of choice. There had been nothing in me capable of choosing. I had done what I had to do, I had done what my nature was, what I would have done anyway. I had done what was to be. It is not myself I condemn, it is the nature of man.  
(151-52)

Comparing human passion to violent upheavals in the natural world Jane says, "The violence is us: is me" (152), and she is as awed by this as poets and painters of the eighteenth century were by the "sublime" in nature.

It is to see "an example of the sublime" in nature that Jane and James visit the waterfall Goredale Scar in North Yorkshire. Chosen for its beauty and the "sexual imagery" Drabble says it evokes for "any post-Freudian" as well as for its literary association with the terror of the sublime (AWB 126-27), this waterfall is a fitting symbol of the "sublime romantic passion" in *The Waterfall* (Interview with Hardin 292). It attests to the reality of the passion as Drabble explains when she is asked about Jane's comment on it, that "it is real, unlike James and me, it exists. It is an example of the sublime" (W 236). According to Drabble, Jane's comment is

a kind of double bluff. What she is saying is that Goredale Scar exists and is sublime. You may well think that James and I do not exist because we are characters in fiction and this kind of thing happens in fiction all the time and isn't true. But if you think a little more, you will realize that we exist. It exists and this could only be the record of a true experience. Otherwise why should anybody want to invent it. That's what I meant by it. But I put it in a kind of apologia. (Interview with Hardin 292)

Double bluff is an apt description of Drabble's method throughout *The Waterfall*. Late in the novel Jane says, "It's odd that there should be no ending when the whole affair otherwise was so heavily structured and orchestrated, that I felt, at times, that I could see the machinery work, that I was simply living out some text book pattern of relationship" (232). Asked about this in the interview with Hannay, Drabble explained that it was a reference to two kinds of text: one "a literary text" with "the adulteress plot" and the other "a kind of well-known Freudian casebook of a woman who can't find sexual happiness with her husband and therefore kind of automatically looks to the next person" (144-45). She said she was influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's view in *The Second Sex* "that women who marry as virgins or as inexperienced women rarely achieve a happy sexual relationship with their husbands; therefore they have to look to adultery for the passion, the sex, the abandon that they can't find with their husbands" (144).

The differences in attitude towards the adulterous relationship reflected in these texts account in part for the combination of parody and sincerity in Jane's and Drabble's treatment of Jane's story. Awareness of the "universality or the repetitiveness of an adulterous relationship makes one feel silly, as Emma Bovary is silly" (145), Drabble said and she pointed out that *The Waterfall*, like *Madame Bovary*, is "a travesty" of the many traditional literary texts in which adultery is elevated, dignified and treated as a tragic passion which must, in support of traditional morality, end in the death of the adulteress (144). But by denying adulterous passion the tragic dignity claimed for it in traditional literary texts, Drabble is not denying that such passion exists and is significant. On the contrary, by first diminishing it, she means to show that it is, as she told the interviewer, "a very real situation," as anyone might see just by looking in the evening paper any day at the reports of domestic shootings and desertions (Interview with Hannay 145). These are "the

high gales of newspaper truths" that Jane speaks of in *The Waterfall* (59), telling of widespread marital dissatisfaction, dissent and adultery, which are ignored by custodians of "Englishness" like Jane's parents "who live," Jane says, "in that small, self-justifying prep school world, marooned in it: petrified, ossified, worse than that, mad ..." (59).

By contrast with her parents, Jane is able with James's help to widen her world and overcome the anxiety which might otherwise have led her to madness. Accepting herself as that passionate "other woman" she had tried to negate, Jane is no longer one of the "frail ghosts" of "Englishness." Taking full advantage of their relationship--cousins by marriage--and of the physical similarity of Jane and Lucy, Jane and James are able to broaden the "warm world" of their passion which was at first "so small it was little larger than that room and that bed" (45). Moving outside the house they are able to find in "the real air" of England a sanction for their passion for, though it is not acknowledged by the Jane Austen-style "Englishness" in which Jane was raised, England does admit "the sublime" and the sublime is a space wherein the question of morality does not apply. According to Jane, the "only moral" of the expedition to the Scar "could be that one can get away with anything" (235) which is, of course, a mockery of the moral implied in those literary texts supporting the "old" morality, that one must pay with one's life for breaking the moral code. Also a mockery of the traditional literary ending of "the adulteress plot" is James unwittingly taking a mouthful of the mixture of Scotch and talc that Jane had accidentally prepared. Jane also tastes the mixture and admits it is as "unbelievably foul" as James said it was, but neither dies from this poison substitute. When Jane says that the drink is "A fitting conclusion to the sublimities of nature," we know that she is referring not only to the sublime Goredale Scar waterfall but also to the sublime waterfall of their love-making (compared earlier in the novel to the card trick James does called the Waterfall [149-50]) and that Jane delights in this ironic reversal of tragic irony. Nor is this the "final

indelicate irony," for that is contained in the "postscript" about the "thrombic clot." Jane says that, "preferring the present to the future, however dangerously," she would have kept taking the birth control pills causing the clot and quite possibly could have died herself of thrombosis had it not been for the car accident that placed James "unconscious and motionless" in hospital for weeks. The accident which could have, and would have, ended in James's death were the story to follow the traditional moral and aesthetic pattern, actually prevents the death of this adulteress who, as Creighton notes, is allowed not only to "have adulterous incestuous sex and live to tell about it--and so [to elude] the sad sisterhood of hundreds of literary precursors who learn too late that the wages of erotic indulgence are death" but who is also allowed to be "miraculously restored through the 'amazing fate' of her 'sexual salvation'" (*MD* 59).

### Chapter 3: "A Real Art of Misrepresentation"

In her novels of the seventies, Drabble continues to call into question the representation of the "family" as the locus of superior human values. Seen from the angles she provides, the English middle-class family seems not a safe and secure haven from the violence outside but rather a fairly safe sanctuary for legal or quasi-legal aggression. Rose (in *The Needle's Eye*), Frances (in *The Realms of Gold*) and Kate (in *The Middle Ground*) all refer to marriage as "warfare" (*NE* 95; *RG* 17; *MG* 147), and the comparison aptly describes the displays of marital hostility that we witness in these novels. Some notable examples of the "extremity" of physical violence reached by the couples in these novels are the literally bloody battles of Rose and Christopher, one of which ends with Rose "fl[inging] the smaller of the two children down [the stairs] at him" (*NE* 92) and the periodic physical assaults of Joy on Karel which end in Karel retaliating with knock-out blows (*RG* 71-72). Less spectacular but no less harmful is the psychological and emotional abuse of Janet by the "horrid little bully" Mark Bird (*RG* 322) who is, we are told, always angry and always "potting shots at her as if she were a duck at a fair" (168).

What is new in these middle novels is that Drabble extends this detailed questioning of the family to other, equally sacrosanct institutions within "Englishness," including education, health care, social services and the judicial system. She has explained that the broadening of her vision to include the situation of men as well as women in England and the role English institutions have played in moulding them reflects the fact that her life became "wider" during this decade (Interview with Poland 263). Because her children were older and were attending school for part of the day, she said, she experienced the "miracle of miracles" and could "get out for walks, look round London" and make "forays outside, meeting other people to get information, do research" and that the ability to do



research opened up for her the possibility of "writ[ing] a different sort of novel" from the ones she wrote during the sixties when she had been "a sort of prisoner" in the home (Interview with Kenyon 46).

The first of her novels to express her wider interests is *The Needle's Eye*, in which, as she has noted, "the point of view [is] spread [among] various characters," allowing her "to express the range of [her] feeling" and to "include some of the things she deeply cared about" (Interview with Milton 60). Published in 1972, this novel marks the beginning of her "interest in the documentary novel" (Interview with Hannay 133), and her "speculations on the state of the nation" (NE 220) which continue through *The Realms of Gold*, *The Ice Age* and *The Middle Ground*. When she published the last of these four novels, Drabble was described by Phyllis Rose, in the title of a review that has since been much quoted, as "Our Chronicler of Britain" (1). Drabble would agree that she was aiming in these novels for a fairly wide picture of English society in the seventies. She told Kenyon, "I'd like to think I write books which might contribute to a way of seeing British society" (WWT 34). At the same time, she has not claimed that she achieved in these novels a comprehensive social history of England in this period. As a matter of fact, she has been harshly critical of herself for not being able to do in these novels what she had hoped to do. With respect to *The Realms of Gold*, she criticized herself for not having paid more attention to "certain side disasters" which are "brush[ed] ... away in [the] comic plot ending" and she spoke of her "uneasiness" with the form (Interview with Parker and Todd 167). She was even more critical of herself with respect to *The Ice Age*. She said that the novel could have been "a tremendous tragedy," that she had originally intended to write it "in a much more extreme Zolaesque way" and "more from the point of view of the aspiring working class," but that she "couldn't actually do it" (Interview with Hannay 142-43). With respect to *The Middle Ground*, she said that she was having "doubts about fiction" at

the time she finished writing it (qtd. in Stovel, *MD* 202) and that Kate's uncertainty about the direction to take in her writing was a reflection of her "own feeling about the novel as a form" (*TWF* 17).

Although, as we shall see, there are hints of it in her three earlier novels of the seventies, it is in *The Middle Ground* that Drabble's dissatisfaction with "the traditional novel" and "the old forms" with which she "associated" herself (Drabble, "No Idle Rentier" 228) is most clearly expressed. Near the end of the novel Kate, who is a successful journalist undergoing something in the nature of a "mid-life crisis," experiences "[a] wonderful if temporary relief" when she is "releas[ed] from the grip of the representative" and is able to stop worrying about whether or not her thoughts and actions are "exemplary," whether or not they "mean something, not only for herself, but also for that vast quaking seething tenuous multitude of otherness, for other people" (224). "Henceforth," she boldly decides, "she would represent nothing but herself" (224-25). She tells herself "she'd spent enough time looking for patterns and trends" and asks herself what is wrong with "[s]hapeless diversity" (225).

Kate's thoughts have "wandered" to this defiant conclusion through a review of her relationship to the British feminist movement of the seventies which had no effect on her when she began writing about women since there was no women's movement at the time but which became increasingly vocal and prescriptive in its demands for the representative "WOMAN" during this decade (224). So unrelenting were the demands that Kate now professes to be "bloody sick of bloody women, sick to death of them" and she wishes she "had never invented them" (8). Kate is only half joking when she claims to have invented women. She is alluding to the fact that by her early writings she helped to create some of the expectations of women which later became prescriptive. Like Drabble, for whom she is a persona in this respect (Interview with Cooper-Clark 30), Kate is aware that a writer

skilled in representation can help "bring into being what we need to be" (Drabble, "Doris Lessing: Cassandra" 52 ); but, while she is aware of the positive aspects of such writing, she is also aware of the negative. What troubles Kate is that the demand for the "representative" necessarily involves what Hugo calls the "art of selection," the "art of omission" (180) by which some people are given more "space" than others and some are given no space at all (181).

Drabble's probing of the negative aspects of representation, disconcerting for the kind of feminism that was the most vocal in England in the seventies, must also have been very annoying to custodians of "Englishness" who depend on English writers to help remake a unified cultural identity by shaping diverse cultural elements within Britain into a literary/cultural whole. "Shapeless diversity" is very different from the shaped diversity of "Englishness" and it threatens to destroy the traditional social structure on which a dominant sense of "Englishness" has so far depended.

As Kate's remark on representing "nothing but herself" indicates, there is ambivalence in Drabble during this period: actively seeking patterns for novels focusing more on the general than on the particular, more on social consciousness than on self-consciousness, she was also becoming increasingly distrustful of any pattern that seemed to be emerging. Looking back at these novels, she has not claimed anything more than the "partial apprehension of things" that she spoke of in the interview with Hannay (133); by the time she reached *The Middle Ground*, she claimed only to be writing about "the state of London rather than of Britain" (Interview with Parker and Todd 176) and, as she pointed out later, she thematized her inability to shape the immediacy and diversity of London life:

I tried consciously to plot in *The Middle Ground*, but it seems to have failed. But that's partly what the book is about, you see: attempts we make to impose patterns—or 'plots'—on life when it's all really quite shapeless,

quite plotless. We look for meaning, for patterns, but perhaps there are none. That is what I was trying to explore. (Interview with Whitehall 72-73)

One of the things Drabble most distrusts about the imposition of patterns on experience is that they tend to repeat themselves and "new" patterns turn out to be updated versions of "old" ones. In the interview with Parker and Todd, Drabble said she thinks that

it is a central experience of history--to think you're doing something new and to find out you're doing something old. It's very difficult to do something new. You think you've made a revolutionary decision and you find you're doing exactly what your parents did before you only in a new form. (173)

What the repetition of old patterns in new forms means for most of the characters in Drabble's four novels of the seventies is that they find themselves repeating old forms of "Englishness" even as they think they are breaking with those forms and making the changes that are necessary for England to realize the egalitarian "dream of the sixties" (*MG* 53). At some point the characters realize that they have been practising what Simon Camish of *The Needle's Eye* calls "a real art of misrepresentation" (137) by which they have disguised, even in some cases from themselves, the fact that they are participating in a renewal or remaking of the old order.

What the awareness means for Drabble, as author, is that she becomes increasingly uneasy about the form of the middle-class "English" novel she has inherited and with which she begins to quarrel openly in her texts. Commenting on the narrator of Drabble's later fiction, Roberta Rubenstein has observed that "she becomes an apologist for the limits of fiction itself--for *untold* stories and for the inadequacy of traditional narrative to tell them" ("Fragmented Bodies" 149). I agree, though I think that Drabble may be less of an apologist than a devil's advocate in her periodic interruptions of the narratives to point out the shortcomings of the form she is using and to draw attention to those representative

"art[s]" of "selection" and "omission" on which the unity of the traditional "English" novel and of "Englishness" depends. Quite aware by this time that oppositional writing tends to be dismissed by custodians of "Englishness" as either unrealistic or artistically flawed, or both, Drabble delights in turning this critical terminology back on itself and implying that what is "real" and artistic about the traditional "English" novel is its misrepresentation of the experience of large numbers of people living in England.

*The Needle's Eye*

One of the main concerns in *The Needle's Eye* is the state of class relations in England at the beginning of the seventies and we are drawn into this question through the thoughts of Simon Camish, a man whose background, education and profession lead him to be very sensitive to manifestations of class consciousness. Through his consciousness we are made aware of "the well-arranged gulfs and divisions of life" in "a mixed area" of London and of the "frivolity," "pleasure" and "complacency" with which his affluent friends view the "contrasts" and "abrasions" and speak of "the advantages of living in a mixed area." According to Simon, his friends speak "[a]s though they licensed seedy old ladies and black men to walk their streets, teaching their children of poverty and despair, as their pet hamsters and guinea pigs taught them of sex and death" (9). We gather from him that his middle-class friends choose to live in a mixed area not to break through class barriers but rather the better to discriminate between themselves and the socially disadvantaged and dispossessed who have no choice but to live in these areas and the better to educate their children in this art of discrimination on which their sense of superiority depends. Seen up close, then, what may appear from a distance to be a new pattern of class relationships—an egalitarian mingling of classes—is really the old pattern of class discrimination disguised in a new form.

Unlike almost all of his middle-class friends, Simon was not "born into possibility and affluence" (31). Rather he was born into a working-class family in the North, born into "a life too near the bones of subsistence, too little padded, too severely worn" (13). Being one of only "two" who "had made it" from "among all those millions," he is well placed to know that "[i]t was all very well, free higher education, education acts, grammar schools," but it was not in any way a guarantee of social "equality" (32). Simon thinks that he and Nick (the other of the two who had moved up from their working-class origins to the middle class) were successful because "their parents--Nick's father, his own mother--had bent on their sons the peculiar weight of their own thwarted ambitions," and that the struggle for equality had passed "[f]rom generation unto generation" (31).

Thinking of one of the institutions which had claimed to offer children from the working class a means of equal opportunity with those born into the middle class, Simon remembers how uneasy he was made to feel at his grammar school when he had to go to school in his father's cut-down suits and when he had to explain to teachers why he could not buy a prefect's uniform until after half term, and we are told that

[i]t always amazed him that a school, like this, which so prided itself upon its policy of providing a superior education for the gifted poor, had been able to devise so many means for making those gifted poor so agonizingly uncomfortable. The truth was, it hadn't really provided for the gifted poor at all but for the gifted middle class.... (138)

Simon soon learned that in order to succeed in English institutions he would have to develop "a real art of misrepresentation" and teach himself "carefully to control his accent, his references, to misrepresent his past, to take on the colouring, first of those boys at school, then of those friends at college, and finally of his colleagues at the Bar" (137-38). Having developed this art, he feels "forever exiled" from the world of the working class (10).<sup>6</sup> Simon knows that only by "turning his back on" his working-class background has

"he been able to represent it," legally, that is, by representing workers' unions in the law courts (109). Far from bridging the gulfs between classes, then, his "middle-class" education served to make Simon more acutely aware of them and of the subtle ways in which middle-class people of his own generation are passing on to the next generation what is, at best, a condescending attitude and patronizing manner towards people on the margins and, at worst, a notion that these people are in some way sub-human (comparable to tame rodents).

Simon's experience of the British legal system has been no less disillusioning. According to him, "everybody knew that the law was far from impartial, it was one of the most biased professions in the country" (214-15). What concerns Simon is "the class structure of the British legal system" and the fact that were he to write a book about it, as he would very much like to do, it would "put [him] out of business for life" (215). If he were to write it anyway, it would "do no good" since it, like its author, would be stripped of professional authority. It would appear, then, that the British legal system is closed to questioning by its members and to change: "Times had changed a little in the world since 1875 but not in the world of judges" (151). So thinks Rose who, as a result of her research on divorce and child custody cases has been alerted to the gender bias of some male judges.

It will be clear that his experience has "embittered" Simon; indeed, he himself is aware that it has (18). He charges himself with being cold-hearted and mean in spirit, "dry, dry as a bone," the only emotions he thinks himself capable of being "hatred" and "resentment" of just about everyone. His awareness is coupled with a sense of guilt which makes him regard his impulses as "being so base" that he must conceal them, and so far he has been able to "behave impeccably" like the middle-class English gentleman he appears to be, controlling his "features" and "responses" so that his bitter resentment has "caused no

positive offence" to others (18). Clearly Simon acts according to "the ethics of a code of self-control" that Alison Light says "Englishness" demands as a sign of an Englishman's or Englishwoman's "moral strength" (210), but while Simon acts according to the code, he does not see his "continual suppression of impulse" as a sign of moral strength. Rather he sees it as a sign of weakness that he has "camouflaged" himself so well as to pass for one of the complacent middle class he so bitterly dislikes (26). Because of his awareness of the divisiveness of class in England and of the ways in which it is covered up, Simon experiences "Englishness" as deception: it is not only that he sees himself and Nick as "masqueraders" among their middle-class friends (31) but also that he sees the falseness of the friends whose expressions of faith in the progress of equality act as a blind for self-satisfaction and the perpetuation of class and racial stereotypes.

A notable illustration of a person repeating an old pattern of class relations in a new form is Rose Vassiliou, the other major centre of consciousness in *The Needle's Eye*. When Simon first meets Rose he thinks that her social journey has been the reverse of his own. Born into upper-middle-class wealth at her family's country house in Norfolk, Rose has moved to a dilapidated working-class neighbourhood at the back of Alexandra Palace. As a child she was in the care of a "puritanical" nanny (85) who impressed upon her the New Testament parable of the Needle's Eye--that it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Rose tried to be, and thought she had succeeded in being, different from her wealthy parents in their "elegant, domestic, tree surrounded, English, charming" country house filled with "the mutual contempt that reigned" between her parents and the domestic staff (344). Rose thought "she had become other" (343). After all, she married a "doubly"-dispossessed Christopher--a poor Greek from Camden Town--without her parents' consent and she gave away all but enough of her inheritance to live on in a working-class neighbourhood.



Simon has great admiration for her and obviously thinks of her as being like the rose in his garden, "a ghostly white crumpled bud of a rose ... frozen into an everlasting flower, never to open, never to die, a witness, a signal, a heroic pledge" (80). Rose represents for Simon a purity and innocence that is absent in his corrupted affluent friends; she seems to represent the possibility of a change in the English social structure and the abolition of class distinctions.

The fact of the matter, however, is that she has not really become "other" at all. Rose herself has doubts about what she has done. At one point she tells Simon that "living here in this little house, it's nothing but a mockery ... in some ways..." (105-06): besides having kept enough of her inheritance to live on, she has friends and contacts outside the neighbourhood who treat her to dinners and entertainment (106). When she fears losing the children to Christopher in a custody suit, she has more doubts about her position. She thinks that Christopher will argue that in sending the children to Harrington Road school, she is not providing them with the kind of education and contacts they will need in the future, but she also knows that "her position was false, whatever it was" (151): in fact, she had not failed to consider the disadvantages of the neighbourhood school and "was cheating intellectually as she had financially" (152) by providing the children with books and other intellectual stimuli the school cannot give them and by encouraging their friendship with children of her own friends from outside the area (151-52). By providing these extras for her own children, Rose is contributing to things remaining as they are for the socially disadvantaged children in her neighbourhood. She is trying to *be* "good" rather than to *do* "good" and, as Christopher tells Simon, he has "no idea ... how absolutely wicked and selfish people are when they get hold of this idea of being good" (254). Christopher points out to Rose that there is as much need of charity in some areas of London as there is in Africa (92). Rose refuses to listen. All that concerns her is that she

not be burdened with the money, spiritually or socially, and she gets rid of it as quickly as she can by donating it for the construction of a school in Central Africa. When, during a civil war, the school burns and hundreds of children with it, Rose "could take no responsibility for that" and "believ[ing] that giving is not simply for the benefit of the receiver," she gives it no more thought: "On faith, on works, on spiritual progress, on all these counts she was quit, even by such a disaster" (89).

In interviews Drabble has expressed some ambivalence in her attitude towards Rose, but in the main she has been critical of Rose's non-involvement in the neighbourhood. In the interview with Nancy Hardin, she spoke of what Rose did as a retreat from her conflicting sense of duty to herself and to others. She said that Rose is successful in finding "a completely different image of domesticity" from that of her upper-middle-class parents, that Rose's "is a nice little cosy working-class image of sitting in your own little house and minding your own business and being completely unaspiring" (Interview with Hardin 278). She also said that

Rose has several possibilities. She can stay with the children and continue to live as she does in a selfish state of grace that excludes the pains of the world. She can go off [as she contemplates doing at one point] and become really martyred, an act which she is aware would produce a state of grace of another kind of selfishness.... [W]hat she accepts [the return of her ex-husband Christopher] is finally no less painful. Well, all the choices are painful for her except sitting at home and carrying on which is what I tend to do.... Duty can be terribly confusing once you've got children and husbands and you're personally involved with other people's sense of righteousness, especially when it conflicts with your own. There are simply no answers. (285)

If Rose were the "English" heroine that her name and actions recall, there would be an answer which, however painful for herself or for others, would support traditional English morality. As it is, Rose no longer has the moral certainty she had as a young woman. She does act, she does choose one of the possibilities, but she remains morally confused.

In a later interview with Dee Preussner, Drabble was more critical of Rose. She

said that Rose knew that she "was being an isolationist in her community" by not "sharing with the people she should have been sharing with, which was Christopher" (566). The point, I think, is that Christopher, who has known the hardships and humiliations of poverty, cannot blithely share Rose's desire to be unaspiring. Simon, who shares with Christopher memories of the "immense sufferings" and "agonizing humiliations" of poverty (367), thinks at one point:

It was all very well for Rose to live in a dump that spoke of his worst fears, because those fears had never been real to her, as they had to him: she could amuse herself with the experience of poverty because it had never seriously threatened her. (138)

The message Christopher got from the New Testament was the opposite of the one that Rose got and tried to live by. He remembers the parable of the talents which, he tells Rose, "was all about making money" (92), and he knows it is only by making money that he will be seen as anything other than "a dirty Greek" (103) by those, like Rose's parents, who are at the centre of "Englishness." Rose, on the other hand, "first wanted and meekly followed Christopher because he was one of the dispossessed" (91) and she *needs* him to stay dispossessed if he is to fit into "the holy city of her childhood" that she thinks she has built by "faith" at the back of Alexandra Palace (63).

In the interview with Preussner, Drabble went on to explain that what Rose saw as a revolutionary act was really a repetition of an old pattern of class relations. She said that Rose "had the upper hand in her community," and that she "was in a way being the lady of the manor, even though that wasn't how it looked" (566). When Preussner questioned this comment, Drabble explained:

She also liked it because [the neighbours] couldn't judge her, and I have ambivalent feelings about that myself. I think it is a real community. But at the same time she leaves it whenever she wants to go out to dinner or when she wants intellectual exercise. They can't. In a way, she is the lady of the manor. That's fine for her because she can come and go as she chooses. But for them, that's all they've got. They're deprived and there's

something in her that likes that they're deprived because then she can be lady bountiful. She is trying to play out mistress of the grand house but in a very strange way. (566)

Having given away most of the money from her inheritance, Rose has little or nothing in the way of material things to bestow on her neighbours. What she (with her guaranteed income) has that they (who have to scrub floors for a living) do not have is time during the day to look after children, and whenever she is asked to look after a neighbour's baby, Rose agrees. Her manner on these occasions is pleasant, soothing and patronizing: "Oh yes, fine," she tells Mrs. Flanagan; "No, no, don't you worry, that's quite all right, of course I'll have her...", she tells Mrs. Sharkey (56;176). Out of earshot of the women, Rose is cross and angry at them for asking favours of her, for taking advantage of her "weak" nature (56), of her inability "to say no" (177), and she is angry at herself, she tells Simon, not only for being so weak as to agree to look after the "repulsive" little beings (178) but also for being so "mean" as to resent it (177). Predictably, Simon sees Rose's unflinching self-scrutiny as a virtue and gets her to admit that she is not "really mean": "One would have to be really mean to say no," she says (177). Then when she belittles her virtue by saying that not even really mean people could say no in a case like Mrs. Sharkey's, Simon responds that it is only "nice people" like Rose who get asked in the first place. Only her precocious son Konstantin sees that her virtue is a façade behind which she hides, even from herself perhaps, the fact that she likes playing the beneficent "lady of manor" role: "Konstantin looked at her shrewdly and said ..., 'Do you know what you are, Mummy, you're--a whited sepulchre!'" (178)

Mrs. Sharkey's plight and that of her daughter Eileen provide a very different view of working-class domesticity in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Sharkey says to Rose after being evicted from her house by the landlord when the neighbourhood started to come up in the world, "I can't complain, ... I've only been paying a pound a week for the whole house.

That's why the roof leaks. There's fungus as big as my fist growing out of the ceiling upstairs. You can't complain at a pound a week, can you?" There are other things about which Mrs. Sharkey does complain: the fact that after having worked hard to provide for five children of her own, she is saddled with a grandchild belonging to her unmarried and unemployed daughter Eileen who ran away just after birthing the baby (173). Even when Eileen returns home, Mrs. Sharkey has to provide and care for the child as well as for Eileen (275).

Mrs. Sharkey and Rose agree that Eileen "is a real bad lot," but they cannot help sympathizing with her (173). Rose tells Simon that the girl had "ambitions" of being someone very different from the person her lack of money, education and training forces her to be (173). Later, we are told that Rose "accepted the reproach" in Eileen's eyes because she knew that her own life had had a "glamour" and "excitement" Eileen could no longer even dream of (276), and she accepted responsibility for having encouraged Eileen in her aspirations when Eileen was younger by playing the lady of the manor and letting her borrow clothes (276-77). Rose knows that with the baby and only work at the bedding factory to look forward to, Eileen is at "nineteen, finished, excluded forever from what she might want to be" (275).

It is because Rose herself is at least partially aware that she has created an updated version of the old pattern of class relations that she agrees to have Christopher back. With his return to the house, the cosy domestic retreat is shattered by domestic squabbles and Rose is "distorted by rage from all her virtues" in response to Christopher's "idly provocative" manner (375). With Christopher back, Rose loses her ladylike status. Even Simon thinks that "[s]he appeared, she was, petty, vindictive, resentful" in the quarrels between her and Christopher (384-85).

The experience Simon has had of working-class domesticity might have warned

him that the "nice little cosy working-class image" that Rose created was a misrepresentation. He might have known, as Rose herself did, that she was only able to afford to live in a working-class area on her own with her three children in relative ease because she kept enough of her inheritance to live on and was able to supplement it with the money from speaking engagements and newspaper pieces. Simon's memories of his own unhappy childhood present a very different image of domestic life in a working-class home on a "miserly" fixed income and of a woman having to raise and educate a child on her own as well as to look after an invalid husband, his father and her own parents:

He thought back to his childhood—to his disabled father, to his driving, neurotic, refined mother, who had worked so hard for him, who had insisted so on his rights, who had pushed him and pushed him to where he now was, through Junior School and Direct Grant Grammar School and through Oxford and on, whether he liked it or not, to the Bar. He had done it for her. He had hated her for so many years that he had to do it for her.... He loved his mother now, he had come round to loving her, or as near as he would ever come to loving so repelling a woman, but he had done what she wanted out of appeasement. To appease her for those years and years of pain and embarrassment and ingratitude. (131-32)

He remembers how "taut and anxious" she was in the "horrid little house" when he, on her insistence, brought middle-class school friends home for tea and how miserable he felt on those occasions. He can see now that "she had done her best for him, wanting nothing but his escape" and that she, being "a gifted woman ... a grammar school product herself," was passing on to him her own "dreams of escape" (132). This image of "[h]is poor, poor, clever mother, unlovely in her efforts to survive, agonized in her efforts for his survival" is juxtaposed with the image of Rose coming and going as she pleases to and from her cosy little house.

Drabble once described Simon's mother as "unpleasant" and said that she is "exactly the same" as Clara's mother (in *Jerusalem the Golden*):

They are unpleasant, hard, bitter, life-denying. Yet one knows exactly why they're like that. In a way they sacrifice themselves for their children. In

both cases Clara and Simon have gone forward. (Interview with Hardin 279)

There is, however, a way in which Simon's mother differs from Clara's: after years of sacrifice for Simon, Mrs Camish "had gained the brighter dawn that had seemed beyond hope" (NE 133). After she had seen to Simon's success, she became a success herself by writing and doing radio broadcasts, and she became as skilful in the "art of misrepresentation" as Simon is. According to Simon, she wrote her books and her broadcasts for "middle-aged women like herself who knew the worst and wished to have it made acceptable to them" (134). With a "public persona ... of cosy, cloying, domestic fortitude" (134), how very similar she is to those "icons of 'Englishness'" described by Alison Light. Light's description is particularly illustrated in Mrs. Camish's "domestic radio chat[s]," all of which "she enlightened with the same glow of nostalgic warmth": "stories of setbacks that she had met dourly and with ill nature ... [were] re-written, touched up, translated into what she would have liked them to have been" (188). She seems almost a reincarnation of Jan Struther's "Mrs. Miniver," that "plucky housewife" who became, Light says, "the epitome of the wartime spirit in England" during the forties (113).

### *The Realms of Gold*

The lingering effects on the present generation of the efforts of past generations to move upward through the classes is seen even in Frances Wingate, the "golden girl" of *The Realms of Gold*, Drabble's second novel of the seventies. Frances is a distinguished archaeologist who has found the ancient city of Tizouk in the Sahara but who, nevertheless, experiences bouts of anxiety about her success. When we first meet her she is attending an international conference and has been put in "the best room in...the best

hotel." She thinks it is "a nice room," "just about right," "fine." "On the whole," she thinks, "she was happy in hotel rooms" (3-4). The next moment she is wondering, "However had she got herself here, into this good room? It was madness really. Why hadn't Professor Anderson seen how mad it was when he showed her up to the room?" She wonders why he had not said, "There's your room and it's too good for you" (4-5).

This is the beginning of the "curious mood" that she experiences periodically and which she used to call "Despair" but now recognizes as "some kind of illness, ... [a] family illness" (6) manifesting itself in her as manic depression which means that she experiences alternating states of depression and mania. There have been times in hotel rooms, for example, when she "felt the reverse--that herself, suddenly put down in transit, was so powerful that it might burst through the frail partition walls and send all the things swirling. Towels, fittings, coathangers, things like that" (3). Her present mood is one of the "times when she thinks that it was all an elaborate mistake, and that she would wake up one morning and discover that the city [she uncovered] was not there" (29). She remembers the time she telephoned her former professor but got the wrong number and "was told he did not exist." Her first thought was not that she had the wrong number but, rather, that she had "gone mad" and had "been suffering from a lengthy delusion" about her whole career, including studying under Professor Bryers at Oxford (30). Frances's sense of humour is in part what saves her from the bitterness that afflicted Simon Camish, for like him, she has the sense of not being what she appears to be, of not deserving the classless professional status she has achieved.

Frances believes that she has inherited the illness from her father's family, the Ollerenshaws, all of whom suffered from one kind of depression or another, although at first she does not know why. At dinner in Hall at Wolverton University (where her father is now vice-Chancellor), Frances half-jokingly suggests to a psychologist sitting next to



her that the Ollerenshaw family illness is caused by the landscape of the East Midlands:

"You know," she said, slowly, "I've often thought that there must be something in the *soil* there, in the very earth and water, that sours the nature. I've often thought that in our family--we've got some hereditary deficiency or excess. And that, combined with the flatness of the landscape, was what did it.... I'm certain that there must be something positively poisoning the whole of South Yorkshire and the midlands." (96)

When the psychologist jokingly refers to it as "the midlands sickness," Frances agrees and says that even though her father got out of the area, he is still "[a] bad case of the Midlands" and that she herself carries with her everywhere this sickness which "flattens [her] out, if [she's] not careful" (96-97). Humorously, provocatively, then, Frances claims to carry with her a little bit of English soil whose quality is very different from that celebrated as the quintessential England of "Englishness" to which she alludes by contrast: whereas Rupert Brooke said that "the actual earth of England held for him a quality which, if he'd ever been sentimental enough to use the word, he'd have called 'holiness'" ("An Unusual Young Man," qtd. in Brooker and Widdowson, Colls and Dodd, 131), Frances says that she thinks the "very earth" of her part of England is poisonous, and whereas Brooke lauded "blessed" "English fields," Frances inveighs against the "stony ground" of the fields of Tockley (129).

It is not until near the end of the novel that Frances finds "records going back into the dim reaches of the dusty Ollerenshaw past" revealing a family "history" of attempts to rise above those flat stony fields:

The Ollerenshaws had lived quietly like mice, hoarding scraps, in their dark cottage....And out of this darkness her father had clambered, oddly gifted, oddly persevering, a freak escape. Or so she had always thought. But of course there had been other Ollerenshaws who had climbed too. They had learned to write their names, they had managed to rise above the twelve shillings a week wage, the suppers of dry bread and onions.... In the heart of the agricultural depression...the Ollerenshaws had managed to become independent. They had risen from the slavery of agricultural labour; they had become shoemakers, smallholders, small shopkeepers. Ambition had propelled them as it had her and her father. (299-300)

This history of the long struggle to rise socially helps to account for the depression that has plagued the family. As was the case with Simon, Frances is aware that she has what she has because the struggle was passed from generation to generation:

Generations of her ancestors had gathered stones in [the] fields [of Tockley]. Her grandfather had grown tomatoes. Her father had studied newts [in the ditches] and become a professor of zoology. And for herself, as a result of their labours the world lay open. That was why she sat here [in a room at the Station Hotel in Tockley] with a tumbler of brandy at her elbow ... with a choice of two single beds .... (121)

One of the reasons that Frances did not know this part of the family history before is that her father practised his own "art of misrepresentation" and rarely spoke of the Ollerenshaws. Frances has to admit that there is "some truth" in the implication in the papers at the time of the death from starvation of her Aunt Con (about whom Frances had heard next to nothing before) that Frances's father, now Sir Frank Ollerenshaw, "had cut himself off (aided and encouraged by [Frances's mother] Stella [who comes 'from a notable family of Oxford intellectuals' (78)] because the Ollerenshaws were socially embarrassing and better forgotten" (284-85). Frances has to admit also that she had not thought the Ollerenshaws were worth knowing. When she found out that the geologist David Ollerenshaw is her cousin,

the truth was (she might as well admit it) that she'd been astonished to learn that any member of the Ollerenshaw family, apart from her father, had ever made it to grammar school, let alone university .... [T]he Ollerenshaws had been written off [by her mother] as peasants, and shoemakers and shopkeepers, and Frances would never have thought of looking among them, would never have dreamed of finding as acceptable a cousin as David. (269)

Frances has spent a great deal of her life trying to escape the Ollerenshaw past. Ironically, perhaps, she has done so by digging into the pasts of others. Ironically, also, "one of her [lecture] themes was the fashionable one that black culture had been consistently neglected and underestimated by scholars, who preferred the Greeks and the

Romans and who couldn't believe that any good thing could come out of Africa" (57)<sup>7</sup> while she herself had always accepted her mother's view "that no good thing could come out of Tockley" (269). Much of what *The Realms of Gold* is about is Frances's attempt to uncover her Ollerenshaw family's past and the source of the "midlands sickness."

On her first trip back to Tockley, Frances visits Eel Cottage, formerly her Ollerenshaw grandparents' home, hoping to confront and exorcise the ancestral ghosts that haunt her. At first her memory of Eel Cottage is highly selective. She remembers only the early years when it seemed to be "a paradise for children" (101) and she is disappointed to find that Tockley is expanding in one direction and Hussey in the other and are threatening to enclose it. Frances is aware that her disappointment, similar to that which awaited George Bowling in Part IV of George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*, is caused by nostalgia for the past which is no longer feasible, and even if it were possible, would not be defensible: "What had she expected," she asks herself, "some untouched corner of Britain, a rustic paradise unreached by road and supermarket and overpopulation?" (112). Moreover, she "began to feel ashamed of her conservationist notions" when she saw two young mothers chatting over the hedge on their "brand-new lawns in front of their brand-new picture-windowed houses" (115). While it is clear that Frances herself would not want to live in one of those houses, it is also clear that she cannot justify her desire for "a rustic paradise" in the face of the growth in population.

In any case, Frances comes to recognize that the conditions accompanying rural seclusion in the past were not as idyllic as reminiscences of childhood often make them appear to be. On the visit to Eel Cottage, Frances reviews the years of holidays she spent there as a child and becomes aware that the very stability which appealed to her as a child of itinerant parents "constantly moving as they climbed the academic social ladder of

promotion" may have seemed like paralysis to Granny Ollerenshaw in "the cottage ... immovable, unchanged and unchanging" (100). Thinking of the "circumscribed lives" her grandmother and grandfather shared, Frances now wonders, "was that why [her grandmother] had been so sour?" (116) She also remembers that it was only "at first" that the cottage seemed Edenic to her, for "Gran [was] normally ... cross" and often shouted at the children and that through the years her "temper ... had deteriorated" to the point where after her husband died she "had developed so great a grudge against life that there was nothing left to discuss with her" (106).

It is also during this visit that Frances has the two visions which make up "an allegory of pointless rural toil" (119), Drabble's counter to the mythical rural England of "Englishness." The first occurs as Frances walks back through Hussey and sees women and children gathering stones, clearing the new school playing field (118). Her first impression was of something quite different, of something like "an ancestral memory" and "what she had seen had been an image of forced labour, of barrenness, of futility, of toil, of women and children stooping for survival, harvesting nothing but stones" (119). Shaken by this vision, she calls at the museum in Tockley, hoping to find some less depressing image of the ancestral past, only to experience a second and equally depressing vision of it. Seeing an "eel stang" which is described as an instrument for "trapping" eels, she misreads "trapping" as "turning" and "had a vision, she had to admit it to herself, of old men pointlessly turning over eels in ditches in meaningless labour" (119).

Frances revises the story of England's rural past with these visions of pointless rural toil which are in sharp contrast to the contemporary accounts of "the golden age" of childhood spent in "the country" that Drabble comments on in the last chapter of *A Writer's Britain*. When Frances began this journey to the East Midlands, it seemed as if Drabble was invoking the nostalgia of "Englishness" evident in those contemporary accounts, but,

as in her early novels, she invokes such accounts in order to revise them and to point to some of the gloomy elements that they ignore. As Sadler says, Drabble focuses on "the dark side of the golden world" (95). Drabble likely feels that she can justify the emphasis placed on gloominess in her accounts of the rural English past by the one-sidedness of the conventional accounts, just as Frances justifies her omission of slavery and child sacrifice when she speaks on the Phoenicians, "the conventional and archaeological estimate" of whom is that they were "a reactionary, mercenary, cruel, inartistic, and unsympathetic people whose disappearance from history was a boon to mankind" (32); but whereas Frances has to emphasize the "few good things" left by the Phoenicians in her revision in order to balance the conventional estimate (33), Drabble has to emphasize the problems in the idealized rural England.

In the process Drabble even questions Wordsworth, a poet she much admires--questions him not with respect to his perception of the sublime, a "bias" which, in *A Writer's Britain*, she says she shares, but with respect to the "homely" in his nature which she attributes to the influence of Dorothy on him (AWB 163). According to Gervais, the Wordsworthian rural ideal gives preference to "hard manual work, not simply labour but work as a community's chief means of finding a cultural identity for itself." Gervais says, "such work becomes an intrinsic part of 'Englishness' after Wordsworth" (44). Through Frances's reflections on her two visions of rural toil, Drabble suggests that such work may have been really aimless and meaningless as well as undignified:

We dig, we plant, we reap, we dig again, and barely we survive. The thought made her ill. A man with an eel stang, like Wordsworth's leech gatherer, stood around portentously in her mind, aimlessly searching ditches for eels to turn. He meant something to her, she had not conjured him from nothing, she had not misread that notice for nothing. What did he personify, that ancient labourer? She looked in horror at his black pronged fork, and turned away. She turned back to modernity and her bedroom's efficient plumbing. (119)

Frances seems in the last gesture to reject her earlier hope of finding "an English rustic paradise" (112) wherein some essential "Englishness" is preserved. After the two visions, Frances tells herself:

The pursuit of archaeology ... like the pursuit of history is for such as myself and Karel [her lover who is a historian] a fruitless attempt to prove the possibility of the future through the past. We seek a utopia in the past, a possible if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede infinitely, for there never was a golden world, there was never anything but toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness. (120-21)

Frances does not allow herself to continue to dwell on these visions, however, and in this, as Drabble has pointed out, she is different from Simon Camish. In an interview, Drabble said that "in order not to be pursued by moral dilemma and doubt [as Simon is], you have to, as Frances Wingate says, forget about that, forget about the doubt and get on with it" (Interview with Parker and Todd 173). In her focus on survival, Frances is more reminiscent of Clara Maugham (in *Jerusalem the Golden*) than she is of Simon:

All one has to do, she told herself with a part of herself, is to keep moving, keep talking, and don't spend too much time alone. And you'll survive. What for? Don't ask, don't be naive. (RG 225-26)

Earlier she had asked herself, "was that all she was doing, feverishly seeking health by trying to avoid illness?" (97) As in the case of Clara, Drabble has said that her attitude towards Frances is "ambivalent": she "thoroughly approve[s] of the energy with which [Frances] leads her life" and thinks that "she's in many ways admirable," but she also thinks that Frances is "rather selfish." Commenting on the disappearance of Karel's ex-wife to a lesbian commune (which frees Karel to marry Frances), Drabble said that the novel is a comedy and "[i]n a comedy you can brush people away in a comic plot ending .... But it's never wholly satisfactory .... An uneasiness creeps in that the winners have won and everyone else has lost ..." (Interview with Parker and Todd 167).

Before separating from Karel and going off to the lesbian commune, Joy had called

around at Frances's house late one night looking for Karel and had started to wreck the sitting room, "scream[ing] loudly and hysterically" that while "she and Karel lived in squalor," in "a *hovel*," Frances's entire family was "part of the vicious power structure of the land" and, in an echo of Shaw in *Heartbreak House*, that the family "deserved to have bombs thrown at its country houses" (68). Frances had to admit that there was "a little truth" in some of Joy's accusations (68). Joy is not wrong about Frances being in a position of power, particularly when compared with Joy who was born into the working class and has middle-class standing only because she married Karel who turns out to be something of a Jekyll and Hyde, loving and supportive of the wealthy and attractive Frances but physically abusive of the poor and unattractive Joy. In addition, Joy turns out to be a repressed lesbian whose sexuality cannot be accommodated within the traditional social structure. While Frances can take advantage of her wealth and social position to have a family and a career as well as a socially acceptable cottage retreat, Joy has to disappear to a lesbian commune and join a group of women who have cut themselves off from a society which would pressure them into traditional and often abusive relationships.

Drabble has also said that she felt at the end that she "was creating [her] own happy ending, a Jane Austen ending, a happy marriage ..." (*TWF* 16). The point is that Frances's marriage and her retreat to Mays Cottage is also a retreat into middle-class "Englishness" which values marriage, domesticity and privacy and turns a blind eye to social injustice. The appeal of the cottage for Frances is that "[i]t was contained, it was secret" (299) and she does not spare a thought for others who are unable to afford the luxury of a retreat costing a hundred times what it did in the nineteenth century. Always a touch "ruthless" where her "private satisfactions" are concerned, Frances delights in those the cottage offers:

She tidied the cottage up, gradually: on the first few visits, she managed to

get there alone with Karel and they slept together among the cobwebs, making good lost months and years, in a terrifying, a safe, a giddy, a precarious, a secure and all-excluding secluded conclusion, as final in its own way as Stephen's [death by suicide] had been: as final, as ruthless, and, it seemed, as natural. (352)

Drabble has said of the ending that there is an element of the fairy tale at work there and that it took many narrative "tricks" to bring it about ("The Author Comments" 38). She did not mean by this that the ending should be read as a straightforward fairy tale reinscribing the values of middle-class "Englishness," but rather that it calls attention to itself as parody and mocks the tale it pretends to tell. There is a conscious sense of play on the part of the narrator as she records Frances's attempts to create either a pastoral idyll or a fairyland out of Mays Cottage and its surroundings. In the passage just quoted, for example, I take it that the "cobwebs" replace the "beds of roses" that Marlow's passionate shepherd promised his love and that the repeated *clu, clu, clu* sound in the "all-excluding secluded conclusion" is what Frances gets in the way of melodious cooing.

The irony which undercuts the pastoral in this passage is evident also in Frances's first visit to the cottage just after Aunt Con was discovered dead there. We are told that the overgrown path to the cottage seemed to Frances to be "like Sleeping Beauty's terrain ... though it was no sleeping beauty that the Armstrongs found there" (296): what they found was the decaying corpse of an old, witch-like, mad, lonely woman. There is irony also in Frances perceiving the cottage as "beautiful" with "a terrible purity" marking its decay while inside there is evidence of Con's desperate struggle to survive: "a sheep's head ... picked too clean" to please Frances who "did not like to think of Constance eating the last scrap" (298). While at the cottage, Frances even begins to think that it was not "too bad, the way that Constance Ollerenshaw had lived and died" (298-99). We remember that earlier Frances had thought the way of her death shocking: "Connie Ollerenshaw, her grandfather's sister, dying like that in a cottage with her stomach full of undigested



cardboard and pages of newspaper" (268). When Frances equates this overgrown decaying cottage with "England" (296), one wonders, first, if she is aware of the irony of equating England with what was for Con a retreat from "Englishness," necessitated by a breach of the proprieties when she had a sexual relationship with a married man and bore a child, and second, if she is aware of the implications of the equation for England's future. At an earlier point in the novel, Frances herself had asked, "what hopes should one have of any future? Should one merely regress to a field of stones, one's own safe place?" (188)

Responding to Roger Sale's comment that Drabble has recorded "the private history of an England that, if only in this beautiful novel, is becoming a realm of gold," Ellen Cronan Rose writes: "*The Realms of Gold* is a beautiful novel. But despite its happy ending, it is not, finally optimistic about the condition of England and of contemporary society." She points out that Frances's "'satisfactions' ... are merely private" (*The Novels* 107). Drabble makes sure that we do not miss this fact by emphasizing the "all-excluding" nature of the passion and by comparing it with death as a way of avoiding the pain and suffering in the world. At the cottage, Frances can be fairly certain that Karel will not be bothered by the pain of all the "unlovable" lonely people back in the city who make what Frances considers to be excessive and unreasonable demands on his time (91).

Had she not taken this approach, Frances might have committed suicide as have so many of the Ollerenshaws (including her sister Alice). The probability of her suicide, had she dwelled on her doubts, is suggested in the murder-suicide of her nephew Stephen who kills his infant daughter as well as himself just after Aunt Con's death. The incident is reminiscent of the suicide of Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and like Septimus, who is a double for Mrs. Dalloway, Stephen is a double for Frances. Earlier Stephen told Frances that like his wife Beata, hospitalized for anorexia nervosa, he believed "that the conditions of survival were such that it was undignified to survive" (88). After

she recovered from the shock of the deaths, Frances began to see the extremity of Stephen's act as her salvation:

He had had the revelation she had always been denied, which she had glimpsed so often in the distance [while in her depressed moods]. It was a revelation that she did not want at all. She would continue to live, herself. He had spared her, and taken it all upon himself. (348)

While Frances reconciles herself to Stephen's act, however, it remains for the reader a haunting image of the sense of hopelessness that accompanied the Ollerenshaws' struggle to rise socially, and while Frances continues to live, she does so only by blocking out the pain and suffering of the "losers" in a social system which, Drabble implies, is only kind to the ruthless.

A further irony is that while the novel ends with the marriage of Frances and Karel it is not the marriage which is celebrated. As Pamela Bromberg points out, "In this ironic epic Aunt Constance's funeral acts as the counterpart to marriage, the celebratory ritual of the traditional comic aspect" (57). The description of the funeral is clearly meant to recall "the idealizing pastoral" which Drabble says informs so much English literature. The scene seems to capture "the golden past ... idealized, bathed in a golden light of nostalgia" that she points out is characteristic of the pastoral tradition (*AWB* 71). Everything is golden, from the "golden stone" of the church which deepens to "yellow gold" to "the yellow lichen-covered ... churchyard wall" to the "yellow" earth of the field in which Con is buried to the "yellow clay" of her grave (334). Ironically, however, each of these images is linked to decay or death: the stone "crumbles," the wall is "decaying," the field is to become an extension to the graveyard and Con, dead some months before she was found, is already in the process of decomposition.

Besides being ironically enveloped in the golden light of the pastoral vision, the grave is made to seem part of a pastoral landscape.<sup>8</sup> As viewed by Frances's lover, Karel,

the scene is like something out of the eighteenth-century poet James Thompson. In *A Writer's Britain* Drabble notes that "Thompson was one of the first poets to make landscape his central subject; ... and [that] he was master of the extended prospect." She quotes Douglas Grant, one of Thompson's biographers, on the way Thompson organized the landscape into "foreground, middle distance and distance" in the manner of seventeenth-century picturesque painters (*AWB* 54). She notes that while Grant "insists that it was the landscape of [his] early years that trained Thompson's eye," there are other critics who "have suggested that Thompson's eye for composition was trained not by nature but by familiarity with the work of the [seventeenth-century] painters Grant mentions" (54). This suggests that Thompson's "luminous golden views" (55) are at a second remove from the actual landscapes of England that he purports to describe. Drabble also notes that "though the son of a poor minister from a small parish, [Thompson] has the landlord's perspective ['the hilltop view' (54)], acquired by association and patronage" (56), and that he "pleases his patrons by depicting their handsome estates and gardens" from their perspective of "complacent ownership" (56).<sup>9</sup> All of this suggests that Thompson's art is another one of the "real art[s] of misrepresentation" which help to account for the survival of "Englishness" through generations of change. Drabble also notes that Thompson's "attitude developed into the sensible, estate-managing heroes of Jane Austen" (56), thus implicating Austen and Leavis's "great tradition" in the continuation of an art of "Englishness" which ends by being at several removes from the reality of contemporary England.

That it is Karel, a Jewish refugee living, at the time, in a "hovel" (68) who assumes the landlord's perspective in *The Realms of Gold* is another of the ways in which Drabble undercuts the perspective and signals its limitations. It is to "the middle distance" that

Karel looks as he

reflects on his own passion for the rural England he [sees] so rarely, his haven, his place of exile, his unknown land, his subject, his livelihood: and on Frances who came from this land. The eighteenth-century cows munched on, undisturbed, in their golden age, by the still waters, by the bending willows, in the autumn light, His own, and not his own. (334)

Missing from this hilltop view are the agricultural labourers who would have worked in the fields and tended the cattle, an absence which Raymond Williams has identified as characteristic of the "country-house" literary tradition and eighteenth-century arranged landscapes, both of which achieve a "magical extraction of the curse of labour ... by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers" (*CC* 32; 124-25). For the social inequality elided by this perspective, we must remember Frances's earlier visions of the futility of rural toil.

There are, however, some notes which disrupt the pictorial description: one is that the foreground contains "the too open earth" of Con's grave and another is the narrator's parenthetical observation on the river that is seen in the distance: "(In the calm estuary of this river John Lincoln, lover of Constance Ollerenshaw, had drowned, not quite by accident, more than half a century ago. He had been drinking, or so it was said at the time)" (334). Neither Con's death from starvation nor her lover's not-quite-accidental drowning fits the idealized pastoral landscape, and the ironic gap makes us aware that Drabble is writing a parody of the pastoral: she is recalling it but at the same time she is making it mock itself. Our first clue is the profusion of images of yellow and gold that serve to drown, rather than bathe, the scene in a golden light, and the second is this tightly organized description of the pictorial landscape that includes observations which are inimical to it.

Particularly ironic is Karel's association of Frances with what seems to him to be this idyllic pastoral landscape when, as we know, Frances's theory is that her

manic-depression is caused by the very different landscape--the flatlands--only a few miles away and that she considered the family feud which separated the two branches of the Ollerenshaws (her grandfather's from Con's) as proof of her theory:

What a sour and tiresome and quarrelsome lot the Ollerenshaws were, they had sucked in some poison with the very water of Tockley, it had poisoned their brains, that unnatural ditch water, she had always known it. (269)

When, despite her theory, Frances chooses Mays Cottage, which is near Tockley, as a retreat, we may remember that when Frances arrived in Tockley to arrange Con's funeral, Tockley seemed "beautiful" and "nice," "an English town," until she opened the car door and was nearly overcome by the stench of cooking sugar beet (292-93). Although the narrator says she cannot be sure of what the lawyer Harold Barnard was thinking at Con's funeral, she speculates that one of the things he may have been thinking about was "the Tockley smell" (336). Even Frances has to admit that although "it suits [her]," her "country cottage ... may not be paradise" (352).

None of the three cottages owned by the Ollerenshaw family turns out to be paradisiacal. The one that, on the surface, seems to come closest to being paradise is as much of a misrepresentation as the idealized Eel Cottage of Frances's selective memory or the fairy-tale Mays Cottage of her imagination. This third "cottage" belongs to Frances's brother Hugh who, like Frances and their father, is well-off. Despite his alcoholism, drinking being his way of dealing with the "Midlands sickness," Hugh is competent in his job in banking and able to afford a cottage in the Cotswolds, that area which is said to have "a fair claim to call itself the heart of England" (Smith 63). Hugh's "cottage" is "a large stone building--three cottages, in fact, knocked into one." Before going off to the conference in Adra, Frances took her four children there on a weekend visit with Hugh and his wife Natasha, their son Stephen and his baby daughter. One evening the adults sat "by an open fire, drinking, talking, remembering old times" while Frances's daughter Daisy sat

quietly with her niece on her knee. It appeared to Frances to be "[a] pleasant scene, a rural scene, a family scene" (181); it is a scene which might have been used to represent the quintessence of "Englishness," for the cottage is located "in a lovely part of the country—fertile, picturesque, with steep hills and valleys, verdant, unspoiled, expensive": "An idyllic position, everyone agrees." Besides that, the cottage has been made "exceptionally pretty" by Natasha, "whose domestic touch Frances at times had time to envy." We are also told that Natasha makes "real" everything from home-made bread and preserves to hand-made rugs (182). Sitting there, Frances thought that

[i]t felt safe, it felt like the country, undisturbed, with the black night and no lights in it outside the small windowpanes, timeless. It was an old cottage, it felt old and safe like a secure infancy. (186)

This impression prompts Frances to chide herself for being too restless to make a home like that and for having "never aimed for Natasha's virtues, Natasha's composure" (186-87).

Aware of Drabble's technique for questioning such scenes, however, we are not surprised when Frances's next thought was that "Natasha must have been very unhappy with Hugh as a husband" or when a little later, we are told that as she watched Hugh tend the fire, Frances

was thinking that any fancy that she could recall even a glimpse of her own childhood, or of an ideal childhood, in this house was an illusion for it was not her past nor the cottage's past that surrounded her. The cottage had belonged to labourers, had been cold and dark. Her own past, too, had been quite otherwise. (188)

We are given an even more depressing image of the rural past when Frances agrees with Hugh that Eel Cottage "had been a gloomy dump" and recalls that her grandmother's bread did not rise, that her mince was stewed in "an enamel dog dish" and that her cooking utensils were rusting. Frances knows that Eel Cottage had been "the real thing" (197) while Natasha's re-creation is an "illusion" (234). She later realizes that Natasha is not as content as she seems: she "slaved till exhaustion to produce this illusion of a home,"

Frances thinks, and she is now attending group therapy sessions (234).

Maintaining the illusion of a safe and comfortable domesticity is part of the legacy of "Englishness" as is the desire to hush up events which belie that illusion. When Frances first hears of Aunt Con's death, she cannot understand how the welfare social workers could have "completely overlooked" Con:

She had heard of loops in the network but surely not loops large enough to allow one whole old lady to starve to death in the second half of the twentieth century while relations sat in nearby Flaxam and Tockley eating bacon and eggs, and her parents dined on elaborately decorated meals in Hall. (268)

At the same time that she complains of the negligence of social workers, however, she thinks it was

bloody awful luck that the Sunday Examiner should have been into the subject of old ladies dying of hypothermia and starvation and bad housing conditions. If they hadn't been, Connie Ollerenshaw might have been buried in peace, without creating a scandal. (268)

Later when she is told that the press had given her cousin Janet a hard time, we are told

Frances had forgotten about the press: rightly she suspected. The Constance story had been a nonstory, and they must have realized it by now. The British public was tired of dead old ladies and the gaps in the social services: its indignation was exhausted. (295)

The point is that, tired or not, the British public, or a large part of it, hears about this old lady, "Connie, dead like a dog in a ditch with her stomach full of paper" (278) because that "nonstory" is made a part of the story of Frances Wingate, one of the "winners" in the social system. Because Frances is interested in the family history of the Ollerenshaws, she uncovers the story of Con's retreat, and because Frances is of interest to us, we are hooked into Con's story and Con is no longer just one of the dead old ladies with whom the public is bored.

Con's story not only makes present for us one of the "losers" in the England of the present, but also illustrates the generational differences that run through "Englishness."

Con's story might have been Frances's story as well had Frances been born when Con was, two generations before her own and a generation before her father's and the grammar school her father attended. The efforts of these earlier generations of Ollerenshaws to raise themselves socially have made it possible for Frances to become a first-class professional and a wealthy woman able to support herself and her children and, like Rosamund of *The Millstone*, able to get away with behaviour that working-class people could not.

### *The Ice Age*

Drabble's most sustained critique of "Englishness" as a cosy-cottage-style domesticity is contained in *The Ice Age*, her third novel of the seventies. The shortest and sharpest illustration of the "double thinking" that this version of "Englishness" requires is Kitty Friedman's refusal to acknowledge the violence that has been done to her. The narrator notes that Kitty's lounge exudes a "profound bourgeois peace, which not even death [Kitty's husband Max, killed by an IRA bomb] and mutilation [Kitty's loss of a foot in the same incident] had been able to disrupt." In it Kitty and her family are "too absorbed, too cocooned in their double-glazed interior" to register what is going on outside (159). Kitty thinks of her house as "warm, and safe, and comfortable," and she refuses to allow thoughts of Max's violent death to intrude: "Max had been exiled to the black outer wastes of incomprehension and impossibility" (161). In order for her to continue to believe in the myth of a perfect England, Kitty must deny reality to the violence which contradicts the myth.

The gloomiest of all the country cottages is that in Oxfordshire owned by Linton Hancox. Unlike the many middle-class owners of such cottages who have "tarted [them] up" (Smith 68), Linton has not even repaired his:

It was old, but it was shabby, cramped, and ill organized .... [It] was



bitterly cold, full of icy damp: being old, none of its doors or windows fitted, and the chill oozed in from the fields and the garden. The dining room was so cold that Anthony could see the backs of his hands turning blue as he ate the exceedingly tough partridge that seemed aptly enough to represent country comfort. (69)

Linton himself is as "depressing" for Anthony Keating as his cottage is. For much of the novel he seems so resistant to change and so imprisoned in old attitudes that he will never be able to cope, let alone compete, in modern England. Anthony thinks that

[p]oor Linton had the historical misfortune to be gifted in a dying skill and to have been insufficiently aware of the shrinking domain of his own subject .... He had come to a dead end, having chose what seemed, initially [twenty years before], a well-structured and secure career. (71)

Linton had been "a scholar, a poet and classicist" with "a good degree and a good post at Oxford" in Classics (67). By the late sixties, Anthony noticed that Linton was "becoming rather sour" and was beginning "to complain about falling standards in education," particularly in the Classics, and about "the state of poetry." Writing poetry that was "academic, intelligent, structured, delicate, evasive, perceptive, full of verbal ambiguities and traditional qualifications," he had been left behind by "the wave of beat poets, Liverpool poets, pub poets, popular poets" and his reaction to them "was one of amusement, then of hostility, then of contempt tinged with fear." He spent all of his time "berat[ing] society, which," he said, "had thrown away its cherished values for a myth of egalitarianism, for a nonsensical fantasy of a popular culture." Anthony does not share Linton's "curious nostalgia": "[t]he golden age of solid education which Linton evoked, to the mocking cries of bleak rooks, had not been like that at all, as he recalled" (IA 70). The last time Anthony had seen Linton he seemed "[u]nable to adapt, unable to learn new skills, obstinately committed to justifying the old ones" and he

sat there in his cottage, depressed on his low salary, with few prospects of promotion, writing cross letters to the papers about the falling standard of literacy, and sneering, if anyone cared to listen, about the inflated reputation of Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney--for it was not

simply the popular who now attracted his fire, it was enough that a poet was successful for Linton to resent his [or her] work. (72)

It is ironic, however, that it is Anthony Keating who is so critical of Linton and his country cottage since it is also Anthony who has the "overwhelming presumption" to buy himself High Rook, "an expensive country house" (8), on the strength of the profits he hoped to make in the property market and this despite his awareness of the problems associated with the value "Englishness" places on the home. At one point we are told that he

wondered why it was that the British, unlike some other nations, had traditionally considered it a good thing to own one's own house and one's little garden. Then he wondered how much space there would be left if everybody did in fact own a little house and a little garden. (IA 63)

Nevertheless, "the new Anthony Oxbridge Arts graduate turned property developer" (30) buys himself an estate which offers a "most undeveloped view" (4). In an echo of E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (115-116; 175), we are told that Anthony purchases High Rook (an allusion to Forster's own cottage, Rooksnest, in Hertfordshire) in an attempt "to escape panic and despondency" and "unpleasant" London. It had seemed to offer a retreat from "the disagreeable intrusions of London life, the people, the garbage, the traffic" (7), and there are brief periods when the illusion seems to tremble on the verge of reality and Anthony thinks that "country life [is] suiting him," that he "could perhaps lead a life away from London, a peaceful life with a peaceful rhythm" (175).

The most promising and, therefore, the most disappointing of these periods occurs after Alison Murray has returned from Wallacia and has recovered from the nervous breakdown (suffered on her return to a divided and depressed England). Anthony and Alison decide to "remove" themselves from the problems in the nation and take "possession" of the country estate (244). There they enjoy an idyllic spring: "Contentment fill[s] them in their safe and private place, and both [are] old enough to feel its rarity" (245);

but they are also aware that such "peace is ... expensive" and that, however spacious it seems, it is really "the smallest cell" (245-46). We are told that "for one whole evening" they are able to "fend off the incursions": they dine on their home produce, they read, they play the piano, and they sit by the fire listening to Mozart:

It seemed to them both that some secret was about to be revealed, was perhaps even there with them: the secret of living without ambition, agitation, hope. Intense silence flooded the house. They had stilled themselves to nothingness. It lasted: there it was. Neither moved, neither spoke. The fire faded. No sound from the world could reach them. Time paused: they heard its heart stop, they heard its breath hold, they heard the lapse of thudding and rustling and pumping and beating. They listened to the silence. (248)

The description is disturbing. The language is like that used to describe Anthony's "boredom" when he first stayed at High Rook alone. The narrator said then that for this "restless Londoner" even very brief periods between appointments had seemed "as though eternity had suddenly set in and would never shift .... Nothingness would yawn suddenly at him, worse than the prospect of a violent death" (35-36). The language also reminds us of that used to describe the death of the pheasant from a heart attack, the incident with which the novel opens. Drabble has explained that this large "artificially preserved" bird, dying of a heart attack (*IA* 3), is "a symbol of the death of the old culture" (Kenyon, *Woman Novelists Today* 96). By the old culture she said she meant "the Old World British imperialism" for which Anthony had been educated, even after its collapse (Interview with Parker and Todd 175).

There are times in the novel when both Alison and Anthony are aware that living at High Rook is, in Alison's words, "a completely artificial way of life" in an "Ancient Monument" (179-80). The problem is that they do not believe that they can make the adjustment to the contemporary situation. With the announcement of the discovery of North Sea Oil, Anthony himself wonders not only about the state of the nation—whether it

is "A senile Britain casting out its ghosts," "or a go-ahead Britain, with oil rig men toasting their mistresses in the pubs of Aberdeen"--but also about what he is--"A man of the past, the present, the future?" (206) It is Alison's view that Anthony belongs to the past, that there is now no place in England for "a man with Anthony's background and qualifications" (238), and indications are that she may be right.

Anthony had tried to become a man of the present when he gave up his career in television to become a property speculator, but there are indications even in that venture that he was trapped in the ideologies of the past: the fact that the property development company he and his two partners formed "inherited" the name of the sweets' factory they tore down and "became the Imperial Delight Company" which Anthony thought was "a satisfactory new identity" (26) and the fact that he had "a sense of empire" during the venture. As Ellen Cronan Rose points out, Anthony's participation in economic expansion reflects and reenacts the imperialist "spirit" (*The Novels of MD* 122). Neither his middle-class upbringing nor his middle-class education had prepared Anthony for post-imperial England. Commenting on the fact that Anthony did not look for a job in industry when he graduated from college, the narrator remarks that

so deeply conditioned are some sections of the British nation that some thoughts are deeply inaccessible to them .... Anthony Keating, child of the professional middle classes, reared in an anachronism as an anachronism, did not even see the [many "seductive"] offers: he walked past them daily, turned over pages daily, with as much indifference as if they had been written in Turkish or Hungarian. He thought himself superior to that kind of thing .... (16)

Anthony was at that time one of the "snobbish and unrealistic and obtuse" young men who formed the "clever set" at Oxford (18).

Anthony's conditioning started early, supervised by his father who was "a churchman and a schoolmaster teaching in an ancient cathedral city" (14). Later, Anthony

was sent to a "more distinguished public school" and from there to Oxford where he studied history (14). Near the end of the novel when he is stranded in Wallacia without his passport, Anthony recognizes the irony of having a degree in history that has taught him nothing about the history of the Balkans except for a few dates: "I am an ignorant fool, thought Anthony; here is history, and I can't understand a word anyone is saying, and my only aim is to get out of it as quickly as possible" (263).

It is only when he offers to go to Wallacia to rescue Alison's daughter Jane (imprisoned there for causing an accident which killed two people) that Anthony becomes aware of the extent of his conditioning. Staying in the guest room of a flat belonging to Humphrey Clegg of the Foreign Office, Anthony thinks that it "was a room of the past. Nothing in it spoke of a future. Victorian England surrounded him." Prompted by these surroundings, Anthony castigates himself and other middle-class people of his generation for having failed to bring about "the new bright classless enterprising future of Great Britain":

So that had been it, that had been England. Anthony stirred restlessly. Surely, even as a boy, he and his clever friends had mocked the notion of empire? Surely they had all known the past was dead, that it was time for a new age? But nothing had risen to fill the gap. He and his clever friends had been reared as surely, conditioned as firmly, as those like Humphrey Clegg, who had entered the old progression, learned the old rules, played the old games.

He thinks of the various ways he and his friends had tried to bring about a future for England but concludes that "[t]hey had produced no new images, no new style, merely a cheap strained exhausted imitation of the old one. Nothing had changed" (259).

Anthony's inability to free himself from tradition and act in new ways has dire consequences for him in Wallacia where he is first held hostage and then imprisoned: "[h]e looked what he was, an English gentleman of the middle classes" (282) who had only "old-world possibilities" to fall back on (283). We leave Anthony in prison in Wallacia

reading Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and thinking only of "alone justifying the ways of God to man" (294). I agree with Sadler that Anthony has now got what he wished for when he was released from debt by the sale of the Riverside property and had to decide once again, what to do with his life: "[n]o guardian angel would put him quietly away in a cell where he could go quietly mad," he thought, and "[h]e wished profoundly that he was where Len Wincobank was [in prison], out of harm's way" (225). We leave him in a cell and, if not quite mad, at least still imprisoned in the ideologies of the past. Whether he fancies himself another Boethius or another Milton, or both, he is unable to escape the effects of his conditioning in "all those restricting, reassuring wombs" such as his public school, Oxford, the BBC and ITV (120).

It is ironic that, stranded in Wallacia as a result of responding to "an appeal to a Chivalric spirit that was condemned as archaic by Cervantes" (260), Anthony should find himself reading Linton Hancox's recent translation of the Theban plays by Sophocles, the introduction to which showed that "even Linton, old world as he was, had become a reluctant structuralist" (283). Drabble's point may be that Linton's education in the Classics is finally not as inhibiting as Anthony's education in history. According to Brian Doyle, history used to be part of "what were called the 'English subjects' (to distinguish them from studies such as Classics)" in the early years when English began to replace Classics as "a central element within the curriculum of higher education" in England (Doyle 2-4). Doyle argues that this switch was a response to a "crisis of leadership," of "attempts to define what specific kinds of leadership qualities would be needed to maintain the overseas empire as well as ensuring secure government at home" (17). As we have seen, Anthony eventually recognizes that his Oxbridge education had "conditioned" him to operate in "the world that had gone." He is, he thinks, "a child of a lost empire, disinherited" (259-60). He can, he believes, do nothing to bring about the future of

England though he has faith that it will get over what Drabble in an interview called its "empire crisis, its middle-age crisis" (Interview with Parker and Todd 174).

The novel expresses a much less optimistic attitude. When Giles told the comedian Mike Morgan that his material was outdated because the English have lost their superiority, Mike asked, "So what next[?]" and we are told that

nobody answered. But it seemed to Anthony ... that there would be an answer, for the nation if not for himself, and he saw ... some apparition: of this great and puissant nation, a country lying there surrounded by the grey seas, the land green and grey, well-worn, long inhabited, not in chains, not in thrall, but a land passing through some strange metamorphosis, through the intense creative lethargy of profound self contemplation, not idle, not defeated, but waiting still, assembling defenses against the noxious oily tides of fatigue and contempt that washed insistently against her shores. An aerial view, a helicopter view of this precious isle came into his head, and he saw the seas washing forever, or more or less forever, around the white and yellow and pink and grey sands and pebbles of the beaches, this semiprecious stone set in a leaden sea, our heritage .... (221)

The question and Anthony's vision of an eternal England recall a comparable moment in *Howards End* (after Margaret tells Helen of Henry Wilcox's marriage proposal):

There was a long silence during which the tide returned into Poole harbour .... England was alive ... crying for joy through the mouths of her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas. What did it mean? ... Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity? (178)

Drabble uses the same Miltonic and Shakespearean allusions and the same contrasting images of Britain as imperial power and isolated island home that Forster does,<sup>10</sup> but the effect is very different. Drabble is, as Hannay points out, "playing off [the] images [from Milton and Shakespeare] with ironic phrases: 'oily tides,' 'helicopter view,' 'semiprecious stone,' and 'more or less forever'" (Hannay 90). Through this ironic play, she is using particulars of contemporary British life to foreground change and to show that a retreat into

the past is impossible. Forster, on the other hand, insists again and again that rural England offers the individual consciousness a way to transcend the particulars of "modern life," a way to "see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect ..." (165; 178; 164). To be more specific, in Forster, although "[t]he reason fails" in the face of the view from the summit of Purbeck hills, "the imagination swells, spreads and deepens, until it becomes geographic and encircles England" (*HE* 170-71) and we are left with what Brooker and Widdowson call a "hushed rhapsody" (Colls and Dodd 138), whereas in Drabble the imagination also fails--"[t]he view shimmer[s], fragment[s], dissolve[s] like a cloud"--and we are left with the awkward, empty "silence" of the three men for moments after the vision disappears (*IA* 221).

Drabble told V. G. Myer that she had much difficulty with this passage:

I intended to redeem [the] overwhelming gloom by some kind of vision of Britain rising out of its chains, and in fact, I've used the quotation from Milton about Britain stirring in its chains and rising up. But when I got to the passage, ... *I couldn't get it*. I couldn't resolve the problem I'd set myself, which was to have some kind of uplift, optimism, resolution .... I think that was reflecting not art, but life. (qtd. in *MD:ARG* 106-07)

That which broke the silence of the men was "a gunshot in the street below," but the characters are so conditioned to think of England as a safe haven, "unlike New York or Detroit," that "[t]hey assumed it was the backfiring of a car and did not much react" (221).

As we have seen, Anthony himself is aware that he ends up imprisoned in a foreign country because his class and education conditioned him for "the world that has gone" (259-60). What he does not seem aware of is that his nationality may be perceived as reason enough to keep him imprisoned. The English Ambassador thinks that the Wallacians must know that Anthony is innocent of the charge of espionage and that he is of "no importance" (289); yet they do not release him. Anthony tells the ambassador that one "unpleasant aspect" of his imprisonment "had been the behaviour of certain of his fellow



prisoners, who had taken against him on account of his nationality" (291), but he does not seem to suspect that the Wallacians may be holding him as a representative of "Englishness," as revenge for England's past arrogance in claiming not only material but moral superiority for itself. The point is made by Alison Murray. Musing on the imprisonment of her daughter Jane in Wallacia, Alison thinks that "England was a safe, shabby mangy old lion now: anyone could tweak her tail" and that British people were now tried and imprisoned in countries that had been British colonies and she concludes:

Malice and justice united to persecute the once so prosperous, once so arrogant, once so powerful of nations, the nation on whose empire the sun had never set. Powerless, teased, angry, impotent, the old country muttered and protested and let itself be mocked. And it served it right, Alison could not but think, in many ways. For too long the English had assumed they had a monopoly not only on money but on morals: who could blame the new nations of the world for wishing to take their revenge? (91)

Cultural superiority has been a fundamental assumption of "Englishness" and it has served not only to subordinate countries within the British Empire but also to subordinate classes and regions within Britain. Drabble makes this point through the brief appearance of the comic Mike Morgan. Anthony remembers him from Oxford where he "had ... been clown, wit and intellectual, a working-class intellectual, son of a Welsh miner, grammar-school boy from the green valley, clever, outrageous, camp, severe" (212). Mike is now as sour and embittered as Simon Camish (of *The Needle's Eye*), but, unlike Simon, he has chosen not to suppress his impulses. He has returned from America with a one man comedy act through which he vents his anger at "the English" for assuming superiority over him on the basis of both his nationality and his class background. Mike had wanted to be a Shakespearean actor, but he was given only bit parts at Stratford, and he was not successful in these. "Looking back, with hindsight," we are told, "Anthony wondered whether the problem with Mike's Shakespearean performances was that he exuded an ineradicable air of disapproval. Second Citizens are not supposed to disapprove of their

betters" (213). In other words, in art as in life, Mike resisted the subordinate status he was expected to accept within "Englishness" and he left England for America.

On his return to England, he turns the "Englishness" of the English against them. Anthony does not find Mike's act amusing although he himself has a Shavian-like contempt for "all the desperate, comfortable, lazy liberal folk" making up Mike's audience (215). Mike is "impassive, cold, disdainful" towards this audience which, Anthony thinks, "liked it when he began to berate them for being what they were: drunk, idle, affluent, capitalist, elitist" (216). When Anthony asks Mike, "What is it, in the English, that makes them take it so meekly?" Mike's answer sums up the essence of "Englishness" as Drabble sees it:

"The English are guilty, they are self-denigrating, they are masochistic, they love to be kicked," he said, "because of their deeply engrained inalienable disgusting certainty of superiority." (IA 220)

Giles Peters, Anthony's friend and partner, tells Mike that his jester act is "out of date," that "the English are changing" and are not "going to find life quite so funny because they've lost their superiority" (220). As Mike points out, though, he still has an audience and what Anthony calls "[t]he theatre-going elite of Britain" (215) is still laughing which suggests that the English sense of superiority still survives as a form in search of a substance.

Drabble told an interviewer that she shared Anthony Keating's faith that Britain would recover from its economic crisis of the seventies with its "character" intact because

[t]here is a low expectation in [England] which is maddening in many ways; it infuriates Anthony Keating, but nevertheless it is a great safeguard, because you don't start throwing yourself out of the city windows when things go wrong. You just accept and carry on. (Interview with Creighton 30-31)

In *The Ice Age*, however, Drabble blames this conservative cautious attitude towards change for the "depression," both economic and spiritual, that is gripping the country:

A huge icy fist, with large cold fingers was squeezing and chilling the

people of Britain, that great and puissant nation, slowing down their blood, locking them into immobility, fixing them in a solid stasis, like fish in a frozen river. (IA 60)

It is only men like Len Wincobank, men from a working-class background, who are interested in the future of England. Len considers himself to be "a man of vision" in pursuit of "[t]he material paradise" (126-27), a man who has landed in jail because England is "shabby, lazy, unambitious, [and] complacently high-minded" (49).

Even Alison Murray has to admit that "Len had energy, ambition, vision ..." (171); but his is not the right vision according to her. Even though she "realize[s] that she ha[s] no picture of the future, either her own or the country's" and that she belongs to a generation of the middle classes which has "fragmented and dissolved into uncertainty" (232), she takes the high moral tone of "Englishness" when it comes to property speculation and development. Alison is like "the conservationists with ... high moral standards" that Drabble criticized for "trying to preserve a very second-rate lot of buildings" in London and impeding the development of "a fine building" by an entrepreneur architect (Interview with Hannay 134). Drabble did indicate that she shared some of Alison's horror at "the sort of anonymous, profiteering shopping malls" like those in *The Ice Age* which "look absolutely appalling," but she said she did not have "a moral attitude" to it (Interview with Hannay 134). Alison does. She rails at Anthony about "the monstrous mess that the developers have made of Northam, about the wickedness of Len Wincobank and his like, and the naive folly of Anthony's getting mixed up in such a money-grabbing immoral corrupt line of business," and she complains of "the state of the nation," that it is no longer as "nice" as it used to be (179). Unlike Anthony, Alison does not really want "the new bright classless enterprising future of Great Britain" that Anthony and his colleagues had tried to bring about and which Anthony believes is "[i]n jail with Len Wincobank" (259). Imprisoned in her "Englishness," Alison yearns nostalgically for a mythical England.

Both Lynn Veach Sadler and John Hannay write of Alison Murray's importance for what Sadler calls "the 'condition-of-England' theme" in *The Ice Age* (104), but whereas Sadler sees Alison as being "unlike England" in not being able to recover and says that Drabble's "smug dismissal of Alison is a weakness" (114), Hannay sees Alison, in her withdrawal and in her unchanging life, as being "more closely representative of England" than Anthony is and as embodying a "vision of ordinary English life" which is "narrow." He says that "[h]er life is beyond imagining because her own lack of imagination rigidifies and creates stagnation" (99). I would add to Hannay's interpretation that at the end of the novel Drabble contrasts not England and Alison but Britain and Alison: "*Britain* will recover, but not Alison Murray" (295; emphasis added). At the end of the novel, then, Alison may continue, as she has throughout, to speak for an England and a general sense of "Englishness" that is no longer recoverable.<sup>11</sup>

Through Alison Murray, Drabble may be invoking the contemporary nostalgia for an idealized England, a nostalgia which has precedents going back at least to the *fin de siècle* to "the 'condition of England' fiction" that appeared in the 1880-1920 period which Brooks and Widdowson describe as "the fiction of an essential England." According to these critics, this fiction was a response by writers "confronted ... with signs of class mobility and conflict and a newer English landscape of expanding metropolis, suburbia and industrialism" (133). What characterized it was nostalgia for "old England," "a mythical England," or a rural England which led writers to "a ... contradictory affirmation of the reality of the unreal, of the essentiality of the marginal" (Colls and Dodd 136) and to making England as it was then seem to be not-England (137). Alison, who considers herself to be "a thoroughly English person" (*IA* 91), who has a face which is "as typically English as the English rose" (33) and who is very conscious of her identity as an

"Englishwoman" (169), shares with the writers of the *fin de siècle* the wistful memory of an earlier England and she, too, attempts to make the England of the present seem un-English. On her return to England from Wallacia, confronted with continuing newspaper reports of Britain's economic decline and cutbacks in the Health Service and plagued by a "terrible fear" which she thinks she sees also in the faces of the "shifting population" at St. Pancras station who walk warily, "expecting explosions," she expresses disbelief over and over again: "It can't be like this ... how can it have got to be like this? Who has so undermined, so terrified, so threatened and subdued us?" (169) The separation of we harmless peaceful English ("us") from some unidentified harmful malicious other ("who") reflects her attempt to reserve for "the English" something of the sense of moral superiority that she criticized elsewhere.

While she was in Wallacia she yearned to be back in England which she was still thinking of at the time as being "nice," by comparison with Wallacia which she said later "probably never was very nice" (179). Alison's comparison of England and Wallacia echoes that comparison of "Englishness" and Otherness identified by critics of "Englishness" as a primary means by which "Englishness" has defined itself as a superior culture. According to M. Spiering in *Englishness: Foreigners and Images of National Identity in Postwar Literature*, the comparison survives even in the second half of the twentieth century. He argues that even for English writers who are satirical in their treatment of the "English" novel and of "English" life as boring, what distinguishes the English from people of other nationalities is their "humanness" (73), "niceness" or "tenderness" (90).

What is important to note here is that Drabble is questioning this claim for "English" cultural benignity by referring to some of the real tensions that it hides. Alison's is the kind of "blind social patriotism" that Hanif Kureishi questions near the end of his essay

"London and Karachi" (286). Kureishi illustrates the problem with such "clichés" by analyzing George Orwell's 1941 essay "England Your England" in which Orwell claims that "the gentleness of the English civilization is perhaps its most marked characteristic" and that "tolerance" is a "continuous, persist[ent]" aspect of English society (Kureishi 285-86). Kureishi asks, "But does it persist?" and his answer is that "[t]olerant, gentle British whites have no idea how little of this tolerance is experienced by blacks [in Britain]. No idea of the violence, hostility and contempt directed against black people every day by state and individual alike ..." (286). Drabble does not single out blacks from whites at the station (there are "old ladies..., a black man..., pallid girls..., an Indian" [169]). What she does is make this "Englishwoman" question her blind patriotism by making her physically aware of the fear that belies the claim for English benignity.

Aware of the class and regional differences that run through "Englishness," Drabble ties Alison's attitude to the class and the region of her birth. As "a Southerner, brought up in Hampshire," Alison cannot see in the North of England anything of the beauty she associates with the essence of the England that she thinks is gone: she is frightened by the North and complains that developers there have marred "the very face of the country" (180). Because she identifies herself so closely with the beauty of Southern England and with refinement, she is unable to cope with the England in which she is living and she suffers a nervous breakdown.

True to her character as an "Englishwoman," however, she recovers temporarily from her depression when Anthony, released from debt and pronounced well by his doctor, goes on an extended drinking bout. She becomes once again a pattern of domestic virtues and plays perfectly the role of the "quietly competent" spouse that Alison Light says has been the major role for women within "Englishness" since the 1930s (211). Alison Murray herself "ha[s] a nasty suspicion that she prefer[s] the drinker" over "the quiet

sensitive man" Anthony had been because she can "manage, dominate, support" him as she can her daughter Molly who has cerebral palsy. Alison has left herself no choice but to find her identity in domesticity. She had long since given up a promising career as an actress and had devoted her time to Molly and to working for the Society for Disabled Children in part because of Molly's condition but also in part because "[l]ike a good wife, ... [she] had chosen to retire rather than to compete," since her ex-husband, an actor, had resented her success (*IA* 31).

That it is her southern middle-class background which prevents Alison from seeing in the northern urban environment any hope for her own future or for England's is evident in the contrast between her and Maureen Kirby. Maureen is a young woman from the working-class who was Len Wincobank's mistress and who had shared with Len his enjoyment of "travelling first-class" and of dining in "posh" restaurants and staying in "posh" hotels (239). When he was sent to jail she suffered anxiety about her own future as well as about his. She told Alison "that she had broken out in spots, and been driven into sleeping with her boss" (236). At that point Maureen thought that in the relationship with Len, "[s]he'd got ideas above her station, as her mum told her ..." (240). Her relationship with Derek Ashby, her architect employer, is not a repeat of her relationship with Len since she is not dependent on him financially either as his mistress or, later, as his wife. Having the job as Derek's secretary means that she "can pay [her] own rent, and buy [her] own piece of cheese, and [when she wants she can] shut [her] own door on [her]self ..." (240). By the time she marries Derek she will have become, with his encouragement, even more independent of him: having taken advantage of the new opportunities for women in business management, she will have gone in for retraining and will be "a representative of the new world of businesswomen" (243) and of an England Alison cannot even imagine. Whereas Alison loses her sense of self, of her identity as an "Englishwoman," in the

England of the present, Maureen, freed from the English notion of keeping her "station," gains a sense of self and of identity in the modern world.

The sense of uneasiness Drabble spoke of in connection with the resolution of *The Realms of Gold* is even more pronounced in *The Ice Age* where, despite the gloom hanging over them, none of the main characters starve or commit suicide. Drabble is aware that difficult as life is for the middle-class characters, it is much less difficult than it is for large numbers of people in England, people whose voices are not heard by the main characters in the novel. Mimicking the strategy of deliberate narrative exclusion used by Forster in his "condition of England" novel *Howards End* where he says, "We are not concerned with the very poor" who "are unthinkable and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet" (58), Drabble says, in one of her commentaries on "the state of the nation," "There were also the real poor: the old, the unemployed, the undesirable immigrants .... Let us not think of them. Their rewards will be in heaven" (62). Like Forster's comment, Drabble's is deliberately disruptive and disturbing. It leaves us feeling uneasy about the omission, particularly since we are made part of the complicity to silence these people. At the same time, of course, the fact that they are mentioned at all forces us to think of them and jolts us out of complacency, but whereas Forster makes his remark in the context of a reactionary appeal to what Brooker and Widdowson call "a preferred pastoral 'civilization' at rest ... held against the acknowledged logic of change" (Colls and Dodd 139), Drabble makes hers in the context of a critique of the persistence of this appeal. Specifically, Forster's appeal is, in his own words, to "the brightly coloured civilizations of the past" before the "angel of Democracy had arisen, enshadowing the classes" (*Howards End* 58). It is an appeal to that idealized but exploitative traditional hierarchical rural social order which Raymond Williams traces in the "country-house" literary tradition (CC 22-34). Forster's position is reminiscent of George Eliot's in *Felix Holt* where, Williams points out, "a whole reality is



admitted in the industrial districts; a selected reality in the rural" (CC 180). Forster mentions "the very poor" and the "abyss" they inhabit only to illustrate the precariousness of Leonard Bast's position in a democratic England in the present by contrast with the stability of his position under the old order when "he would have had a definite status," when "his rank and his income would have corresponded" (HE 58). What Forster hopes for is an arrest of the democratic movement--for, in Margaret Schlegel's words, a future "civilization that won't be a movement, because it will rest on the earth." She hopes that the country house "is the future as well as the past" (329). By contrast, Drabble knows, in Anthony's words, "that one cannot turn the clock back" (IA 163), and that such houses belong to the past and not to the future. The point of the novel is the necessity, however disorienting that may be, for the people of Britain to break out of the old patterns which are "locking them into immobility, fixing them in a solid stasis" (60). What is needed, Drabble argues, is the "movement" that Forster feared.

### *The Middle Ground*

There is only one character in Drabble's four novels of the seventies who comes anywhere close to creating a pattern for a future "domesticity" that Drabble herself could celebrate. In *The Middle Ground*, Kate provides a contrast to Evelyn Stennett who is another of the "icons of Englishness." Having met through the Parent-Teacher association of the school their children attend, Kate and Evelyn have become friends, but they are very different from each other in family background, education and present lifestyles. Evelyn has memories of "a nice safe middle-class childhood" (151-52), filled with a sense of "continuity, tradition, safety, pleasantness" as memories of her own childhood fuse with those of her children while she gazes at "the grandfather clock that had been inherited from, indeed, her grandfather" (208-09). Kate, on the other hand, has memories of a miserable,

insecure, lower-middle-class childhood, much of it spent in Arblay Street, Romley in East London, and she "has said several times that she can imagine no way of life more cramping, painful and pointless than the lower-middle-class family aspiring to be better than it is" (21). Such was the case with Kate's family, particularly with her mother who considered the Arblay Street neighbourhood "beneath her" and who "strove to set herself apart, to cut herself off, and succeeded" (17); she succeeded so well that she became an agoraphobic who never left the house (23), one of the ghosts of "Englishness." To make matters worse for Kate and her brother Peter, their father who was, like his grandfather and father before him, a sewage worker, was also "an eccentric": he was "self-educated, self-made, a working-class intellectual with a passionate interest in his work" and he used to lecture neighbours about the sewage works in a "purposefully, provocatively irritating and alienating ... manner" (19). For these reasons Kate and her brother "lived precariously, nervously, subject to teasing, mockery, contempt, outcasts in their own community" (20).

Kate's education was also different from Evelyn's. The school Evelyn attended emphasized the traditional English virtues of "service" and "self-denial," the result being that most of Evelyn's school friends are "housewives now, though some had pursued careers in medicine, nursing, teaching. The caring professions, the women's professions." These were the professions the school encouraged the girls to enter, "but it had not taught its pupils to aim high" even in them. Evelyn's friend Stella wonders if that is the reason she is now a physiotherapist and considered "a second-class employee" at the hospital where she works when she might have been, and indeed wanted to be, a doctor (139-40). Low as these expectations were, however, they were not as low as those for Kate. Kate's Secondary Modern School at Romley Fourways

was in those days a dull, restrictive, traditional school, which aimed to keep

its girls as quiet as possible .... The academic standards were not high; the brighter girls were steered towards jobs as secretaries and bank clerks and nursery nurses. (26)

The boring curriculum and low expectations were attributed to the headmistress who "was an elderly spinster in the last years of her career, whose outlook on life was dour, negative, unnerving." Kate remembers that "[h]er cultured middle-class tones depressed [the girls] and made them feel inferior" (26-27). In the Afterword to *Forever England*, Alison Light speaks of the effect upon her of just such tones. Having been born to working-class people, Light was very sensitive to a "posh" accent as one of "the forms of English snobbery" (215):

For many years even the sound of an educated woman's voice would make me wince and squirm. It was the voice of the employer and the landlady, ... of the girls I encountered at college who didn't know the right end of a broom, and of the friends and colleagues who, when they want to be funny, put on working-class accents. (220)

Light says it took her many years to realize that "even the most privileged have their deprivations," that "there are differences within class formations as well as outside them" and that some members of the middle class, particularly women, suffer from "instabilities" in their "identities" (220-21). Looking back, Kate also realizes that the headmistress's tones may have been as defensive as they were offensive, that they were a substitute for the "confident equanimity" which Miss Simmons lacked. She

began to think that Miss Simmons had been physically frightened of her pupils, that the sight of them sitting or standing before her, sullen, bored, ominously fertile, potentially rebellious, must have been as unnerving to her as the sight of an angry mob to a Victorian millowner .... (27)

Kate now believes this woman suffered from "some kind of insecurity," which was probably connected with anxieties about her own sexuality.

Kate seemed to be in a better social position when her father was promoted and the family moved to Amalfi Road on the other side of the bank: "It was just two miles away,"

we are told, "but the social difference was enormous" (22). Although the family situation is no better for Kate (if anything it gets worse), Kate is able to take advantage of being in a new neighbourhood to "leap from timid, persecuted outcast to queen of the playground" at the Girls' Secondary Modern at Romley Fourways. Here Kate learns how to turn "horrible and discreditable ... subject matter" into "a joke" (25): "out they all came [the members of her family, sly Mr. Bly, the sewage works, etc.], translated into art. It was like a kind of magic, turning shit into gold ..." (26). Had Kate not learned this particular "art of misrepresentation," she might have become as embittered as Simon Camish in *The Needle's Eye*. Commenting on the humour in her novels, Drabble said she thinks "that humour, after all, is the way we get through life. When bad things happen to us, we often retell them later as jokes," but she also said she thinks that we can "go too far with laughter and use it as a form of escapism" and that she deals with this in *The Middle Ground* (Interview with Whitehill 71). Kate's sense of humour allows her to survive her cramping painful lower-middle-class childhood, but it also covers up a very unpleasant social reality which is likely to continue to exist if it is made to seem acceptable through humour.

It was fortunate for Kate that she was introduced to the Highbury New Park scene at Hunt's house and to the bohemianism of the Armstrong home. Hunt's house was a great "cultural shock" for a teen-aged Kate who knew not what to make of the "amazing variety of people" who passed through it. Later she was to learn that the "shifting population of friends and lodgers" (30-31) was "united by a spirit of homosexuality." At the time, she knew only that the atmosphere there was very different from that at her house. According to Kate, Hunt's

pad, far from being a cosy refuge, was always seething with ill-will, with sullen or vocal disaffected acolytes, with emotional dramas, hurt feelings, double crossing and double meanings. (31)

Kate found this volatile atmosphere "highly stimulating." One of the things that both

shocked and pleased her was "the dirt [which], after the shiny satin surfaces and lustre vases of Amalfi Road, was quite a revelation .... It was an act of rebellion to sit on such a [dirty] cushion, to stare at such tattered curtains, to drink tea from so cracked a mug" (31-32). The reason Kate finds this atmosphere so attractive is that it offers her a variety of alternative lifestyles, none presented as any more proper than the other: "[i]t was almost as though [she'd] been put down in a shop of lifestyles and told, there they are, take your pick" (31-32).

This is also what Kate says the Armstrongs offered at their "large, ugly house" near Hampstead to which Kate was introduced by Stuart Armstrong (her then prospective but now ex-husband): a "way out of the mistakes and embarrassments of a lower-middle-class lifestyle" that was "not upward into the middle classes, but out as it were sideways into a kind of comfortable uncompetitive Bohemia" (36). At the Armstrong house there was also "a high emotional temperature: kisses, embraces, tears, endearments, shrieks of joy and despair were the stuff of daily life" (35). For Kate, who shares with Drabble's earlier "wild" women an excess of identity unacceptable to "Englishness," such "warmth" was a revelation, and it is to the Armstrongs, Kate thinks, that she "owes the ease with which she embraces her own children and colleagues, the liberality of her own endearments: they taught her an emotional style ..." (36).

Her acquaintance with these subcultures helped Kate to develop a professional as well as a domestic style that works for her for some time. Kate once referred to herself as "A walking anomaly, a walking hybrid" and hybridization has been the secret of her public as well as her personal appeal. In the case of her journalistic career,

[h]er lower-middle-class origins, onto which she grafted the language and opinions of the artistic and articulate middle class, proved an invaluable asset; she could communicate with a large audience. (39)

Hybridization did not mean that Kate became wholly representative of conventional

middle-class opinions: "she was bold" and resisted the pressure from "[s]queamish editors [who] tried from time to time to tone her down," and she succeeded in "creat[ing] a place for herself and set[ting] a good price on it" (39). Nevertheless, as Kate is aware, she gained a voice within "Englishness" only because of that alchemical-like humour which changed painful experience into a joke, something to be laughed at rather than taken seriously.

When Kate compares her work and her domestic situation to Evelyn's she is sometimes troubled by the difference:

Evelyn was a good woman, a woman with a conscience. She went out of her own way, and worked long hours [as a social worker]. Whereas I, thought Kate, I merely at random scatter my notions abroad like bird seed, and accept the visitations of people like Mujid [her Iraqi visitor] and Hunt and all those silly men I get mixed up with, and the children's awful friends, because I haven't the strength to say no .... Evelyn goes home to her white house and shuts the door. Then she gives proper dinner parties with proper food. And she has Ted after a fashion. She draws lines, she makes demarcations. She is a proper woman. And I, I mess about and straggle and excuse myself and giggle and turn everything into a bad joke, because I can't do anything properly. (115)

The one time we do see Kate try to organize "a proper social occasion," it turns into "a classic social horror," according to Hugo. On the spur of the moment Kate had "decided to kill several birds with one stone" and had told her ex-brother-in-law Paul that she would go to the theatre to see a preview of a play by a mutual friend and meet Paul's American visitors if she could take Mujid and Hugo along and make an evening of it. Never mind that the playwright is a Jewish South African and that Paul's American friends are also Jewish while Mujid is from Iraq. Never mind either that Hugo was taken prisoner and held hostage by the Kurds during the Kurdish battle for independence, which accounts for his "absent arm," while Mujid happens to be in favour of Kurdish independence. Kate hopes that Hugo can help her out with Mujid because Hugo is a "war hero" and can speak Arabic (88). She might have known, had she stopped to think, that her guests (an Arab, some

Jews and an American feminist) would not feel constrained by "English" social custom and would end up, as they do, talking politics and religion, subjects tabooed by that custom.

It is difficult to imagine Evelyn getting herself involved in such a continental-style dinner party. As Kate noted, Evelyn's dinner parties are very "proper"—meaning very "English"—occasions, and the glimpse we are given of one of them bears this out. Evelyn and her guests avoid potentially sensitive topics like politics and religion and instead "talk of sex and poetry" (209). For Evelyn it is "a relief ... to sit in one's own home" after a wearying day of social work spent among the socially disadvantaged and disaffected. "Why venture out of it?" she wonders. "Why not stay inside in the warm, like [her sisters] Isobel and Josephine?" (209) Although Evelyn does continue to venture outside her home, she never gets outside the conventional English middle-class values it represents. As her daughter Vicky is aware, Evelyn has "become a slave to convention" and is "trying to do too many things at once." The result is that she is too exhausted to enjoy the "animated" after-dinner conversation of Ted and the guests, and Vicky finds her asleep (209).

The fact that Ted has extramarital love affairs, the last but one having been with Kate, does not worry Evelyn very much because she thinks he is not likely to divorce her and marry again, especially not Kate. Musing on his affair with Kate, Evelyn thinks that

he didn't want to live with her. He wanted a big house with polished floors, and a wife who could and would cook dinner for his colleagues. A life with Kate would not have suited him at all. She was too disorganized for him; he could never have taken the constant flux of her home, the lack of regular meals, the wild opinions, the eccentric outbursts, the haphazard hospitality, the Hunts and Mujids and Stuarts with which Kate surrounded herself. The drinking companions, the riff-raff, the spongers, the lunatics. (147-48)

Evelyn is right about Ted. All indications are that even if he loved Evelyn when he married her, he would not have married her had she not been part of "a charmed circle" connected with "the academic and medical worlds, which were the worlds Ted intended to besiege"

(43). Being from a background not dissimilar to Kate's, Ted had been different from Kate in wanting to move upward in, rather than outward from, the middle classes, and he thinks that in marrying Evelyn, who has two sisters similar to her in certain respects, he got

an impressive package .... Well informed, well read, witty, original, and above all so unshakeably, so unquestioningly confident. Never a moment's doubt of their right to their own opinions ever seemed to cross their minds .... Breeding, intelligence and education, all in the same deal. Whatever uncertainties they suffered in private they brought none of them to the dinner table. (206)

What Evelyn provides for Ted is what Batsleer et al say the heroines of the popular English romance can offer males who would otherwise be excluded from it by virtue of "class, nation [or] race": what they offer is "pure Englishness, a background and the anchor of respectability" (Batsleer et al 97). We are told that when Ted first met Evelyn, out in Gambia, "she seemed to represent an unfamiliar world, and a world that he wanted; a world of good connections, security, style" (42-43). Besides her own "well-mannered virtues" (51), Evelyn brought with her the network of family and friends that Ted needed in order to be a success in medicine. After marrying Evelyn he switched from microbiology to medicine and, when qualified, back to microbiology "with a special interest in the history of epidemics" (40-41). Since then he has spent little time on research from which he "was diverted by an increasing number of invitations" to sit on all kinds of high-profile advisory committees for government and the WHO, to attend conferences and emergency investigations of epidemics (41). As both Evelyn and Kate are aware, Ted is not likely to want to divorce Evelyn since that would make his place within the "charmed circle" less secure.

Ted once told Kate that she disliked statistics because "her own situation was so anomalous, sociologically, that she felt that the law of averages threatened her right to exist" (52). As indicated above, Kate's domestic situation is far from average. Mary



Hurley Moran points out that the conception of "family" is broadened in *The Middle Ground* where Kate "finds herself developing a new kind of family structure, one which includes the various friends--old and new, English and foreign--who gravitate toward her and her warm vibrant home" (MD 77) and Wojcik-Andrews describes this extended family as "a global community" (193).<sup>12</sup> A typical evening at Kate's house has "an air of emergency." The house is too full of people and the evening involves numerous interruptions: the phone rings repeatedly, the doorbell chimes and Kate goes about in her best dress brandishing the sludge-covered bottle-brush she is using to clean the washbasin overflow (90-91). Hugo thinks that "Kate conducted and orchestrated all these interruptions with a verve that implied she had laid them on especially for her guests' amusement: here am I, busy Kate, comic Kate, conducting my own little modern domestic symphony, isn't it delightful?" (91)

In "An Invitation to a Dinner Party," Judith Ruderman argues that "Drabble is one of the women who are helping 'to mythologize the transformative energies of domesticity'" in opposition to the patriarchal myth of domesticity with its negative drain on women (112). Kate is well aware that there is a difference between the way she views domesticity and the way some men view it. She says, "it is true that many men have curious expectations of domestic happiness" (100), and she should know given her "fling" with "one impossible man after another," eight in all, after she decided to abort the baby with spina bifida and learned that Ted, the father of the baby, was already having another affair: "[t]he men, she said, behaved like caricatures out of a male chauvinist pin-up book, destroying her naively held faith that men were human after all and behaved decently if you treated them decently" (74). Among other things, these men expected Kate to clean, wash and iron and cook for them because she is a woman (74-78). We do not doubt Kate's

word for their chauvinistic attitudes since she does not like "to find herself echoing" militant feminists: "the cries of hate from the sexual battleground horrified her" (74); but she has to admit that these men were anything but decent in their treatment of her.

Kate does manage to gather about her some men who are decent and they help with the preparation of food for the large dinner party she is about to give when the novel ends. There is Mujid and his fiancée Simone together "stirring up their couscous" and Hunt, recovering from a drunken stupor, "contributing a mushroom salad" (260). The scene is very pleasing to Kate who thinks,

The world is changing ... and all the nice friendly people will inherit it. What a hope, what a hope. But what else can one do but hope? Her own kitchen seemed hopeful enough, charged with an atmosphere of excitement, of end-of-term abandon: ... Mujid and Hunt were now on the best of terms, as they quarrelled over possession of the sharpest kitchen knife. (261)

Having done her own food preparations earlier, Kate feels at loose ends at this point and is very pleased when her daughter, who is reading Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* for A levels, suggests that she arrange the flowers. Kate goes out to buy flowers, but as Ruderman points out, there is a difference between Kate and Mrs Dalloway in that Kate has men in her kitchen and she "is not limited to a domestic realm" (115).

Has Kate really achieved a model for a future domesticity and, by extension, a future "Englishness" that Drabble can celebrate? The answer seems to be no, despite the obvious sympathy of the narrator with Kate and despite all that is forward-looking in Kate's attitudes. A wonderfully humorous vignette of Drabble's own response to the contemporary nostalgia for "Rural England" is Kate's visit to the Harrogate conference on old age in "Rural England" (*MG* 79). The visit promised well: good weather and pleasant scenes of children waving, of "golden fields, little chestnut-backed kestrels flying low, gardens full of roses, boys fishing by small rivers"; all seemed intended as an antidote to Kate's depression after her abortion and the failure of her attempt to find a not-impossible

man to love. "Yet," we are told, "the whole experience instead of cheering her, was oddly depressing." Depressed by the subject of the conference, Kate left to return to her hotel room and "found the weather had clouded over; rain had fallen ... and a purple-grey metallic sky arched over the trees and gardens" and when she got back to the hotel and was having a drink at the bar, "a large Alsatian ... wandered over to her, cocked its leg, and pissed on her skirt. 'Well can you *imagine*,' said Kate. 'Of all things .... To be pissed on by a dog in a hotel'" (80-81). So much for the joys of country living!

The confusion and noise of the city is much more to her liking and, as we have seen, Kate, unlike Evelyn, does not lock her door on it. At the end of the novel she is about to give that large dinner party which is very much in contrast to the small intimate dinner parties Evelyn gives after she closes the door of her white house on the world outside. Kate does not know where to stop with her invitations and invites just about everyone she knows as well as her children's friends. As Sadler points out, the party "will cross national, class, sexual, age and other kinds of lines" (128).

On the other hand, when an interviewer said he saw Kate as "a woman who feels she'd like to have her life disrupted ... but keeps opting for the more stable, safe patterns of motherhood," Drabble agreed:

Yes. Carrying on in much the same way she's used to. I think that's right .... She has made herself a little fairy-tale cottage, a cosy little cottage where everybody's happy and jolly. There's a bit of *Little Women* in it. (Interview with Hannay 146)

These comments are similar to the ones Drabble made earlier on Rose in *The Needle's Eye*. Kate is very different from Rose, of course: while Rose rebels against her upper-middle-class family, Kate rebels against her lower-middle-class family aspiring to become upper middle class; whereas Rose is an "English"-style heroine in search of purity and innocence, Kate is one of Drabble's "wild" women; whereas Rose is, as Drabble

points out, "desexed ... slightly" (Interview with Hardin 294), Kate is, as Mary Jane Elkins says, "a woman of pronounced appetites--for food, sex, everything" (178); and whereas Rose is trying only to change her own situation so that she can *be* "good," Kate is "seeking the egalitarian millennium, which would bring security, opportunity, prosperity to all .... The dream of the sixties" (MG 52-53).

Despite these differences, however, Kate's preference for "hopeless people" (148) connects her with Rose, though she is more aware, or more often aware, than Rose is that her preference is motivated in part by selfishness. Early in the novel we are told that

Kate reflected, not for the first time, that it was very shocking of her to be pleased that Hugo had lost half his arm ..., but nevertheless she was pleased in some wicked corner of herself, for now she could look after him ... and make him duly grateful without feeling she was imposing on him in any way. (14)

Later, when Evelyn is musing on the differences between herself and Kate, she remembers that

Kate had once said to her, the thing is Evelyn, I actually *prefer* hopeless people, whereas you want to help them and stop them being hopeless. And, being Kate, she had gone on to say, of course I realize I probably like them because they make me feel I've got the upper hand, they make me feel big, they make me feel I run the show. (148)

Kate can no more do without her "hopeless people" than Rose can do without her "deprived" neighbours, if she is to maintain a sense of importance.

Kate is made more aware of her "narrow limits" (113) when she takes in Mujid for a term.<sup>13</sup> Mujid likes "to harangue her on the triviality and social bias of English television, on the poor coverage of Middle East affairs in the media, on the pro-Israel, anti-Soviet line of the press" (84-85) and Kate is embarrassed by her ignorance of world politics and of the Middle East. She accuses herself of being an "ignorant fool" about international affairs (13) and is made to "feel deeply guilty" because "she is, after all, as he

rightly suspects, trivial, ill-informed and biased" (85). During the course of his stay, Kate begins "seeing Britain through [Mujid's] censorious foreign eyes" (89) and she has to admit that selective cultural representation on television programmes supports Mujid's charges of bias. Having indignantly repudiated Mujid's allegations of "Jewish propaganda and Jewish monopolies" in Britain, Kate has to confess "the fact that in one week's television viewing," Mujid had seen a variety of Jewish programmes, four in all, and "not a *single* Iraqi comedy, or Lebanese tragedy or Kurdish documentary .... Nothing but newsreels of demonstrations, and, in Mujid's view, not enough of that" (93-94).

Trying to see London through Mujid's eyes, Kate sees anew the slogans of "hatred" written on "every wall" (107). Some of these--directed at "NIGGERS," "BLACK CUNTS" and "MUSLIM DOGS," who are said to be "RUINING OUR COUNTRY"--are clearly racist (105), and when Drabble has Kate describe them as an "indigenous array" she raises the question of the relationship between such attitudes and the "Englishness" that self-appointed guardians of "our" England want to protect. Kate thinks Mujid would no doubt say that the slogans of "hatred," the "ideological epidemic" she sees sweeping the country "is the disease of capitalism ..... The final sickness," and she wonders "would he be right?" Kate does not know the answer and her response is defensive: she puts the question out of her mind (107).

When her friend Evelyn becomes the unintended victim in "a domestic tragedy" having been hit in the face by a bottle of cleaning fluid thrown during a fight between the Bradford lesbian and her Rastafarian husband (220-21), Kate has to think again, to reflect on the violence in contemporary London: "Pub brawls, skinheads, Paki-bashing, school gangs waiting at the gate, stolen bicycles, bicycle chains" (222). As she listens to the children talk of street violence she remembers "the scum of opinion" she heard from the women in Romley "about blacks, punks, kids, the Irish, the unions, none of it serious, ...

or so she had thought." Having been brought close to the violence, however, she takes the slogans of hatred and the scum of opinion more seriously. In addition to the extremity of "domestic" violence displayed in the case there are disturbing overtones of racism suggested in the official response to it. Ted is furious to learn that it took a long time to get the ambulance because the young girl who called for it was Pakistani (227). Evelyn is more upset by the fact that the police had "manhandled" the severely injured Rastafarian (233) who, according to Evelyn, was neither as violent nor as dangerous as the Bradford lesbian who had thrown the pan of hot fat and the cleaning fluid (221). Earlier Evelyn had been equally perturbed by another incident involving a person with "a foreign accent" and health professionals. On her way home from work one day Evelyn found in front of the local hospital a "tiny woman with [a] large shabby shopping bag, lost, adrift in meaningless London" (62). The first time Evelyn offered to take her back to the hospital, "the woman manifested intense alarm at [the] suggestion and refused to turn back" (62). When the woman reluctantly agreed to Evelyn's second offer, and Evelyn took her back, it became clear why the woman had been alarmed: in Casualty was "an extremely disagreeable and abrupt receptionist in a white coat [who] snapped angrily" at the woman and it is in these "unkind professional hands" that Evelyn leaves her. Evelyn recounts the incident to Kate as an indication of her loss of faith in a welfare state administered by middle-class professionals like herself who offer to the poor and the disadvantaged "horrid inept middle-class interfering tones ..., patronizing kindness" in place of the understanding they lack (63).

The incident in which Evelyn is injured prompts Kate to ask:

but what if each act of violence were after all an expression, a culmination of all that vaguely directed ill-will, hatred and frustration, of the terror we each now feel when walking down a concrete underpass, when we fumble for a key on our own doorstep with the sound of footsteps behind us, when an unknown car pulls up at the curb? Belfast, Beirut, Baghdad. And

was this London, a bed-sitter in flames ...? (223)

Again, however, Kate shies away from the conclusion that London is a violent place: "No, surely not, surely not," she pleads (223). The difficulty Kate has in accepting that London is not immune from the discontent and violence of the twentieth century is similar to Alison Murray's (*IA*) and it is likewise indicative of her "Englishness," of her belief in an essential England untouched by the problems in other parts of the world. Kate, we are told, "was frightened to travel in foreign countries" (61) and has refused Hugo's "invitations to the world's hot spots" (176), the implication being that although Kate is much less complacent than she was before her "mid-life crisis," she is not yet willing to give up seeing London as a refuge from the "hot spots" of the world outside England. Nor is she willing to give up her "old-fashioned" notion of being at the centre of a "family circle." It is from this private and seemingly secure place that she gets "a sense of immense calm, strength, centrality" (268). When she is outside the "circle," she is aware of her vulnerability.

She is aware, also, that she has "two selves" within her: "that prattling chattering journalist in Kentish Town, with her smart views and expensive boots and trendy house ... and the child in its skimpy cotton dress, lonely, cast out, cut off" (117). Significantly, we leave Kate alone in her room before the party, "pondering the choice between various garments, each of which seemed to present some minor disadvantage" and thinking that "[p]erhaps none of them suited her at all, perhaps none of them had ever suited her" (269). We are reminded of what Kate saw when she imagined looking through the magical apple (of the fairy-tale called "The Silver Saucer and the Vanishing Apple"):

herself and Peter, lonely Londoners, playing with a paper boat on the fairy-tale village duck pond in Devon [where they had been sent when the bombing started], oh so pretty a scene, but lonely, but outcasts, with the wrong clothes, the wrong accents, ugly ducklings in an alien flock, bound in a communion of exile .... (203)

Something of that lonely, insecure childhood self is there in the woman we "leave ... in an

attitude of indecision" about what to wear (269).

It is also significant that Kate's brother will not be at the party. United in early childhood by the torment they suffered, they are now estranged. Kate suspects that it is Peter who has been sending her anonymous accusative letters about her left-wing progressive views on such topics as homosexuality, abortion, race and education (117-18). She cannot quite put her finger on the reason for Peter's behaviour, but her memories of their childhood and early adolescence suggest that Peter was more damaged by their parents' middle-class aspirations than she was. Kate thinks that "Peter had been the real victim, right in the firing line. Being the only boy" (119). Recalling the "miserable suppers" during which their father had "nagged at Peter to better himself, had bullied both children into trying to speak properly, had poured scorn on working men in other lines of business ..." and so on, Kate thinks, "Peter had been terrified" and "[s]he could remember now his broad pale frightened face harangued over sausage, swede and mash. A sacrifice to progress" (119-20). Also, Kate recalls that while she deliberately failed her eleven plus and was sent to the Secondary Modern where she discovered her gift for misrepresentation, Peter passed his and was sent to the Grammar where, like so many other "grammar-school" boys, he was extremely unhappy. Despite his later rejection of his father's aspirations and of his father's contempt for working-class men, Peter quickly became like his father. According to Kate,

he would occasionally listen to other people, but much preferred to expound his own views, at great length, to any audience he could capture .... People began to avoid him as they had once avoided his father.

Here, Drabble is making a point she made earlier in connection with Simon in *The Needle's Eye*, a point made also by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams (see note 6). Like many other grammar-school boys from the lower middle and working classes, Peter is at ease neither in the middle class which his education allowed him to enter nor in the working



class from which it separated him. He is a reminder to the "comic Kate" (91) of the social problems that she transmutes into jokes and to us of the persistence of the divisive class system in Britain.

Drabble said that she had trouble ending *The Middle Ground* (Interview with Hannay 132) and at one point in it the narrator says, "but one could go on endlessly, and why not for there seems little point in allowing space to one set of characters rather than another" (181). By this comment Drabble draws attention to the "art of selection" on which the unity of the traditional English novel depends and explains why her novels of the seventies became larger and messier than those of the sixties. By the time she wrote the last novel of the seventies she was expanding her questioning of the extent to which any one novel can speak to or for the whole of English society to questioning the extent to which the "English" novel has a future or a role to play in what Hugo, quoting John Updike, calls "the global decade" of the nineteen-seventies and beyond (170). After a discussion with Mujid about "the unfair historical advantage of being born to the English language, and the extreme insularity of English publishers," Hugo is prompted to ask himself the question about whether or not it is any longer possible "to write, with confidence, a book that assumes the significance of one culture only" or "to stand upright in one nationality" (170).

The whole question of the West's representation of the East is raised in an argument between Hugo and Ted about the Arab contribution to medicine. Having won the argument, "Hugo held forth on the deep prejudice of the West against the East, a prejudice as ignorant and falsifying as the ignorance of classical culture in the Dark Ages" (177).<sup>14</sup> The question had also been raised in *The Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*. In *The Realms of Gold* we are told that through Joe Ayida, Minister of Culture for Adra, in Africa,

Frances "had glimpsed what it must be like to have lost one's past, and to stand on the verge of reclaiming it. The Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, he had said, they have blinded us for centuries. She agreed. She always agreed in theory, but Joe had made her feel that it mattered" (222). In *The Ice Age*, the question is raised not only by Anthony and Jane, both of whom are ashamed of their ignorance of Wallacian life (263; 273), but also by Anthony's comment on the reporter from the *Examiner* who "had already written his in-depth report on life in Wallacia, based on a few chats with the barman and a taxi driver or two, an interview with a man in the Housing Department and a visit to a nursery school" (271). Anthony also finds that the other English-speaking journalists he meets in Wallacia are "full of unreliable-sounding gossip about the political state of the country" (261), and later he thinks that "it would be hard to imagine any scene less reminiscent of the savage and brutal bureaucracy invoked by the *Daily Express*" than his very civil reception by the deputy minister of the Department of the Ministry in Wallacia under the old regime (262).

These comments are all part of Drabble's criticism of English insularity which we have seen also in Kate's relationship with Mujid and her fear of travelling abroad. What Kate feared was that disorientation and disintegration would likely result if she were to find herself away from England and the charmed and charming "circle" of her "family." It was a fear that Drabble herself outgrew as she gained the freedom and means to travel. In the early seventies Drabble told an interviewer

I certainly wouldn't want to go abroad. That seems to me a fatal step for a writer to take: it's a step towards disintegration. (Interview with Firchow 114)

By the end of the seventies she was telling another interviewer, "I love travel" and "I love being abroad; I love the feeling of being helpless and shocked and being out of my depth ..." (Interview with Preussner 571-72). The most significant challenge to "Englishness" in Drabble's novels of the seventies is this feeling of disorientation on the part of characters.

Whereas Drabble learned to welcome the feeling of uncertainty, the characters, for the most part, fear it. Creighton says of *The Ice Age* and *The Middle Ground* that Drabble's

people feel out of control, unable to impose a meaningful shape on experience, for the old patterns no longer fit. They feel alternately imprisoned without choice and overwhelmed with the burden of decision-making. The ground is imperceptively moving from under their feet; they feel themselves suspended, fragmented, disoriented, unsure. Where they had earlier stood upon what seemed to be strongly held values and opinions, nothing now seems certain. (*MD* 92)

The best metaphor for the characters' feelings is Kate's

sensation as if the world had ... slipped and [she'd] fallen off it. Lost [her] footing ... as though it had tilted away from where [she] thought it was, and had slid away .... A giddy feeling as though [she'd] fallen off into space. The ground gone from under [her]. (*MG* 249-50)

She "strongly dislikes the feeling of helplessness, the lack of direction, that this uncertainty generates" (*MG* 16). Although some of Kate's uncertainty is no doubt caused by her personal "mid-life crisis," much of it is related to a national sense of crisis, a sense that, in Hugo's words, the world "moved by while we [in England] stood still" (*MG* 249).

#### Chapter 4: "Out of Plausibility into the Unknown"

At the beginning of the eighties Drabble took a break from writing fiction and edited the new edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. She has said that she agreed to take on this project because of the doubts she was having about fiction at the time she finished writing *The Middle Ground* (Stovel, MD 202). As we have seen, Drabble was having doubts even while she was working on that novel and they are in large part what the novel is about. When, after seven years, she announced her return to fiction with the publication of *The Radiant Way*, it was with what she described in an interview as "a very peculiar, uncomfortable book" (Interview with John Ezard, qtd in Myer, *Reader's Guide* 162), and she followed it up with two equally uncomfortable sequels, *A Natural Curiosity* and *The Gates of Ivory*.

In the same interview, Drabble went on to say that the world of the early nineteen eighties which she depicts in *The Radiant Way* is an "extreme world," that "we're continually made aware of extreme divisions within it," and that the novel is "about how we cling on to normality in a world which at a national, international and personal level seems very odd..." (qtd in Myer, *Reader's Guide* 162). One of the unsettling things about the book is that it questions this myth of "normality" on which a dominant sense of "Englishness" depends. *The Radiant Way* is as "eclectic" and as "full of riddles" (36) as the Headlands' drawing room on the night of the large "much mixed ... cosmopolitan New Year's Eve party" Liz and Charles give to usher in 1980 (33). From the mystery surrounding Charles's decision to divorce Liz and marry Lady Henrietta to the mystery of Liz and Shirley's mother's complete social withdrawal and of their father's disappearance, to the "something" that Liz is hiding from herself, to the relationship of Esther and her satanic anthropologist, to the identity of the Harrow Road murderer, to the strikes and riots

inside the country and to the wars outside, we are not allowed to take comfort in the view of "normality" that the characters try to keep in place.

Throughout this and the other two novels making up the trilogy, Drabble continually reminds us that the world is not as "familiar, [as] manageable, [or as] subject to known laws" as people of the English upper middle class might like to think (*RW* 16). Clive Enderby in *A Natural Curiosity* is aware of many "family secrets" through his work as a solicitor and according to him,

People don't want to think about these things. So they don't. People want to believe in an ordered, regular world, of faithful married couples, legitimate children, normal sex, legal behaviour, decent continuity and they will go to almost any lengths to preserve this faith. Any suggestion that "real life" is otherwise tends to be greeted as "melodramatic" or "implausible."

Solicitors know better. The police know better. Social workers know better. Doctors, especially since the emergence of AIDS, know better. The subplots fester, break out, infect strangers. Dark blotches spread. Life is more like an old-fashioned melodramatic novel than we care to know. (141)

Drabble makes the point again when the narrator comments on the economic hardships endured by the poor:

A few eyewitnesses continue to describe what they see, as they travel by tube, walk the streets, wait in bus shelters, queue in doctors' waiting rooms, serve on juries, and clutch their wire baskets at the supermarket check-out, but others accuse them of telling atrocity stories, of indulging in a pornography of squalor. (*NC* 54)

The "others" are, of course, the privileged who do not have to rely on public transit or the National Health, and they are the people in control of the predominant stories.

In these passages Drabble is echoing something Ford Maddox Ford wrote in *The Spirit of the People* (*England and the English* in the American edition) where he identified the refusal to acknowledge the existence of such things as "greed, poverty, lust or evil passions" as a peculiar quality of "the Englishman" who "hides [such things] from himself," who "prefers to say--and to hypnotize himself into believing--that the world is a

very good--an all-good--place .... People, he will say, do not do such things" (Giles and Middleton 46-47). Ford sees these "defects of the Englishman's qualities" in a more positive light than Drabble does, however. While he says that the "Spartan repression of emotion" (48) "seems to [him] to be a manifestation of a national characteristic that is almost appalling," and while he sees it as an obstacle to "the arts" and "knowledge of life" (51), he attributes it to "the Englishman's" need to protect himself from "the depth of his capacity to feel" (46) and to "the evolution of a standard of manners" that are "the best in the world" (51). As pointed out by Giles and Middleton (in the Introduction to Chapter I: "The Ideas and Ideals of Englishness"),

Whilst Germany and the USA may have increasingly threatened the world dominance of English trade and commerce [in the first half of the twentieth century], English good manners remained a highly exportable commodity in many middle-class accounts of Englishness. Commentators on this era such as Ford Madox Ford and Charles Masterman are concerned to establish "Englishness" as a specific, benign, and frequently superior form of national identity. (23)

By contrast, Drabble focuses upon the negative aspects of this construction of "Englishness"--on the hypocrisy it involves and the disparity it conceals.

Drabble identifies herself as one of the eyewitnesses, as one who has not allowed herself to become so cocooned in middle-class comfort as to be deaf and blind to the distress outside. Asked whether she was pleased when the *Standard* referred to *The Radiant Way* as "important," she replied,

I'd like to think that [it] is an important book. It's not prophetic. I'm recording and I think that can be useful. An important role for a writer is simply to use your eyes and to tell the truth .... (Interview with Kenyon 33-34)

As her response above indicates, she believes that the truth to which she is witness is different from the truth held by a majority of the middle class, and the subtext of the response is the difficulty facing English writers who attempt, as she does, to challenge the

"norms" of "Englishness" and to open up to debate concepts such as "normality," "reality," "plausibility," and "truth," the "English" versions of which have been revered as universal within the dominant discourse of "Englishness." That this is a problem Drabble shares with other English writers is evident from the comprehensive study entitled *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain*, in which the author Alan Sinfield notes that "the standards of plausibility are not universal but culturally specific" and that "[i]t is hard to challenge the prevailing stories" in any society, because "the prevailing stories are believed to be the most plausible ones" and rival stories "will be thought implausible" (25-26).

How Drabble manages to tell stories which challenge the dominant discourse of "Englishness" but which are not easily dismissed as "implausible" is one of the most interesting aspects of the trilogy as, indeed, it is of her earlier novels. Characteristically, Drabble introduces the new in the framework of the old, the "unknown" within "the limits of the known" (NC 9), so that before we realize it Drabble has, like her character Shirley who fled the "Englishness" of South Yorkshire for the freedom of Paris, "stepped out of plausibility into the unknown" (NC 141) and we with her.

### *The Radiant Way*

Throughout *The Radiant Way* Drabble debates the relative merits of writing about the "known" or the "real" as opposed to writing about the "unknown" or the "implausible" and "melodramatic" where "known" denotes English middle-class "norms" and "unknown" denotes what is outside them. Part of the debate is focused on the relative merits of "knowledge through width or depth" and, like her characters, Drabble refers "inevitably [to] Jane Austen and the Country Village" (165) and to Austen's advice that "three or four families in the Country Village [is] the thing to work on when planning a novel." The implication of the advice is, as Drabble's narrator points out, "that depth rather than breadth

is of importance and intimate knowledge of a corner more valuable than a sketchy acquaintance with the globe" (84). Repeated in the context of the extremely complex world depicted in Drabble's novel, there is such a ridiculous disparity between Austen's advice on form and the subject to which it would be applied that the advice has the effect of seeming to be a parody of itself. It is made to seem even more ludicrous when the narrator says that, given her attention to detail in her profession as an art historian, Esther Breuer might have been expected to approve Jane Austen's advice, but that

perversely Esther Breuer disliked the only Jane Austen novel she had ever read (which was, perversely, *Sense and Sensibility*) and frequently boasts of her inability to tackle the others. "Too English for me," she will sometimes add in her impeccably English middle-class intellectual's voice. (84)

The disdain for what she considers a very narrow "English" tradition and the perverse wit of the contrast between statement and voice may be explained by the fact that Esther is a Jewish refugee from Berlin who, though raised and educated in England, has retained and strengthened her ties with the continent.

The fact that Esther would have had neither a place nor a voice in Jane Austen's fiction is indicative of the differences between England in the late twentieth century and England "in Jane Austen's day" (84), differences which cry out for new standards of plausibility for the "English" novel. The narrator points out that the three women characters whose friendship goes a long way towards providing the plausibility of the "non-story" of *The Radiant Way* (301) are ones "who in Jane Austen's day would never have met at all" (84) and who, separately, would not have been suitable subjects for a Jane Austen novel. It was the social changes brought about in England during and after the Second World War—"the brave new world of Welfare State and County Scholarships, of equity for women" (88)—that made it possible for Alix Doddridge (now Bowen) Liz Ablewhite (now Headleand) and Esther Breuer (still Breuer) to meet at Cambridge in 1952



and to form a friendship which is in its fourth decade by the time the novel ends. Had they been born in Jane Austen's day, they would have had neither physical nor social mobility and they would have remained in their respective villages or towns where it is most likely that they would have continued to be "on the margins of English life" (90). The narrator says that while the young Alix, Liz and Esther had in common with the heroines in Jane Austen's novels youth and "considerable wit," they had not the other attributes with which Austen's heroines are blessed:

In Jane Austen ... the protagonists are ... privileged. By youth, by wit, by beauty and sometimes by wealth. The Princesses of their Country Villages. Liz, Alix and Esther were not princesses. They are not beautiful, they are not rich. (88)

Lacking these attributes, it is likely that they would have become "old maids," not an exemplary fate in Jane Austen's world where, as noted in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "the garrulous old maid Miss Bates" (a minor character in *Emma*) is said to enjoy "a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich nor married" (316).

A fundamental difference between Jane Austen's protagonists and Drabble's is that Austen's achieve their exemplary status by remaining in their "Country Villages" and fulfilling their traditional role at the centre of hearth and home while Drabble's achieve theirs, to the extent that they do, by escaping their respective villages and towns where their "considerable wit" would have made no difference to their marginal status. Liz, Alix and Esther think that they may have been drawn together at their Cambridge interviews by

a sense of being on the margins of English life, perhaps, a sense of being outsiders looking in from a cold street through a lighted window into a warm lit room that later might prove to be their own. Removed from the mainstream [in Liz's case] by a mad mother, [in Alix's] by a deviant ideology, [and in Esther's] by refugee status and the war-sickness of Middle Europe. (90)

As we have seen in Drabble's earlier novels, just being born into the middle class

does not guarantee the safe, secure and cosy middle-class domesticity of "Englishness." Among the "disadvantages" of Alix's middle-class childhood in Yorkshire was the fact that her parents were Fabians, mockingly referred to as "Dotty Doddridge and Dolly" (78-79). Another was the fact that, despite being Deputy Head at his school, her father "was poor when compared with the parents of many of the children who attended [the] school, even when compared with some of the teachers" (103) and this, together with his "deviant ideology" and his odd appearance, led to "relentless mocking" of him by Alix's peers at school (78). Alix has since realized that "it was only the intensely conventional world of a Yorkshire boarding-school that had made [her parents] seem so eccentric" (79), but at the time she was agonizingly embarrassed by them.

Liz, born and raised in Northam, had an even more troubled childhood. Like Clara Maugham (of *Jerusalem the Golden*), Liz dreamed only of escaping her background and her mother and, having escaped, she tries to keep at a distance from both, particularly from her mother, "the domestic ghost with which she had lived so long" (90). At the beginning of the novel Liz knows only that her mother Rita Ablewhite lives like a ghost in her house, that she had immured herself in it and had not ventured outside it for as long as Liz can remember. The narrator says that the mother suffered from "a withdrawal so extreme that the term agoraphobic would hardly do it justice" (52). The source of this complete social withdrawal remains a mystery to Liz and her sister Shirley until the end of the novel and even then they learn only part of what caused "the silence, the seclusion ... the barrier of secrecy, the fear that had possessed the daughters" (383-84), although Liz has guessed some of the other part.

It is this other part of the story that had the most impact on her when she was younger and fuelled her desire to escape from becoming her mother. While she was growing up, Liz had had assigned to her a weekly ritual of polishing her dead father's

shoes and cleaning her mother's one mysterious piece of silver. In her mid-teens these duties seemed to Liz to be suggestive of "below-stairs behaviour," and it was at that time that she began to think "that maybe her mother had once been in service" (182). From that point on, Liz thought of her mother as a ghost of the domestic servant she had been and that Liz feared becoming.

Of Esther's childhood and adolescence we are given hardly any details, but from the bits we are given we can infer that it was a very unhappy time for her. We are told that Esther was born in Berlin but had been too young at the time to remember it and that when she first returned to Europe at the age of seventeen,

Berlin and Bologna, Venice and Vienna, Munich and Marseilles were then but names to her. She was acquainted only with rainy Manchester, with a smart girls' boarding-school in Shropshire, with the Cheshire homes of friends, with London (a little), and, yet more fleetingly, the Oxford and Cambridge of her interviews. Italy had been a revelation, a deliverance, a new birth. (189)

From this we can gather that it was not only the sunnier weather but also the less oppressive intellectual climate and the warmer emotional atmosphere of Italy that exhilarated Esther.

Drabble makes it clear that it was fortunate for these women to have come of age when they did and not in Jane Austen's day, but she also makes it clear that while the social changes between Austen's day and the nineteen fifties were great, they were not such as to mean equality of opportunity for the majority of English women. Alix, Liz and Esther were offered the opportunity to study at Cambridge only because they were "among the *crème de la crème* of their generation" (88), and it was only as a result of this "elite" education that they "had choices":

Adventure and possibility lay before them as they had not lain before Liz's sister Shirley, who married [Cliff Harper] at nineteen and stayed on in Northam, or before Dora Sutcliffe who left school at fifteen and sold sweets in Woolworth's until she married Shirley's husband's brother Steve. (88)

Shirley is very unhappy in a very dull middle-class marriage in a dull suburb in Northam: "she is bored, underemployed, mildly depressed" and she fears becoming "too like" her mother the recluse (199). She also worries about her daughter Celia leading this "protected, quiet, refined life, in Northam. A provincial life, a middle-class life, an old-fashioned life" (199). It is a very narrow life which leaves Shirley momentarily frozen in despair.

The tedium of Shirley's provincial, middle-class "English" life is not an anomaly. Jilly Fox, incarcerated at Garfield (a progressive women's prison) for "several rather serious drug-related offences" (77), was rebelling against the dullness of her upper-middle-class background:

Jilly Fox had said, one evening in [Alix's English] class, that she loved crime. Just like that, she had said it. Normal life doesn't attract me, said Jilly. It's dull. Alix had shut her up quickly (they were not meant to discuss such matters) .... Jilly had stared at Alix with a sultry, intimate colluding intensity. Alix understood Jilly. She understood what it was that Jilly found dull. Bourgeois life. Dull, dull, dull. Jilly had broken out of it by violence, by crime, by extremity: she had by a short cut, by a short circuit, attempted thus to join the human race. (215)

This passage is also a fine example of the way in which Drabble domesticates subversive thoughts and makes them seem more "normal" than "abnormal," more plausible, even, than the "civilized" middle-class values they oppose. What starts out as a melodramatic incident--Jilly's subversive interruption of the class in English Language and Literature, which is funded for the "civilizing effect" it is thought to have on the women prisoners (184-85)--is made plausible by Alix's "slightly dangerous, slightly irregular sympathy with Jilly" which Alix attributes to the fact that they are both "[m]iddle-class girls from nice middle-class homes" (214). Alix has such a "social conscience" (186) that we accept from her what from Jilly we could dismiss as psychotic ravings: that the "norms" of "Englishness" are no more "human" than the violence, crime and extremity Jilly used to

oppose them.

While Alix sympathizes with Jilly's desire to escape middle-class boredom and "respectability," her own insecure dependent position makes it impossible for her to do much to help Jilly. Despite having a first-class Cambridge degree in English Literature, Alix has never had a full-time job and has never been in a position with enough authority to follow through on her desire "to change things," the aspiration she had when she began her education at Cambridge (85). Drabble has said of the three main women characters that "they obviously have not done anything like as much as they could do with their lives" and that this is particularly the case with Alix and Esther "who have muddled along, after a good education," who "teach part-time and never get themselves on the career ladder--typical of that generation" which she said was "slightly older than [her own] age group, so slightly more trapped," mainly because the world they hoped to enter after graduation was still, she said, a "man's world" (Interview with Kenyon 36-37).

One does not have to look far for the biographical information that made these women "comprehensible" to Drabble (Interview with Kenyon 37). She has spoken of the shock and disappointment she felt when she left Cambridge with an equally privileged education and found that pursuing a career was far harder for women than it was for men (Interview with Kenyon 27-28; 45). Alix is similar to Drabble in having married just after graduation, in having become pregnant very early in the marriage, in having to care for a child while "struggl[ing] to learn the rudiments of domesticity" and, finally, in having to raise the child on her own (96-98). She has spent her life in "dead-end jobs" that she thought were "socially useful" (392)--most recently in teaching the English class at Garfield and in working part-time for the Home Office on a related project. Before the novel closes, both jobs have come to an end as a result of changes in government policies and we leave Alix in "an ivory attic" in "a northern suburb of Northam" cataloguing the papers of a poet

whose work her husband Brian says is "elitist." Alix considers her position to be "[p]aradoxical" and says that she has "not chosen" paradox but rather has "been driven into it" (393) by the conservative policies of the nineteen eighties which are undermining "the great social dream" of the sixties, the dream of an egalitarian England.

This paradoxical position causes her to question the social value of her privileged education as well as the teachings of her former mentor, another reflection of Drabble's own questioning of the limits of Leavisite criticism. Like Drabble, Alix studied under F. R. Leavis, and we are told that she chose Cambridge over Oxford partly because of him (87). Alix's respect for Leavis has been tempered over the years, however, and she has now reached the point where she is able to joke at his expense. When she becomes aware of her love for Otto Werner, Alix

blame[s] the English Tripos at the University of Cambridge for the restless ecstasy and puzzled disquiet of her present state of mind, and wonder[s] what Dr. Leavis would have to say to *that*. Not what he had intended, surely? (323)

Neither is it likely that he intended his "dating classes" at Cambridge (which required students to guess when an unknown poem was written and by whom) to be training for a "television quiz" show, but that is what they were like according to Alix, and she wonders "what would Dr. Leavis have made of the infiltration of television by his ex-students?" She answers for him: "Making games of that which is most serious" (266). The irony at Leavis's expense is heightened when Alix remembers the quotation from Shakespeare which the answer echoes and which she thinks may well indicate a distrust of language on Shakespeare's part:

The quotation suddenly came to her: "Do not play in wench-like words with that which is most serious" .... Wench-like words. Did that dismiss all language, all poetry? Was Shakespeare, as she had always expected, in these late plays turning on his own art with a sardonic, elegiac, disenchanted wit? (267)

Since Shakespeare was described by Leavis as "the pre-eminently (in his relation to language) English poet" (*Revaluation* 12), to suggest that *he* questioned the efficacy of language is to question the authority of Leavisite literary criticism.

Near the end of the novel it would seem that Alix has retained very little of the respect she once had for Leavis as a distinguished critic and teacher. Visiting Jilly Fox, now released from prison and living at the dilapidated Lykewake Gardens "off Mortuary Road," in a room with walls covered in "dreadful, psychotic paintings [of] [d]aggers, pierced hearts, severed heads, dripping blood, gaping wounds, severed limbs, floating eyes" as well as a floating breast, listening to Jilly talk of "[e]mbarking upon eternal night," the only retort Alix can come up with is

I think that's rhetorical, melodramatic, self-important rubbish .... You are also, I think, mixing your metaphors. Have I entirely wasted my time, trying to teach you the study of English language and literature and the techniques of practical criticism? (325-26)

Later after Jilly's severed head is found in Alix's car, and Alix is questioned by the police, Alix and Polly Piper "agreed that, in the circumstances, it was hard to think clearly, even though trained by a Cambridge degree to do so at all times" (333).

At the end when she is sorting through Beaver's papers Alix

finds a review of Beaver's second volume of verse, published in *Scrutiny*. The review praises Beaver as one of the best poets of a rising generation. She shows it to Beaver. Beaver laughs and laughs. He tells her stories about the Leavises. They both laugh, until tears stand in their eyes. (393)

Readers of the novel are not told these stories, but we are allowed to share in the joke at Leavis's expense when Alix's next thought is "So this is where my privileged education has brought me ..." (393). She seems at first to mean that her Leavisite education has given her the means to laugh at Leavis, and there may be in this another Shakespearean echo: in response to Prospero's claim to have endowed him with the power of words, Caliban retorts, "You have taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to

curse' (*The Tempest* I. ii. 63-65). In *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*, Batsleer et al argue that "[e]very act of writing and reading, however apparently servile or mutinous, is marked by [a] double movement, echoing [that] cry of Caliban": that is, that reading and writing are both forms of domination "and potential modes of resistance" (5). Seen in this dialectical manner, Alix's education in Leavisite criticism could not help but provide her with the means to resist the "Englishness" it was meant to support. As we have seen in novel after novel, Drabble is very adept at making "tradition" mock itself in this Calibanian way.

On a more serious note, Drabble has Alix question the moral teachings of her former mentor:

The social structure greatly interested Alix. She had once thought of herself as unique, had been encouraged (in theory at least) by her education and by her reading to believe in the individual self, the individual soul, but as she grew older she increasingly questioned these concepts: seeing people perhaps as flickering impermanent points of light irradiating stretches, intersections, threads, of a vast network, which was humanity itself .... We are all but a part of a whole which has its own, its distinct, its other meaning: we are not ourselves, we are crossroads, meeting places, points on a curve, we cannot exist independently for we are nothing but signs, conjunctions, aggregations. (73)

Alix's questioning of the focus on the individual in the Leavisite "great tradition" and her movement towards a more postmodernist position focusing on social context and global complexity reflects Drabble's own. Creighton says that "the dominant impression" she got from her conversation with Drabble in June, 1984 was "her flexibility and openness to contingency both in her life and her fiction" (109). Creighton quotes Drabble as saying that "[w]e may have 'too developed a sense of one person's rights rather than group rights'" and that she "find[s] more of value in looking at collective thinking than some people who regret the decline of liberal humanism." According to Creighton,

having what she terms an "insatiable curiosity" about life, [Drabble] is interested to see what is "brewing," what English society is becoming. If it



is losing some of its traditional "Englishness" and becoming something else--so be it. She welcomes the "broadening" of consciousness, the greater sense of international "community." (109-10)

It is Drabble's awareness of global complexity which accounts for the playful suggestion in *The Radiant Way* that there is a similarity between a novel by Jane Austen and the one that Drabble is writing: "A few families in a Country Village. A few families in a small densely populated, parochial, insecure country" (171). Although it is humorous, the comparison raises some troubling questions for Drabble, questions about the extent to which an "English" novel has any relevance for the global concerns of the late twentieth century.

In the novel the character who comes closest to expressing this broader consciousness is Esther, but even she, with her "un-English spirit" (193), has been unable to escape completely the influence of her English education. Like Alix, she does not have a permanent job and she depends on public lectures and on part-time teaching (a course on art history at the Feldmann Institute and a WEA evening class on art at the beginning of the novel, both of which are subject to cuts by government). She has not bothered to publish the lectures and she has not got around to turning her thesis on Crivelli into a book. Robert Oxenholme tells her, "It's very English the way you don't bother [to publish]," and he explains to her that she is "a casualty of an education system that prized modesty above self-esteem, that encouraged dilettante dabbling, that scorned profit, achievement, success" (350).

In the interview with Kenyon, Drabble said that "Liz is the career woman" and that she "can be considered successful" in this respect but that she "has more personal problems" than the other two women (36-37). This description is apt for the Liz we meet at the beginning of the novel, but the additional personal problems that erupt soon after, though they do not make her less effective as a psychotherapist, do lead her to doubt

herself in that role.

When the novel opens Liz is getting ready for the New Year's Eve party she and Charles are giving and she thinks she has everything she has ever wanted: a restored eighteenth-century house on Harley Street, a twenty-one year "modern" marriage to a top executive in the television world, grown-up stepchildren and children of her own and a successful career. We are told that

Liz loved the house, she loved the neighbourhood. It gave her great delight, to see her children and Charles's here, thus in the centre. Her own childhood had been lived on the margins: she had wanted theirs to be calm, to be spared the indignities of fighting unnecessary territorial and social wars ....

Liz still, after all these years found satisfaction in giving her address. Each time a shop assistant or a clerk or a tradesman wrote down Dr. E. Headleand, Harley Street, the same thrill of self-affirmation, of self-definition would be re-enacted. Liz Ablewhite of Abercorn Avenue had become Liz Headleand of Harley Street, London W1. Nobody could argue with that, nobody could question it, it was so .... The Headleands of Harley Street. Resonant, exemplary. A myriad of uncertainties and hesitations were buried beneath that solid pile, banished by the invocation of a street name. Vanished suburbia, vanished the provinces, vanished forever solitude and insignificance and social fear. (18)

It is evident that Liz's sense of identity and of being at the centre of English life depends more on her being part of "The Headleands of Harley Street" than it does on her being a psychotherapist.

It is also evident, however, that the social fear has not vanished. It has merely been buried and continues to exist for Liz as the ghostly presence of her mother haunting her imagination. Even before she discovers that Charles wants to divorce her and marry Lady Henrietta, Liz thinks of herself as "biologically a peasant" by comparison with Henrietta (30). Behind the social fear is the "dread of reliving her mother's unending, inexplicable, still-enduring loneliness" (31), and when she learns that Charles wants a divorce this anxiety resurfaces. Although she manages to conceal it from others most of the time, Liz is filled with a "sense of misgiving, of uncertainty, of disorientation" (125). She feels that

because Charles "has withdrawn his support, ... she has become nobody" (184). Even in her career, she has a "sense of falseness, of faithlessness" (137). Like Kate and Hugo in *The Middle Ground*, she feels as if she is on "[s]hifting terrain" and is living in the midst of an earthquake (124). She fears suffering a complete reversal of fortune and a return to the disadvantages of her childhood:

She is afraid that if she takes a step back, all her worldly riches will crumble, like Cinderella's at midnight, and she will find herself once more polishing the boots. Well, of course she is afraid of this, we are all afraid of this, if we have any imagination. But she is more afraid of this than most. She knows that she is not the true princess, but only the fake princess, a scullery maid dressed up by a Cambridge scholarship and her own wits, and rescued by a dubious prince. (183)

Neither Alix nor Esther sympathizes with Liz in her anxiety over the divorce since, as Alix points out, Liz has a very good income from her psychotherapy practice, but they are made aware of the fears that can haunt a person of Liz's background, even one like Liz who seems not to lack confidence, who seems to her friends, in fact, to be "too confident" at times (126). Through Liz, Drabble is once again looking at the negative effects of class-consciousness on people who move to "the centre" from "the margins." Like an earlier Drabble working-class Oxbridge graduate (Simon in *The Needle's Eye*), Liz feels that she is masquerading as something she is not. Because she is a woman whose sense of being at "the centre" of English life is closely linked to her place at the centre of a large family, when the marriage fails she fears a return to the "margins" of her childhood.

She comes close to a nervous breakdown when, in a typical Drabble discovery scene near the end of the novel, she finds the story of her father in newspaper clippings of paedophiles and male suicides secreted in drawers in her mother's room of the family house (383-4). Liz's speculation that her father was one of "these outcasts" is confirmed by her mother's solicitor who tells Liz and Shirley that their father committed suicide after being acquitted of a charge of indecent exposure to primary school children. Prompted by

the children's primer called *The Radiant Way*, Liz remembers her father and the advantage he took of her own "infantile sexuality" as she slid up and down on his knee learning to read (386). Although the "psychic fever" that follows lasts only twenty-four hours (387-88), Liz is left feeling even less secure about her present social position, less sure of the "plausibility" of her identity as a respected psychotherapist.

Her social fears do not seem excessive in the context of "the persistence of the class system" in England with "things getting ... worse and worse" under Thatcherism (236). The ironic title of the novel is also "the ironic title" of a series on education which Charles Headland made in the sixties when he was new to the television world and still a radical. We are told that this series "demonstrated, eloquently, movingly, the evils that flow from a divisive class system, from early selection, from Britain's unfortunate heritage of public schools and philistinism" (174). What viewers found most unsettling about it was the revelation that a tradition thought to be amusingly old-fashioned in the progressive sixties was, in fact, still the predominating influence on the present:

The nation smiled as the camera elicited words, accents, attitudes of extraordinary outmoded quaintness and patronage from Oxford dons, from headmasters, and pupils from public schools, from prep-school boys in short trousers; then frowned thoughtfully as the camera showed these attitudes to be entrenched within the very fabric of British society. (174)

The greater irony is the fact that there was more hope of change in the system when the series was shown in 1965 than there is in the 1980s. It was in 1965 that the Labour Government issued a circular "designed to end selection at eleven-plus and introduce comprehensive education" (174), whereas in the eighties a Tory Government under Thatcher is making severe cuts in public spending, particularly in education, and is closing colleges. According to one of the characters in the novel, England in the 1980s is "the most class-divided society in Europe" (236).

Earlier in the novel, the narrator commented on the enduring friendship of Brian

Bowen who came from "the heart of urban England, in industrial Yorkshire" and Stephen Cox who came from "the heart of rural England, in the West country, in the heart of the Tory shires," a friendship formed "over the class barrier" while they were doing their National Service (158). She observed that National Service and jury service are the only two forms of service which bring people from the various classes in England together in "enforced proximity" (168). The persistence of class barriers outside these services is indicated by the fact that

[i]t is commonplace to hear middle-class people declare that they enjoy their jury service because it gives them an insight into how other people think and live. As though there were no other way of discovering these things. (168)

There are other ways for the middle classes to discover these things, of course, but what ultimately prevents them from voluntarily seeking contact may be fear. We are told that as a child, Alix was informed of poverty in other countries and urged to contribute "pittances of pocket money" to sink wells and buy tractors for India, but she was not made aware of the facts of poverty in England:

Poverty nearer home had been less vividly presented to her .... It was grey, shabby, and somehow infectious: to be avoided. It lived in back streets of terrace houses and on sprawling housing estates. It wasted what money it had on drinking and it spoke with rough accents. It was feckless, unthrifty, sluttish, violent, loud-mouthed, and materialistic. (102)

In sum, "it" was to be feared and avoided by "nice little middle-class children in school uniforms" (102). We have seen this pattern in Drabble's earlier novels (in *The Millstone* and *The Needle's Eye*, for example): poverty in other countries, which are said to have less "advanced" cultures than England, is vividly presented in England which, through its middle-class contributions of a mere pittance, may be seen as having a superior culture, financially and morally, while poverty at home is blamed not on the inequities of English class culture but on the poor themselves, on a "class" of people whose characteristics are said to oppose those claimed for "the English" as a people.

We are told that "even as a child" Alix "disliked being made to feel fear of her fellow men and women" and that she "had always had a secret yearning to enter the other city, the unknown city" of the working-class poor (103). When, after her first husband's death, Alix did enter this unknown terrain, the result was that "[g]radually her fears of the rough and the unmannerly faded" as she "faded into the background," a position from which she could see that "these people ... were like herself in more ways than they were unlike herself" (104). Alix did not remain in poverty, but she did marry a man who, Alix thinks, "brought with him," from his working-class origins "[a] sense of not being afraid" (168). Together, in the "warmth" of their physical intimacy, "safe from the storms of fear" (169-70), they form something close to the mixed-class marriage that characters in Drabble's earlier novels (Emma and David in *The Garrick Year*, Jane and Malcolm in *The Waterfall*) had hoped for but had not achieved. We are told that "it has been alleged" that Alix "is a sentimentalist about class" and that she sees her relationship with Brian as a public and political as well as a personal act:

Lying in your arms, Alix said once, not very seriously to Brian, I am in the process of healing the wounds in my own body and in the body politic.  
(168)

The narrator notes that "Brian laughed, as she meant him to; but she meant it" (169). Alix would like to think of Brian "as a symbol of the new, the classless society of which she had dreamed" (232) and which she thought she was helping to bring into being.

The narrator makes it clear, however, that not even the socialist city council of Northam in the "Other Nation" of Northern England (47) is able to change the narrow-minded class consciousness of those residents who see themselves as embodying the values of "Englishness" and consider themselves to be models of morality. While Fred Bowen, Brian's father, is quite happy to be living in a council block flat in Northam (53-54), Mrs. Harper, Shirley's mother-in-law, "frequently and loudly denounce[s]" the

housing project despite the fact that she has never gone near it. The narrator explains that "the precariousness of Mrs. Harper's own social position would forever prevent her from visiting Fred Bowen" (54); yet, it is this prejudiced woman and other like-minded people who see themselves as "[t]he backbone of the nation, the salt of the earth" (53), and Shirley's "vision of households all over Britain" harbouring "ensorious old bags like her mother-in-law" (53) suggests that there is little chance that England will become the classless society of Alix's dream.

When an interviewer observed that *The Radiant Way* appears "pessimistic from a political standpoint," Drabble replied,

Yes, it was meant to be. I am depressed; we ought to have got a bit further by now. I see a terrible failure of nerve in the political and educational system. They are going to sell the National Health Service. Even the underpinning is being taken away after all our progressive dreams. I think our society is mad and we will look back on these dark days with disbelief. (Interview with Kenyon 35)

She went on to say that the question she was concerned with in the novel "was what went wrong in the 1980s" (38). The answer seems to be that everything went wrong: cuts in public spending were accompanied by high unemployment rates, privatization, a decline in manufacturing and violent labour strikes; add the inner city riots, the race riots and the war in the Falklands (227-31) and it is hard to imagine a more divided England. What is particularly unsettling about the novel, however, is not the depiction of the extreme divisions within England in the 1980s which some characters believe can be blamed on the Thatcher government and which they think can be solved by replacing that government with another. What is particularly unsettling is the radical conclusion reached by others that the problem is the system itself and that the only resolution is in revolution.

As we have seen, one of the ways in which Drabble gives credence to this conclusion is to imply it in the description of Charles Headleand's eloquent series on

education in the 1960s which depended for its effect on showing rather than telling and what it showed in the words and actions of the people in it was that class consciousness was so much a part of the English social structure that its abolition would require the abolition of the structure itself (174). That the situation is even worse in the 1980s merely reinforces the point.

Another way in which she makes her radical conclusion more "familiar" or acceptable is to show it being reached by Alix Bowen, the most well meaning and socially conscientious of the characters in the novel, the one most committed to the egalitarian dream of the 1960s. As noted earlier, Alix would like to believe that her relationship with Brian is representative of the creation of a classless society in England rather than the warm domestic retreat it turns out to be. The illusion is shattered when the relationship is disrupted by the "Class War" outside (235) as Brian, loyal to his class background, takes to the streets in support of the miners and Alix, not sure where her loyalties are, sits helplessly and hopelessly at home watching the strike on television and feeling "[a] terrible grinding disaffection" (242). She knows that her pain is caused by the conflict between her Oxbridge education which makes her recoil from "the righteous voices of unreason" and her belief that "Brian [is] right," that the cause of the strike and the violence is the "economic system itself. This system under which she lives. There [is] no hope in it" (342). Alix can see no way out of her dilemma and the narrator notes that there are "many thousands like her" (243).

By the end of the novel, Alix has completely lost faith in the dream of an egalitarian England: with the miners defeated or "in the inelegant words of the Prime Minister, 'seen off,'" and "[t]he nation ... divided as never before" (391), Alix decides not to look for any more jobs in English institutions, jobs which she had once mistakenly believed to be socially useful:



She has had enough for the time being, of trying to serve the community. There is no point in it. The community does not want her, and she does not at the moment much care for the community. There is no hope, in the present social system, of putting anything right. The only hope is in revolution and Alix does not think revolution likely. (392)

To understand this abdication as I think Drabble means us to understand it—as a positive action related to a politics of guilt—we must return to an earlier "dialogue of self and self" (185). In the course of this earlier examination of conscience, Alix tells herself that she is a "socialist" but that she cannot as yet define what she means by socialism. All she knows is that she does not mean the kind that would be carried out by a switch from a Tory to a Labour government under the present system. She describes this inability to define her position as a "lack of position." At the same time she admits to herself that she is in a "false position" by continuing to work within a system she distrusts. Here, near the end of the novel, having lost both her jobs, she decides to stop pretending to herself that she had been helping to change the system. She admits to herself that by working within the system she has been complicitous with it, helping to keep going what Drabble will later describe as a "haze of talk and compromise and phrase-making" wherein the idea of *complete* equality is lost (*The Witch of Exmoor* 265). For Alix to think that the only hope of complete equality is in a complete change from the existing social system indicates an inability or refusal, on Drabble's part, to negotiate or mediate a radical perception of unfairness in the interests of finding that "centred" or "tolerant" middle-ground position on which "Englishness" depends.

On the way to this subversive conclusion, Alix had to resist Brian's nostalgia for the provincial working-class culture of his youth in the North, the essence of which Brian tries to recapture during his and Alix's annual visits to old Mrs. Orme, his family's next-door neighbour when he was a child. These visits bring back for Brian memories of the "warmth" and "cosiness" of Mrs. Orme's kitchen during his childhood. Alix's point is

that this atmosphere has "faded," has "dwindled into a lapsed evening melancholy, a cooling, an irreversible dim decline" (232) and she is "bored despite herself" as she listens to Mrs. Orme's "tedious, repetitive, mournful, nostalgic" reminiscences of "[a] way of life, a culture" "that was fading forever" (233). This is the old dream of an organic working-class culture that fuelled the British left. Some of this leftist nostalgia for "a way of life, a culture" can be seen in Richard Hoggart's work, and in Raymond Williams's early work (like *Culture and Society*). It has been critiqued by critics like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy for its failure to include recent immigrants, a point Drabble makes also. Unlike Brian, Alix is able to penetrate the air of nostalgia surrounding such "relics" from the past (233) as a "hand-painted egg timer" or a "white wooden cotton reel" and to consider it from the point of view of a refugee:

Otto Werner had never worshipped an old wooden cotton reel: he was not entranced by the past. He was a refugee. He believed that the British labour movement in general, the manufacturing North more specifically, and Brian Bowen his old friend in person were in danger of worshipping an old wooden cotton reel. Some called it class solidarity. Otto could not see the charm of it at all. (234)

Seeing no hope of change in England, Otto leaves for the United States and does not plan to return.

The only one of the three main women characters not bothered by class consciousness is Esther. When we enter her consciousness it is to learn of ways in which she sees herself as being different from her "English" friends, and not troubling herself about class conflict is one of them (343). She is very unlike Alix in having "no social conscience at all, in her own view" and her response to the cutbacks in education is to "not worry about it very much" (187). She is "quite happy" to teach the wealthy young foreigners who fill up places in her course at the Feldmann Institute which used to be filled by English students who no longer get grants (186), and when her WEA evening class on

Italian art is cut, she is just as happy to replace it with her "new project" which is

to set up an exhibition, preferably at the Hayward Gallery, of scarecrows .... International scarecrows. The scarecrow in art and mythology .... The global scarecrow. (187)

She is quite aware that this subject is similar to those chosen (or invented) for "articles that [then] frequently appeared in the [English] press mocking the abstruseness of higher education and the subjects selected for research." Esther's response, however, opposes the mockery of the articles. She finds such topics "particularly fascinating" and "immediately want[s] to know all about [them]" (187). Her interest in these subjects is not, unlike Alix's, in the social implications (188). What motivates her is curiosity and the sheer enjoyment of learning new things (187).

Cosmopolitan in her work, she is also cosmopolitan in her personal relationships. Unlike Liz and Alix, both of whom have married a second time, Esther has never married, and her two English friends think that there may be something very odd about her sex life. It was on her first visit abroad that Esther began a series of relationships of "platonic passion" with married older men (190) with which she distanced herself from English middle-class domesticity. Although Esther jokes with Liz and Alix about the various men she has admitted to her salon, they feel that

beyond the oddity some serious drama was being enacted from which they themselves were excluded, debarred, but which might in time perhaps be played in public instead of in that red room behind those thick drapes. (106)

The Jamesian aura of mystery surrounding Esther's continental-style salon turns sinister when Esther "embark[s] on a new and even more enigmatic liaison with an Italian anthropologist of satanic reputation" who, Drabble adds in a sideswipe at English cultural insularity and complacency, "turn[s] out to be--indeed, for some time unrecognized by the British had been--a structuralist" (100).

Claudio is such an odd character by English standards that there are no English

words to describe him. We are told that "[h]e never sounded as plausible [speaking] in English" as he did in his native Italian (348) and the only word Esther can think of to describe him is the French *outré*, a word not yet naturalized in English, and even Esther does not know what, "in relation to a person as *outré* as Claudio, the word 'real' might mean" (191). A respected scholar working on "medieval superstition and heresy in a small mountainous region of the Greek-Bulgarian border," he even succeeds in momentarily discomposing "the ageing aristocrats of the academic world" gathered at the Institute in Rome to hear his Montano di Salvo lecture when he departs from a precise and sober discussion of his research to a first person informal account of "his own adventures into the supernatural" (251). In "a circumstantial narrative style," with references to such realistic details as his "little orange Fiat 125" and the meal of "olives ... flat unleavened bread ... [and] rough wine" he was served by the "ordinary, human, two-legged villagers" (253), Claudio claims that while driving alone through southern Bulgaria he met a werewolf who guided him to a village where he was introduced to a witch (252-53). Esther--who has with Claudio "an understanding of a dark, shared, seclusion: an erotic, a satanic understanding" (206) and "a disembodied mystic intimacy" (289)--thinks that Claudio has gone too far this time even for her and she consults Liz about her relationship with Claudio: she confesses that when she is with Claudio she finds herself "believing these things" (255).

Liz is able to give Esther's collusion with Claudio a name but, as in the case of Claudio himself, it is the French language rather than the English which supplies it: she describes the relationship as "some kind of *folie-à-deux*. A willed mutual hallucination" (256). The fact that there is a name for it, however, even though what is named is considered to be a shared delusion, a form of madness, gives plausibility to this state of mind. When Liz suggests and Esther agrees that Esther is "afraid to disturb Claudio's

madness, because by disturbing it, [she] might drive him mad," (256) we understand that what others would describe as a disturbed state of mind is, in fact, Claudio's sanity, to disturb which would be to disturb his "reality," the way he makes sense of the world, and, therefore, to drive him insane. If we accept this view (and why not, since it is the view of a respected psychotherapist?) we have stepped out of the plausibility of "Englishness" into "the unknown" and admitted the existence of a "reality" that is an alternative to "Englishness."

In Drabble's portrayal of Claudio one detects the influence of Angela Carter (especially Carter's "The Company of Wolves" in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*). Drabble has said that he was her "little joke about magic realism, a sort of response to it" and "a symbol of the extraordinary contrasts in our intellectual life today" (Interview with Kenyon 37). His presence in the novel is indicative of Drabble's growing interest in cross-cultural concerns. She told Kenyon that she has "a theory that magic realism by women is different from men's" and she mentioned a lecture she gave in Spain on "witchcraft" in the novels of such British women writers as Fay Weldon and Angela Carter whose use of magic she sees as being comparable to the "rewriting of fairy tales," or the telling of "upside-down fairy stories" by women, an example being, she said, the "Scandinavian writer called Maria Tikkenen telling Red Riding Hood as an obvious sex story" (39-40). This is what Carter does also in "The Company of Wolves" which, as Salman Rushdie points out in his introduction to *Burning Your Boats*, has for its theme the "radical" and "shocking" suggestion "that the girl (Red Riding Hood, Beauty) might easily be as amoral, as savage as the Wolf/Beast; that she might conquer the Wolf by the power of her own predatory sexuality, her erotic wolfishness" (xii). What Drabble finds attractive about magic realism is its departure from the Leavisite "great tradition" which is essentially anti-fantasy and resolutely fixated on *moral realism*. Unlike moral realism, which is

conservative in its impulse, magic realism is often utopian and subversive of the status quo (the real), and it is particularly appealing to Drabble for the use women writers from various parts of the world make of it in their revisions of gender stereotypes and their celebrations of the threat that female sexuality poses to patriarchal society.

What is most interesting about Esther's relationship with Claudio is the way Drabble uses it to explore an alternate female sexuality. The intimacy with Claudio is different from Esther's other emotional relationships with men in being erotic while, at the same time, being like those other relationships, a way "to avoid normal sexual intercourse" (346). Her aversion to a "normal" sexual relationship is best expressed in her weird dream about the severed head. Having familiarized us with various unknowns, Drabble now reverses the tactic and defamiliarizes one of the knowns of "Englishness"--the idea of domesticity and the heterosexual bond--which seems, from Esther's point of view, to be a perversion. Esther dreamed that she had been walking along the canal bank under Ladbroke Grove near Harrow Road and that she had encountered on the towpath the severed head of a bearded young man which "asked her ... to take it up, to care for it" (205), and which had, when she refused, "raised itself on a bloody shoulder, a torn ragged bloody arm, and moved towards her." Filled with "panic and fear and revulsion," Esther had woken (206). She can explain the dream rationally as having been brought on by the fact that she had spent hours musing over paintings of severed heads, but the dream continues to haunt her and she begins to interpret it as a plea from Claudio that she take care of him. The reason she refused is that "she could not endure the physical intimacy, the daily intimacy, the perverted intimacy" that would exist in such a domestic relationship (206).

Her fear that Claudio wants to "normalize" their relationship arose earlier when he had his sister Elena invite her to stay at Elena's apartment while she was in Bologna (191).

It may be, however, that Claudio knows more about Esther's sexuality than she does and is providing her with a way to express it that she would not find repulsive. Whether or not he intended or desired Esther and Elena to become lovers, indications are that they will when Esther goes to Bologna to live with Elena as she plans to do at the end of the novel. There are suggestions of a growing physical intimacy between the two on Esther's earlier visit (300), and the narrator notes that "[t]ime [is] on their side" (318).

There are hints of the potential for lesbianism and also incest in Esther's relationship with her niece Ursula with whom she shares her flat for a time. Although they never mention it to each other or to Esther, "[b]oth Liz and Alix are of the opinion that Esther's relationship with her niece ... is very odd indeed ..." and we are told by the narrator that Esther "is not much interested in the distinction between the natural and the unnatural" in sexual matters (81). In her college years she even "maintained the fiction that she was in love with her older brother Saul" probably because with this "love that dared not speak its name" she could ward off any unwelcome advances from the young and not so young men who visited her room (93).

Esther is also unlike her two "English" friends in not having and not wanting a house of her own. According to Drabble, the desire to own property is an inextricable part of "Englishness,"<sup>15</sup> and we have already seen her note the problems associated with this desire in a small country with a large population. In *The Radiant Way*, the association of property ownership with "Englishness" and of both with immorality (as opposed to the morality usually claimed for "Englishness") is made by Esther, reflecting on the reasons why she

is so little attracted to the notion of owning property, when she is so interested in the visual aspects of the material world, so attracted to the details of her own immediate environment. Maybe it is merely a continental aberration, a Viennese inheritance, an unsettled refugee spirit, an un-English

spirit. Alix and Brian, good socialists though they try to be, own or at least are paying a mortgage on their house in Wandsworth. It is, of course, a fairly horrible house, which mitigates in their favour, morally. (193)

Later when Alix and Brian move to Northam and decide to keep and rent out the house in Wandsworth, the narrator makes this wry comment: "A property in London (accepted Brian the extremist) was not to be parted with lightly" (374). The question this raises is the extent to which "Englishness" acts as a brake on English socialism and prevents it from bringing about radical changes such as the abolition of private property.

Esther lives in a rented flat "at the wrong end of Ladbroke Grove" near Harrow Road (3). It is not an area in which one can retreat into middle-class cosiness and ignore the murder and mayhem outside the "home" or "private place" (337). In fact, the serial murderer dubbed "the Horror of Harrow Road" by the press turns out to be P. Whitmore, "the silent young man" who has lived in the flat above Esther's for "some thirteen years" (345). Drabble told an interviewer that the murder is "a Dickensian motif," the difference between her use and Dickens's being that "in Dickens [the murderer] would have murdered one of the principal characters whereas in [her novel] he murdered one of the marginal ones" (Interview with Kenyon 33). She was referring to the murder of Jilly Fox on the night that Alix visited her at her flat at Lykewake Gardens, not far from Esther's flat.

On the night the police come to arrest Whitmore, Alix and Liz are visiting Esther, and Alix remembers having run to Esther's "warm and intimate" room "for safety" from Lykewake Gardens nearly a year before when after visiting Jilly she returned to her car to find the tires slashed (365). None of the three women wants to acknowledge the street noises which begin to impinge upon the "silence [which had] prolonged itself peaceably" in the "room [which] glowed, comfortably" behind drawn curtains (365): "They [are] safe in there, they [have] created their own safety," or so they think (366). We may remember an earlier scene in which the three friends were gathered in the same "warm, comfortable,



intimate" room when the silence during their pauses was "disturbed only by the muffled comforting hum of the Black and Decker of the quiet young man upstairs" (112). It was at about that time that the killer adopted as his trademark the decapitation of his female victims.

The humour of the retrospective irony is indicative of the subtlety of Drabble's handling of Dickensian melodrama. Humour is the means by which she avoids both the "sentimentality" of which Dickens has been accused and the "sombre" quality of his later work (*The Oxford Companion* 273). In her treatment of the murder motif, Drabble veers more towards "the high-spirited humour" of Dickens's early work (*The Oxford Companion* 273). Consider the description of one of the murders committed by the "Horror of Harrow Road." According to Ivan Warner (a gossip columnist) who describes the murder to Liz,

Everybody claimed to be horrified, everybody was delighted: except, presumably, the victim herself, who had been found, said Ivan (wiping his lips delicately on the dark-pink napkin), sitting in a waste lot in the driver's seat of a wheel-less Notting Hill Carnival float, headless, neatly wearing a safety belt with her head by her side on the passenger's seat. (203)

Both the macabre humour of the murder and the relish with which Ivan recounts it play down the horror and play up the element of entertainment that is present in it.

The murder motif is only one of the ways in which Drabble tries to do Dickensian justice to contemporary London in *The Radiant Way*. Another is Esther's wanderings about the streets of West and North-West London and her ambivalence to what she sees:

London has become difficult. Not impossible, but difficult. Even Esther, who likes urban life, is becoming distressed by the visual impact of some stretches of Ladbroke Grove, by the apartment blocks of the Harrow Road, by the strange surreal landscape under the arches of the motorway. (192)

As she wanders about the streets it seems to her to be "[a] landscape of nightmare, an extreme, end-of-the-world, dreamlike parody of urban nemesis" (244). There are echoes of Conrad's description in *Heart of Darkness* of "the grove of death" in Esther's perception

of Ladbroke Grove where "Giant graffiti marched and sprawled, machinery rusted, padlocked gates labelled 'Reception' and 'Welcome' led to nowhere ..." (244). There are also echoes of the London of Eliot's *The Waste Land* as Esther sips a drink at the Metropole Hotel, sees "a hanged man" (which is actually "a lifesize dummy in workman's green overalls, dangling against the sky") (243), and sits by the canal reading Dante's *Purgatory* (244).

Despite all of the imagery of decay and death, however, Esther does not want to leave the city for the beauties of nature and a rent-free cottage belonging to friends in Somerset, and her ambivalence about contemporary London reflects Drabble's own, an attitude which is closer to Dickens's towards nineteenth-century London than it is to the modernists' attitude toward modern London. In *A Writer's Britain* Drabble expresses her admiration for Dickens's depiction of London as "a free-style hotchpotch of a place" (213). She says of Dickens's attitude that "[h]e denounces but he loves" and that there is an appeal for him in "the confusion" of the city (207). Of his Thames, she says that it is "far from calm and clear" or "sweet," "but it is a hundred times more interesting" than earlier poetic evocations (209). It is obvious that she shares Dickens's attitude when she writes: "His London is dirty, but it is also wonderfully mysterious and dramatic" (209).

Esther does go to stay at her friends' cottage in order to get away from the publicity surrounding the P. Whitmore murder case and Alix and Liz visit her there at what they call "Esther's Somerset retreat" (395). Commenting on the "pastoral note" on which the novel ends, Drabble explained that "the end is only a mood," "a sort of epilogue" in which the women have "mixed feelings about their future and the past" (Interview with Kenyon 33). The scene is the end of "a perfect day" the women spent picnicking in a beautiful valley lush with flowers. It is "the only sunny weekend of a dismal damp year" (394). We leave them during a pause "[a]t the top of the last steep homeward ascent" leaning on a gate to

watch the sunset:

The sun is dull with a red radiance. It sinks. Esther and Liz and Alix are silent with attention. The sun hangs in the sky, burning. The earth deepens to a more profound red. The sun bleeds, the earth bleeds. The sun stands still.

The incomplete sunset is very much in contrast to the "primal timeless brightness [which] shimmer[ed] in the hot afternoon air" (395). There is an apocalyptic, end-of-the-world quality about the burning, bleeding sun hanging in the sky which reflects what Drabble said is her main concern in the novel: "the decline of Western civilization" as "seen through women's eyes" (Interview with Kenyon 37). The scene reminds us, by contrast, of that depicted on the jacket cover of the children's primer called *The Radiant Way*: "two children, a boy and a girl, running down (not up) a hill against a background of radiant thirties sunburst" (385). The change in the images--from youth to middle age, from a downhill run to a slow uphill climb, and from an intense dazzling sunburst to a dull gloomy sunset--reflects a change from hope to despair, from a clear vision of a new society to a lack of vision.

#### *A Natural Curiosity*

From the point of view of a complacent middle-class form of "Englishness," *A Natural Curiosity* is an even more uncomfortable book than *The Radiant Way*. In it Drabble not only takes us farther out of the known of English middle-class values and beliefs into the unknown where those values and beliefs have little or no validity but also suggests that the "curiosity" which takes us there is a more reliable guide to the "real" than the middle-class morality it displaces. In a move which subverts the Leavisite notion that to be human is to have an innate ability to be a moral agent, Drabble suggests that "human nature" is a human "invent[ion]" (24-25) and that it is only by going "way beyond all moral

judgement" (7) that we get close to discovering what it is.

Even more disturbing for this version of Englishness perhaps is Drabble's location of the unknown "other" not in foreign lands but in England itself. The history of Britain which provides the background for *A Natural Curiosity* is not the well known middle-class history of liberal humanism with its claim to material and moral superiority but rather the history of Britain as a marginal country—the largely forgotten history of ancient Britain and its conquest by Rome and the still unrecorded history of contemporary Britain as, in the provocative view of one character, "a poor colony of the USA, a missile pad, a nuclear dump" (224). In the foreground of the novel, England takes its place alongside countries usually viewed by "Englishness" as foils for England. Drabble assumes that England is as suitable a setting for "a pathological novel" or a "psychotic novel" (194) as the Congo of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed, where severed heads are concerned, those found in England far outnumber those Marlow found on stakes round Kurtz's hut in the "heart" of the Congo. Drabble's novel seeks to discover in England the origin of those human "monstrosities" (167) which "Englishness" refuses to acknowledge as part of "English" history. Filled with what "Englishness" would, if it could, dismiss as "atrocities" (54) and case histories of "[a]bnormality" (25), *A Natural Curiosity* supports the view of one of its characters that "the whole of human history [including 'English' history] is nothing but a history of deepening psychosis" (24). Through what Rubenstein refers to as a "domestication" (or naturalization) of the macabre ("Severed Heads" 103) and what I refer to as a denaturalization of the domestic, Drabble undermines distinctions between the "natural" and the "unnatural," the "normal" and the "abnormal" or "deviant"; and, having taken us into unknown territory—and unsettled preferred notions of "English" identity—she leaves us there, confused and uncertain.

Drabble begins the process of defamiliarizing the familiar and familiarizing the

unfamiliar on the first page of the novel which opens on "a pale lemon grey day" shrouded in a "grey mist" with Alix Bowen driving across a "lonely moor" on "a road climb[ing] gently into obscurity." It seems that we are about to be treated to a tale of the unknown and this expectation seems to be confirmed when we are told that Alix is "on her way to see her murderer" whom she visits "quite regularly." Even when it becomes clear that Alix is on her way to visit the serial murderer Paul Whitmore and that he is referred to as "her murderer" not because he has murdered her (or will murder her in the course of the novel) but because she has "adopted" him, we may still feel that we have "stepped out of plausibility into the unknown" (141). At the same time, the unfamiliar story to which we are to be treated, that of "an exceptionally law-abiding and mild-mannered and conscientious citizen" befriending a serial killer (5), is made to seem more plausible by comparison with the horror story Drabble is not telling.

That the story involves such a "nice" person as Alix Bowen (5), however, turns out to be another way in which Drabble makes it seem realistic by "English" standards. Alix is an "ever loving mother" (125) and she is drawn to Paul Whitmore in part because he does not have a mother who visits him. In the course of the novel Alix sets out to prove that maternal neglect and abandonment account for the fact that Paul Whitmore is a serial killer. Even before she meets Angela Whitmore,

Alix is convinced that Angela is a very nasty bit of work. She has little to go on, but she has a smell of her, an instinct. The Bad Mother .... The Runaway Mother. Can she be blamed for the disaster of P. Whitmore and the deaths of his random victims? (165)

Alix believes that Angela can be blamed and she is confirmed in her suspicions on her first visit to Angela when Angela refers to Paul as a "pig" and refuses to have anything to do with him (201). Alix concludes that "Angela Whitmore had not loved Paul Whitmore, and as a result he had killed several innocent strangers" (225). A second encounter with Angela

turns up more evidence of her nastiness: Alix discovers a room full of dogs which are either dead or dying of starvation in a heap below a horse's head suspended just out of their reach (283-84). Since the scene is obviously the work of Angela, it confirms Alix in her belief that Paul's crimes can be traced back to maltreatment by his "evil" mother (280).

Thus far this aspect of the story seems to support the value "Englishness" attaches to "the home" and a woman's place in it. At the end of the novel, however, Alix's explanation of Paul Whitmore is questioned by both Liz and Esther and, finally, by Alix herself. At first we are told,

Alix believes that she has unknotted and unravelled the strands of her murderer, that she has seen into him and known him. She presents Liz and Esther with her version of the murderer, and they have, by and large, accepted it. Yes, they concede, Paul Whitmore has clearly been unhinged by maternal neglect, by maternal hatred, by punitive discrimination in his early years. An abused child. (302)

This explanation is immediately called into question for the reader by Liz's thoughts:

Liz does not like to point out that by Alix's account, Paul's father is a perfectly normal, indeed quite kind-hearted chap, and that many children grow up fairly normal without any parental kindness at all. At least they do not grow up into mass murderers. (302)

It is then called into question for Alix too when Esther says that there is nothing "odd" about the fact that Paul Whitmore turns out to fit the kind of explanation that Alix expected him to fit. She points out that Paul is "not just any old murderer" selected at random. She tells Alix, "he's *your* murderer," and she explains that Alix chose him "because [she] knew he was going to turn out to be the kind of person he turns out to be" (303). Alix concedes Esther's point and she herself draws the conclusion:

So, I haven't proved anything. I've just confirmed my own prejudices about human nature. I've been travelling around a closed circuit. A closed system. Me and my murderer together. It wasn't a theorem, it was a circuit. (303)

According to Liz, "One wants a theory that fits all occasions .... But there isn't one"

(304). The case of P. Whitmore is even more complicated than Alix's theory can explain since, as Alix learned from Paul's father, Paul had a twin sister who died when she was eight months old--"A cot death. No explanations, no reasons"--and that Angela blamed Paul (302-03).

The fact that for so much of the novel Alix operates within the "closed system" of "Englishness" and that she would have preferred to see its "prejudices" confirmed makes it more difficult for proponents of "Englishness" to dismiss the subversive thoughts she has on occasion. Alix does not think that her interest in Paul can be explained fully by her motherliness since she "has always been peculiarly interested in ... violence and the criminal mentality" (5). It is an interest which she thinks must be seen by others as "excessive, or unnatural" (1), but when she speculates on the reasons for her "obsession" (1), her thoughts undermine this distinction between the natural and the unnatural and, indeed, between the criminal mentality and "human nature." Alix's thoughts reverse the claim made by "Englishness" that, in Spiering's words, "to be English is to be human" or "to possess a special human quality" not possessed by other nationalities, a quality variously referred to as "niceness," "tenderness" or "humanness" (90-93). Alix suggests that this very niceness, of which she is such a strong representative, may make her an incomplete human being. She wonders,

It is perhaps *because* she is so "nice" that she is so intrigued? Does her interest express her other darker ever-repressed self? .... Or maybe it is precisely *because* she definitively *lacks* this element in her psyche that she is drawn towards it .... As though in a search for her own wholeness? (5)

We remember that Alix expressed the same thoughts in *The Radiant Way* when she explained Jilly Fox's involvement in crime as a way of escaping the boredom of middle-class life and of joining the human race.

In *A Natural Curiosity* Alix goes even further to suggest that "the Horror of Harrow

Road" is not such an anomaly as "Englishness" would like to believe. Paul's curiosity about "the Druids and Stonehenge ... the Celts and the Romans ... [and] the old gods" is shared by other characters in the novel, particularly by Alix and by old Beaver who has written poems on the subject, and as Liz and Alix note in a conversation following their visit to the British Museum archaeology exhibition to view Lindow Man, there is at this time in Britain a great deal of interest in "Bog people in general": in their discussion, "P. Whitmore's interest in corpses and Ancient Britain" is placed alongside "the poems of Seamus Heaney, the Bog Man of Buller, P. V. Glob" and recent archaeological excavations in Britain (59-60).

Nor does Alix think the fact that Paul became "obsessed by death and human sacrifice" at the age of eleven after he had been taken on a school outing to see the Bog Man of Buller is much of an aberration. On an expedition to Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, Alix thinks,

Well, one could hardly call Paul Whitmore all *that* peculiar in his interests, could one? Yesterday in the British Museum a cluster of perfectly respectable people had gathered to stare at Lindow Man ["the .... multiply wounded, overslaughtered sacrificial corpse, the corpse of a victim who had been bashed on the head, stabbed in the chest and garrotted, whose throat had been cut, and who had been left to lie for two millennia in a boggy pool" (58)], and here an only marginally less respectable lot were goggling at Marat and a replica of Garry Gilmore in the electric chair. (65)

Alix even thinks that Paul's trademark decapitation of his victims may not set him apart from "normal" people. Musing on the motif, Alix is "remind[ed] ... that severed heads [are] a commonplace of history, of history much more recent than the Celts" (194).

Reading the history of the Romans who are credited with bringing "civilization" to Ancient Britain (3), Alix agrees with Liz who thinks that some of the classical Greek and Roman literature which is said to be the foundation of Western civilization may have been the foundation for



the proliferation of "violence, murder [and] aggression," the result being that "[a]bnormality is in-built by now" (25). We are told that Alix returning again to Tacitus reaches the same conclusion. Tacitus strikes her as sane. Now what does she mean by this? He is reporting mass historic madneses that make Paul Whitmore's aberrations seem trivial. Yet he himself is sane. On the other hand, if you define sanity, if you define normality, so narrowly that only one or two exceptional people can ever achieve it, what does that signify? (25)

Later, as she continues to read Tacitus and begins reading Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Alix thinks that Paul's education may be "as implicated in his decapitations as the evil Angela and [his father's] butcher shop" (165). Reading Lucan's account of "Caesar's desecration of the sacred grove of Massilia" (166), Alix thinks that "[m]aybe the teaching of the classics teaches us monstrosities rather than balance, wisdom, stoicism, reason" (167).

Certainly, Alix sees enough reports of "abnormality" on one evening's television news programme to suggest that it is now "normal." We are told that "[t]hat month, in England" there had been eight killings and one aborted killing, that one of the killings had involved sexual and physical abuse of a year-old baby and that at least three were carried out as pranks or jokes, though only one of the three had been accidental (207-08). A tenth item--"Lavinia, speechless, gushes blood from mouth and stumps of arms"--presented by the narrator as if it were part of the list is actually a scene from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, a film adaptation of which Alix watches following the news. When the narrator invites us to "[s]pot the one invented story if [we] can" (208) she draws attention to the seemingly incredible nature of the violence in the factual accounts, violence which rivals that in *Titus Andronicus*, a play filled with the bloody mutilation and sacrifice of their opponents' children by revenge-crazed parents, notable images besides the one of the raped and mutilated Lavinia being the severed heads of two of Titus's sons, sent to Titus along with his own severed hand, and the pie made of the flesh of two of Tamora's sons served to Tamora by Titus following a butcher-like killing.

When the narrator has Alix reflect that Brian "has never liked [this play], has always considered it one of Shakespeare's lesser plays" (208), she alludes to the fact that English "[c]ritical judgement of the play has tended to be unfavourable" (*The Oxford Companion* 986). In fact, from the point of view of "Englishness," the play shows such "un-English" tastes on the part of its author that up to the second half of the twentieth century "English" critics wished to deny that Shakespeare was the author. According to Hardin Craig in his introduction to the play in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1961), the "exaggerated expression of passion and ... repulsive subject matter" of the play are alien to Shakespeare's more mature and "naturally gentle tastes" and, "if it is Shakespeare's play," it must have been written very early in his career, before those tastes "had had time to assert themselves" (366-67). The absence of gentleness which bothered Craig still bothers Brian who, we are told later, is also "slightly disturbed" by Alix's insistence on revenge in her dealings with Angela Whitmore and "does not like the new vindictive note in [her] voice, the new glitter in her eye" (289-90).

The equation of "Englishness" with gentleness and of both with humanness is given a bizarre twist in the case of the fear expressed by the serial murderer Paul Whitmore that Esther Breuer might become a serial killer of potted palms. While she was living in her flat at Ladbroke Grove Esther had put her potted palm, which looked as if it were dying, outside so that it might die quickly and Paul, on one of the very few occasions he spoke to her in his thirteen years in the same apartment building, had expressed his concern for the palm (106). The concern resurfaces in a dream Paul says he has had about the palm in which it was "crying out[,] 'Take me in, little sister, take me in ....'" Paul wants Alix to tell Esther that she "needn't have killed it" because it "wasn't really dying." "They always look like that. Half dead," he explains, and he urges Alix to warn her "not to do it again" (105). When Alix points out that the palm is "dead by now," Paul says, "But she might get

another .... She might do it again" (106). As she listens to Paul express his fear that Esther might kill another potted palm, Alix recalls

involuntarily, the macabre details of a recent murder case in Leeds: a dentist and his wife, who had murdered their adopted Brazilian daughter (who knows why, or how?), had chopped her up into tiny pieces and buried her in a hundred different places—in the garden, under the floorboards, and most horribly, in plant pots around the house. They had lived with bits of her buried beneath rubber plants and cheese plants and a winter-flowering jasmine. (106)

It would seem that in the couple, as in Paul, the "naturally gentle tastes" of "the English" have manifested themselves in a "grotesque" combination (106) of murdering humans and caring deeply for potted plants.

The question of what is "natural" or "unnatural," plausible or implausible, becomes even more complicated when Drabble addresses the question of sexual behaviour. As usual in Drabble, the "normal," monogamous, heterosexual relationship supports a domesticity which is, at best, boring and, at worst, as painful as "hell" (258). There is the usual boredom suffered by the wife who has to accompany her husband to out-of-the-way places for the sake of the family and the husband's career. Fanny Kettle accompanied her husband on his archaeological dig on the flat fens of the East Riding where, she says, she would have "gone mad, quite mad" were it not for her "little trips abroad, ... little trips to London" (46). Being one of Drabble's "wild" women, a "good old-fashioned nymphomaniac" according to her husband Ian (255), Fanny did not suffer in silence. Besides taking her periodic trips abroad, she gave her own parties which her old friend Susie thinks were characterized by "[c]arnival, abandon, licence" (49). Susie Enderby has given up the "childhood naughtiness" and the "experiments" of a heterosexual nature that she and Fanny shared at school (146) and has turned into a "respectable housewife, mother of two, and part-time speech therapist" (147). She is both appalled and attracted by Fanny who has continued with her experiments despite marriage and motherhood and who "seems

to think that sexual promiscuity is both natural and normal" (146). Under Fanny's influence, however, Susie begins to doubt her own conviction "that the kind of behaviour Fanny seemed to think normal was aberrant, deviant, almost pathological" (149).

Susie will shortly embark on a tempestuous love affair with a man chosen for her by Fanny and act "in a way that is quite out of character, or quite out of the character she had thought she had settled into in her adult life" but in a way that is consistent with the adventurous schoolgirl she had been (146). Drabble's treatment of Susie's passion for Blake Leith is the culmination of her attempts to give romantic love a plausibility it does not have within the dominant discourse of "Englishness," to give it the "quotidian reality" Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* knew it had but found so difficult to describe (85). Drabble is so determined to get it right this time that she presents us with two versions of romance, the first of which is similar enough to the second to act as a rehearsal and to weaken disbelief.

Shirley Harper, Liz's sister, seems at first to be as constrained by "the norm of suburban South Yorkshire" (293) as Susie Enderby is by being half of "Mr. and Mrs. Average Professional Couple" (115). Like Susie, Shirley was, or wanted to be, "a bad girl ... before she grew up and became a housewife and mother of two [later three]" (180). By the time we meet her, she is suffering the effects of many "dull normal day[s]" (96) of cooking, washing and cleaning. She and Cliff have never had a satisfying sexual relationship (243) and they have now become "like strangers to each other" (95), we are told. Only a week before Cliff's suicide and the "hysterical fugue" on her part that follows (241), Shirley thinks that "[n]othing interesting ... will ever happen to [her] again" (95).

The shock of finding Cliff dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in his car in the garage jolts her out of her sense of identity as wife and mother and she begins "to feel strange, airy, irresponsible" (98). On impulse, she flees the scene, and the farther she moves from her suburban home, the more liberated, the more like "an unperson" she feels

(126). Her impulse leads her to leave England on the cross-channel ferry, at which point we are told that she "has stepped out of plausibility into the unknown" (141). The unknown turns out to be a Parisian romance with Robert Holland, a man she met on the ferry, and for a month or so with Robert, we are told, "[s]he sails on a high erotic dream" (181).

The dream comes to an end shortly after Shirley, who has "a terrible boil on [her] bum" (242), returns to England's more efficient suburban plumbing. While Shirley and Robert remained in Paris, Drabble had no difficulty giving their romance an everyday reality. Living in a "homely district" there (178) they enjoyed the warmth and acceptance of Robert's friends and acquaintances (161-62) and Shirley, continuing to feel "weightless, airy, irresponsible" (181), was released from the demands of "the norm of South Yorkshire": she was able "to avoid expectation, recrimination, commitment" and "live in the present" (220). When "she is back in England," however, "the craziness of her own behaviour begins to alarm [Shirley] a little" and she starts to think in terms of the "future" (241-42). Unlike Jane Gray in *The Waterfall*, Shirley has not learned that romantic love has a quotidian reality only in the present and it is only by "preferring the present to the future, however dangerously" (*WF* 238) that one can enjoy the freedom it offers.

On the other hand, although Shirley finds it difficult not to worry about the future, she was not unaffected by the alternate reality she experienced in Paris. While she is not quite like the draper's daughter in D. H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* who embraced the alternate reality that she discovered "in the freedom of the Apennines" after running off with a travelling Italian entertainer (252), she is also not quite like Sophia in Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale*, to which Lawrence's novel is a riposte: we are told that, according to Bennett's friend "the rackets rake Frank Harris," Sophia "had wasted Paris, had wasted her mad escape" and "remained a housekeeper at heart" (252). Shirley may be

"a failed experiment" in Drabble's attempts to give romantic love an everyday reality in England (252), but not a failure in the attempt to unsettle the notion that there is only one reality. Even before the Paris episode, Shirley did not think her old existence had meaning (200). Now, when "[s]he contemplates the reality of the suburban world to which she has returned," she finds that it is "not really very convincing." Having experienced a temporary freedom from it, she sees it as not only "frivolous" but also "arbitrary, random" (253).

When Shirley notes that "[e]ven curiosity has died here," the narrator asks us, incredulously, "Shall she resume her non-existence? Is that what you seriously expect?" (253) In an interesting twist, Shirley is rescued by Drabble's revised version of the classical Greek *deus ex machina* in the form of Marcia Campbell, "sister ex machina" (291). The relationship of these sisters is not at all like that of the two sisters in Bennett's novel. Marcia is actually Liz and Shirley's illegitimate half-sister and she introduces Shirley to a postmodern hybrid London sub-culture where "the norm of suburban South Yorkshire" is not thought to be "at all normal," where "[i]t is only one of many patterns" (293).

Marcia herself is a kind of hybrid, born to the young housemaid Rita Ablewhite and her blue-blooded employer Percy Latchett and raised by foster parents who ran a boarding house where, according to Marcia, "all sorts" of "people from all over the world" came (292). She is also an actress and her experience has been enriched by the various roles she has played. She is presently involved in a relationship with a black man who is also a cultural hybrid, born in Trinidad but educated in England where he has worked for thirty years. As a result of all these circumstances, Marcia has "friends in all walks of life." She has a "heterogeneous" life, "[a] magpie life," the diversity of which appeals to Shirley who thinks that "[t]here is room for her here too, in the corner of this settee" (292). We leave

her there with Marcia and Oliver trying to learn from them to be, as they have learned to be, "comfortably unalarmed by ... uncertainty" (293). Surprising as it is to Liz, Marcia too had suffered from "an identity crisis," caused in her case by a change in career, a divorce and her foster mother's death (268). It is surprising because Marcia has benefitted from the disruptions and changes in her life and is no longer involved in that search for the illusion of order and security which Clive Enderby identifies as characteristic of the English middle classes. Shirley may be learning from Marcia that there are alternatives to these "norms" of "Englishness."

Ironically, while Clive Enderby is privy to the secrets in other families, he is unaware of the one in his own "model family" (115). As noted earlier, Clive's wife Susie becomes involved in a romantic affair with another man. It begins just after Shirley has returned from Paris and the narrator has admitted her failure to make Shirley's romance with Robert seem "plausible" enough to survive the return (254). Having conceded the improbability of that romance, however, the narrator introduces another and this time she sets it in Northam, South Yorkshire. Unlike Paris, Northam is hardly the most romantic of places, but its very staidness acts as an incentive for Susie to welcome the disruption of a passionate affair.

Drabble has said of Doris Lessing that in the opening of her second Jane Somers book, she

is playing a game with Mills and Boon romances. Like Anita Brookner's Edith Hope, but more devious. Both are anti-romantic and romantic at the same time. Women have not thrown away the notion of the romantic novelist, romance, the dark stranger, love. (Interview with Kenyon 29)

The same can be said of Drabble whose characteristic "teetering on the brink of parody and sincerity" is evident in the treatment of romance. It is very much in evidence in her handling of the Susie-Blake relationship. The romance begins with the two "locked in a

Mills and Boon embrace" of near-orgasmic intensity which would be the climax of the popular romance. What comes next is outside the Mills and Boon formula. We are told of Susie's recognition that she "has fallen helplessly, hopelessly, in love with this smooth-talking, desperate, second-rate small-town seducer, this self-condemned cad, this self-dramatizing worthless bastard"; but despite the parody and despite the fact that Susie knows Blake "for what he is," she surrenders to "a new and overwhelming desire" and leaving behind the known--"the real world of real people," she enters the unknown--"the dark world of passion" (260-61).

What Drabble is foregrounding with this mixture of parody and sincerity is the disruptive potential of romance. Unlike those popular writers of romance who, Batsleer et al say, restore "England as the heart of the world, and the family as the heart of England" (97), Drabble insists that English middle-class "[h]ome life [is] hell" for some (NC 256) and no source of happiness for many others. The heroines of her romances are dissatisfied housewives who find sexual passion and fulfilment in extramarital, adulterous affairs with irresponsible men and, almost invariably, they have no intention of ruining the romance by marrying their lovers. Just prior to the Mills and Boon kiss in the unused conservatory, Blake had advised Susie to "look backwards" to the house, to, "look at all those real people," "the happy married couples," that he envies, but what Susie saw when she looked were only "animated brightly coloured figures ... behind a solid pane," more like animated cartoon figures than "real" people and she turned back to Blake (260). What Susie is looking for is the opposite of marriage and domesticity. She wants to join Blake outside the warm, lighted room and the family. She does not want to offer, nor is she able to offer, the "pure Englishness" of popular romantic fiction which Batsleer et al identify as "a background and the anchor of respectability" (97). In Drabble, romance remains a disruptive rather than a stabilizing force.



While "stepping out of plausibility into the unknown" of heterosexual romance is not new for her heroines, it is not until *A Natural Curiosity* that Drabble seriously considers the homosexual alternative for women. Joy's discovery that she is lesbian and her removal to a lesbian commune in *The Realms of Gold* is, as Drabble has said, little more than a plot device to facilitate the comic ending. While there are suggestions that nearly all of the husbands of unsuccessful first marriages in Drabble's fiction are repressed homosexuals, the marriages are viewed from the perspectives of the wives who are decidedly heterosexual and who either suffer the repression of their own sexuality in the cause of "the sanctity of the family" (114) or rebel and seek fulfilment in adulterous heterosexual affairs. In *A Natural Curiosity* Drabble takes another step outside "Englishness" with Esther Breuer whose less-than-happy sexual life may be the result of the fact that lesbianism was not there as an alternative when she was young. At the end of *The Radiant Way* we left Esther looking forward to going to live with Claudio's sister Elena in Bologna. Here we learn that this alternative lifestyle has not been easy for Esther, now over fifty, because of her former conditioning:

She had looked upon Bologna as a forbidden dream, had succumbed to its temptations with a slight guilt, seduced by the architecture of the city and the gracious ardour of Elena's protestations. She had abandoned for Bologna and Elena ... a life of austere eccentricity, of solitude and concentration, of a narrow clear depth. But what she has embraced is neither soft nor simple. Or not, at least, for her. She is too old to learn new ways. Elena is young, still in her thirties, a fully paid-up, radical-feminist-lesbian-Marxist. It is easy for her. But for Esther it is impossible.

Had these options been available when she was young, Esther thinks she might have chosen them. Might have lived a happier, richer, more "normal" life. A less devious, more deviant life. But they were not available and it was too late now  
.... (186-87)

Her recognition that it is too late for her to be comfortable with the lesbian alternative does not mean that she, or Drabble, denies the reality of that alternative for younger women who share her qualms about "normal sexual intercourse" (*RW* 346). As a matter of fact, her

regret may be a warning to those women to take advantage of the options which *are* now available before it is "too late" for them also to lead the "happier, richer, more 'normal' li[ves]" than the "norms" of "Englishness" allowed Esther.

Drabble's questioning of what is "natural" or "normal" in sexual behaviour becomes even more subversive when she has Liz take part in a televised panel discussion on sex and the young. Two of her co-panelists, a politician and a retired headmaster, argue that abolishing the age of consent, of which Liz is in favour, would "open the floodgates" to pederasty and paedophilia (85-86). Liz responds by asking whether they "really think ... that the desire of adults for sexual contact with children is so widespread and so strong that only the most severe social and legal sanctions can control it." When the politician deflects the question and the headmaster hesitates, Liz follows it up with another, and more socially outrageous question: "And if this is so, does it ever occur to you that this desire is less abnormal than you think? and possibly less harmful?" (86) Watching the programme, Clive Enderby "could tell, she really had gone too far, she had broken a taboo, she had said the unspeakable" (86), and Liz's stepson Aaron "smiled in appreciation as the expressions of her co-panelists grew more outraged, more self-righteous, more disbelieving" (89). When Liz later tells Clive about the "violent letters" she received in response to the programme, letters which she thinks must have been written by "[d]eranged" or "very disturbed" people, Clive explains that "[i]t's the sanctity of the family .... People don't like to hear it attacked. Or to think they're hearing it attacked" (114). The people Clive is referring to are the English middle classes whose search for "the illusion of order and security" he spoke of earlier. What we have here, then, is the equation of emotional or mental instability with the English middle classes and of abnormality with their beliefs. This equation turns the usual equation of middle-class "Englishness" with superior human values--such as tolerance, niceness and particularly restraint--upside down and inside out.

As Roberta Rubenstein points out, the novel is Drabble's "simultaneous inquiry into and domestication of criminal abnormality and the 'unnatural'" which leaves us confused about Drabble's own position and, in fact, "befuddles" the issues raised ("Severed Heads" 103; 105). I think that the confusion is a deliberate strategy on Drabble's part: that is, I think that Drabble deliberately presents us with a puzzle that she either cannot or will not solve. It is this inability or refusal to refashion in the narrative another or alternate unity of belief to replace the "illusion of order and security" shattered in it that is most subversive.

### *The Gates of Ivory*

This inability, which may be read as unwillingness, to act as intermediary in the interests of redefining "Englishness" is evident also in *The Gates of Ivory*, the last novel in the trilogy, in an attack on that combination of art and morality which the Leavises identified as the essence of the "English" novel. The book opens on a note of uncertainty about form: "This is a novel—if novel it be ...." Asked about this odd qualification in an interview in 1997, Drabble still seemed not quite sure what the book is. She began by saying that it is "a sort of discourse" which is sort of "sociological" but ended by suggesting, not wholly facetiously, that it is "sort of the ravings of someone who has forgotten how to write a novel." She explained that she had intended to write "a proper-shaped novel, a Conradian novel of this man who goes to Cambodia and gets lost in the jungle" but found she "couldn't do that." What she ended up with instead, she pointed out, is "a broken narrative" containing many "bits of information," the sources for which are included in an attached bibliography. She said that in the course of writing she realized that she had "wandered into some territory between fact and fiction and ravings" (Interview with Wachtel). It is a territory in which there is a great deal of confusion and one of the questions Drabble's comments lead us to ask is the one Liz asks of the "confusing"

chronology and "skipping about" in Conrad's *Victory*: "Is it incompetence or ingenuity? And if it is ingenuity, what is [the author] being ingenious about?" (GI 238). The impression Drabble gave in the interview was that she lacked competence or, in her words, "ha[d] forgotten how to write a novel," but there is more to it than that.

An admission of individual incompetence on the part of Drabble may not seem to be much of a threat to the "English" novel. Given the fact that she has persistently thematized her doubts about the form and has occasionally expressed downright hostility to writers chosen to represent it in the Leavisite "great tradition," "Englishness" might welcome such an admission, see it even as a concession, and hope to have heard the last of her. That would be a mistake because in *The Gates of Ivory* incompetence is turned into ingenuity and what Drabble is being ingenious about is the failure of the form of the "English" novel to come to terms with the diversity and complexity of a post-imperial and postcolonial world.

In one of her addresses to the reader in *The Gates of Ivory* Drabble makes it clear that she could have written that "proper-shaped ... Conradian novel" but that she chose not to:

[S]uch a narrative would have required a certain amount of trickiness, a certain deployment of not-quite-acceptable coincidences, a certain ruthless tidying up of the random movements of people and peoples. But it should not be beyond the competence of a certain kind of reasonably experienced novelist. One may force, one may impose one's will. (138)

The reason she chose not to write it, she says, is that

such a narrative will not do. The mismatch between subject and narrative is too great. Why impose the story line of individual fate on a story which is at least in part to do with numbers? A queasiness, a moral scruple overcomes the writer at the prospect of selecting individuals from the mass of history, from the human soup. (138)

What Drabble is calling into question here is not only the adaptability of the traditional "English" novel but also the traditional "English" morality that the Leavises claimed for it,

and what she is suggesting is an alternate morality, an alternate art. According to this new morality, the emphasis should fall not on the individual but on the "mass" and the new art consist not in the skill with which the novelist can impose a pattern on experience but on the skill with which she or he can break up the old one. Drabble explains:

Perhaps, for this subject matter, one should seek the most disjunctive, the most disruptive, the most uneasy and incompetent of forms, a form that offers not a grain of comfort or repose. (138)

In this authorial intrusion, Drabble states what is implied in the text's many literary allusions which, as Rubenstein notes,

signal her revisionist argument with previously canonized Western texts in the glare of postcolonial awareness of global complexity—a world that can be neither understood nor represented through a single moral code or vision. ("FB" 145-46)

The moral vision found wanting in *The Gates of Ivory* is that contained in the Leavisite version of Joseph Conrad, the third in the triad chosen to represent "the great tradition" of the "English" novel. According to Leavis, the "greatness" of Conrad lies not in the cosmopolitan "profundity" that has been "imputed" to him and which Leavis sees as a weakness (*GT* 211) but in the embodiment of a moral "ideal" that "is of the same order as the moral idea of the Merchant Service" and "owes its strength to a traditional and social sanction" (*GT* 235-36). Even where there is a great deal of doubt cast upon the reality of this ideal by which "Englishmen" live, as Leavis admits there is in *Nostramo* (*GT* 234; 241) where "a suggestion of a certain emptiness" disturbs him (243), he manages to make the doubts seem unimportant in the light of "the pattern of moral significance" that, he says, is formed by the whole work and which sees "even [the sceptic] Decoud conced[ing] that the illusions 'those Englishmen' live on 'somehow or other help them to get a firm hold of the substance'" (*GT* 241). The emphasis F. R. Leavis places on this pattern is explained by Q. D. Leavis's identification of "an essentially and profoundly moral ... framework" as

the main characteristic of "the Englishness of the English novel" (310). In *The Gates of Ivory*, Drabble shatters that framework and insists on widening the "metaphysical gulfs opening under life and consciousness" which bothered Leavis in *Nostramo* (*GT* 243): in technique as well as in content, Drabble moves "out of plausibility into the unknown" by departing from the realistic surface of the "English" novel of moral certainty--based on cultural familiarity and genre stability--to a hybrid text of moral uncertainty--made up of cultural otherness and genre instability.

A question arises at this point about whether Drabble is complicitous with Conrad in her parody of him, or rather--since it is the Leavisite version of Conrad as representative of "Englishness" that is parodied--whether she is complicitous with Leavisite "Englishness." As will be illustrated in the discussion which follows, Drabble problematizes the Leavisite version of Conrad by suggesting that the "proper shaped ... Conradian novel" may be a Leavisite invention, a moral pattern imposed on what is actually a vision of meaninglessness and a questioning of "the illusions" that keep "Englishmen" like Leavis from falling into those "metaphysical gulfs" that Conrad opens up in his fiction. With respect to Conrad, then, we have to ask which Conrad is Drabble complicitous with--the Leavisite Conrad of "Englishness"? or the anti-Leavisite Conrad challenging that ideology? That Drabble does not provide any narrative resolution of this question is very important in considering that other question about whether Drabble is complicitous with the "Leavisite" Conrad.

In an article entitled "Leaving Dr. Leavis: A Farewell to The Great Tradition? Margaret Drabble's *The Gates of Ivory*," Karen Patrick Knutsen argues that the novel is "not a farewell" to Leavis or his "great tradition," that it is, rather, "a painful probing of postmodern society which reveals our innate need for criteria of validity" and shows that "[g]reat literature still has moral import" as, of course, Leavis claimed (591). In the course

of the article, Knutsen provides a very good analysis of the postmodern elements in the novel, an analysis which might be used to support the opposite conclusion: that is, that while Drabble may be like her characters in wishing that there were such criteria of validity for moral values, she cannot come up with them. This is a point Rubenstein makes in "Fragmented Bodies/Selves/Narratives: Margaret Drabble's Postmodern Turn," where she argues that "*The Gates of Ivory* may be understood ... as a hybrid of traditional and postmodernist attitudes and narrative strategies" (149) which ends with Drabble "betray[ing] her rather awkward position out on a limb, suspended somewhere between realism and postmodernism. The tensions between the knowable and the unknowable, the real and the imaginary--or unimaginable--inevitably elude resolution" (153).

Rubenstein attributes this awkward position to "[t]he nostalgia for meaningful connection" which, for the characters (and, she suggests, for Drabble), "coexists and overlaps with psychological fragmentation and literal or figurative dismemberment as defining conditions of late twentieth-century experience." She goes on to point out that "the longing for meaningfulness is inseparable from the postmodern attitude that critiques its likelihood" (152). As Rubenstein notes, this is a point Linda Hutcheon makes in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* where she argues that "postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest" (n8, 152). What Rubenstein refers to here is an important part of the postcolonial and postmodern perspectives: that is, that critique is very often complicitous with the very thing it is critiquing and that there can be no pure or objective ground from which one can critique others, that one's own position is always partial, provisional and incomplete because it is invariably situated and hence also complicated and contaminated ideologically.

One should also note, however, as Rubenstein does, again quoting Hutcheon, first that "the postmodern partakes of a logic of 'both/and' not of 'either/or'" and second that

postmodernism "uses and abuses ... intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and *then subverting that power through irony*" and that parody is "a perfect postmodern form since it both incorporates and *challenges that which it parodies*" (n7, 149; n5, 146; 154; my emphasis). The point I want to make is that postmodernist irony and parody do carry a charge; they are not just (not even mainly) carriers of the thing they are trying to disarm. What this means in terms of Drabble's combination of the traditional and the postmodern is well put by Rubenstein commenting on the contradictory lists and catalogues in the novel which, she says, "express but refuse to mediate the tension between ... [among other things] the knowable and the unknowable" (148-49).

Knutsen, on the other hand, argues:

On the surface level, *The Gates of Ivory* describes the breakdown of ideologies and moral values which postmodernism has led to; a complexity of clashing or competing discourses, none of which is allowed to dominate. Superficially there is no synthetic or coherent viewpoint in this series of positions; it becomes a polyphony of voices. On a manifest level, however, Drabble's characters *do* choose standpoints which they live by and take responsibility for. (590)

Using a distinction between narrative closure and "ideological closure" (made by Roger Webster in *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*), Knutsen argues that there is "ideological closure in the actions of the [novel's] characters [which] suggests that we need a version of truth to live by—a moral vision" even if we "embrace ambivalence and ambiguity" and "accept that there is no metadiscourse of truth or morality" (590). Where I would disagree with Knutsen is in her view that the morality with which Drabble is concerned is that demanded by Leavis. As Knutsen very persuasively argues earlier in the essay, Drabble "create[s] the perception of the de-centred self, the personality in a constant state of flux" (particularly through the many changes in names, identities and/or roles of the characters and through Stephen's sense of "[a]lienation and fragmentation" [581-83]); and, as illustrated in the blocked quotation above on the "legitimation crisis," she also



argues that Drabble creates a "perception of the universe [which], in a sense, has become de-centred and unstable, in analogy with the perception of the self" (583). These perceptions are, of course, the same as the "metaphysical gulfs opening under life and consciousness" that Leavis closed with his perception of an overarching "pattern of moral significance" in Conrad's work. Clinching the case, Knutsen shows how Drabble deconstructs the "binary oppositions" between "falsehood or fiction and truth" that "the opposition between the gates of ivory and the gates of horn" usually symbolizes, and she concludes, "Because [in the novel] both gates ultimately symbolize dreams, we are left with no 'truth' and no determinant 'meaning' with which to settle the meaning of the text" (585).

This is hardly conducive to a Leavisite moral vision, but that is Knutsen's point. She argues that "*The Gates of Ivory* is a novel about the unmasking of illusions, but it also implicitly unmasks the postmodern perception of the world" and that, by leaving us "groping for meaning and thus ... truly immersed in the postmodern experience," Drabble makes us aware of our need for a moral vision (580). It becomes clear, however, that this vision is not based on the Leavisite assumption that one should discriminate between humans on the basis of some inner "self." When Knutsen says that she agrees with Stephen Connor who "believes that if we examine the postmodern critique of metanarratives closely, we will find that it implicitly depends on the assumption of 'the universal right of all not to be treated unjustly or oppressively'" (590), she does indeed identify an assumption that is at the heart of Drabble's fiction, but this is an assumption of *complete* equality which does not depend on the degree of a person's state of consciousness measured on some culturally specific scale and the Leavisite "pattern of moral significance" does. The assumption that Connor says is behind the postmodern critique of metanarratives is the assumption with which Drabble challenges Leavisite "Englishness" or any version of "Englishness" which is based on anything less than the

assumption of the "universal *right*" (my emphasis) to equality. It is this stubborn belief in complete equality which is at the heart of the English radical tradition of dissent, the tradition with which Drabble challenges "the great tradition."

Drabble's "novel—if novel it be" may best be described, in the way that Alix describes the package of fragments that Liz receives from Stephen in Cambodia, as a "Do-It-Yourself Novel Pack" (9) and it is designed to leave us as uncomfortably "[m]uddled" and "confused" as Liz is by that strange package (20). The package—containing fragmentary diaries and notebooks, newspaper clippings, odd bits of paper, postcards, sketches and, strangest of all, two human finger bones—replaces the "thin, bad, tricky" unfinished novel that Stephen left behind in the safe in the Trocadero Hotel in Bangkok when he left Thailand for Vietnam and Cambodia (357), and there is no doubt that Drabble means for Stephen's unfinished novel to represent the "proper-shaped ... Conradian novel" she intended to write. Like Drabble, though, Stephen finds the form of that novel inadequate for a disorienting experience, and we are told that by the time he reaches Cambodia he no longer cares what will happen to it (357). Because he is a Booker-Prize winning English novelist with a great admiration for Conrad, his dissatisfaction with the form poses a serious threat to "the Englishness of the English novel." He, if anyone, should have been able to write that novel and carry on "the great tradition."

What we are treated to in *The Gates of Ivory* is a parodic version of that novel interspersed among the other bits and pieces which make up the book, and Drabble has a great deal of fun mimicking and mocking Conradian narratives of restless male wanderers and adventurers into "the unknown" (40). It may come as no surprise that the author as well as the central character of this parodic story is Stephen himself: who better to mock the Conradian novel than an author inspired by Conrad? Characteristically, Drabble is

involving "the great tradition" in mocking itself. There is more to it than that, however, and when we are told that Stephen is "pleased" by the announcement that the name of the captain of his Air France flight to Thailand is Commandant Parodi since, as he reminds himself, "[w]e live in the age of parody" (40), we begin to see that Drabble is subjecting the tradition to a process in which "Englishness" becomes a parody of itself.

It is no coincidence that at the first stop on his journey into one of "the dark spaces of the globe" (349), Stephen should remind us of a character Marlow meets at the first stop on his journey in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the one whose "appearance [is] ... that of a hairdresser's dummy." Marlow insists that, in the context of "the great demoralisation of the land," this man and his appearance are worthy of respect: such details as the "starched collar," "white cuffs," "snowy trousers" and "clean tie" seem to him to be "achievements of character" and he refers to the man as a "miracle" (*HD* 18). In *The Gates of Ivory*, we are told that as he sits alone in the Author's Lounge in the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok,

Stephen does not look out of place in his white suit. His white suit is made of a miracle material. It never creases or crumples. It never picks up dirt. (52)

A subtle difference between the snowy white appearance of the man Marlow meets and Stephen's is that the first required some effort while the second requires none: according to Marlow, the accountant "had verily accomplished something" in teaching the native woman to launder his linen (a "difficult" task, he tells Marlow, since she "had a distaste for the work") (*HD* 18), while according to Drabble's narrator, Stephen's synthetic suit takes care of itself.<sup>16</sup> That it is the suit and not the man wearing it which is described as a miracle is one of the ways in which Drabble shows Stephen to be a parody of the disciplined Englishman Marlow admired. When the narrator goes on to say that "Stephen's face and accent do not crease and crumple" and that "[h]e is the English public-school product ... abroad" (52), she suggests that that product is as artificial as the material of the suit.

We soon learn that Stephen is a form without substance, an "Englishman" without "the illusions 'those Englishmen' live on" in Conrad's *Nostramo* and which, according to F. R. Leavis, "can give life meaning, direction, coherence" (*GT* 232): "I can't stick it all together," Stephen complains to Miss Porntip. "Sex, politics, the past, myself. I am all in pieces." When she asks, "Who can stick these things together? Why expect?" he answers

"But in *me*, ... the gaps are so *great*. I am hardly made of the same human stuff. The same human matter. There is no consistency in me. No glue. No paste. I have no cohesion. I make no sense. I am a vacuum. I am fragments. I am morsels." (105)

As "the English public school product" he is representative of a tradition which has become a mockery of itself. This point may be clearer if we compare Stephen to that young captain in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* for whom "[t]hat feeling of life-emptiness" from which he suffered "lost its bitter plausibility," when he took command of a ship in the British Merchant Service and became part of "a tradition which seemed to [him] to be as imperative as any guide on earth" (qtd. in Leavis, *GT* 243; 228). According to Leavis, "[t]he sinister spell that holds the ship [in that novel] is characteristically felt in terms of contrast with the tradition and its spiritual values" (228). By contrast, in Drabble's novel it is the tradition (imbibed in this case from an English public-school and Oxbridge education) which has cast a spell on Stephen, and it is this and not, as our would-be "spiritual hero" (107) wants to believe, the "spells and ... potions" of the Circean Miss Porntip (79) that holds him and makes him incapable of action.

Stephen is not the only one to have been educated for defunct roles, roles which disappeared with the breakup of empire and for which the nation has found no replacements. The full force of Stephen's reflection at the beginning of his journey that "[w]e live in the age of parody" (40) is not felt until he reaches the camps of the international relief workers and journalists near the Cambodian border. Stephen refers to

the workers here as the "faithful disillusioned" (127), an oxymoronic phrase which invites comparison with Marlow's "faithless pilgrims" in *Heart of Darkness* (HD 23). If Helen Anstey is any indication, the aid workers are not like the company's agents in *Heart of Darkness*: while they spend their time "strolling aimlessly about," "backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way" (HD 23-25), she "works long hours" (129) in a manner that is reflected in her "no-nonsense, managerial middle-class British tone." Nevertheless, her tone is "overlaid and underlaid by private anxieties, private desperations," (128) and she is not above a little backbiting of the charming Konstantin Vassiliou, a photojournalist (129), one of the many reporters who "come and go" in their search for stories and photographs to send home (123). In the evening after work, groups do gather to "talk politics and camp gossip" and there is "[a] certain mild competitive machismo [that] emerges." We are told that "Stephen feels at a great remove" from the conversation of his group (123-24) and there is no doubt that this air of friendly rivalry seems to him to be as "unreal" as the "air of plotting" at the central station did to Marlow (HD 25), and he wonders, "What are they playing at, these workers for the world?" (GI 124)

In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow thinks that his dedication to "work," a quality completely lacking in the "faithless pilgrims," helps him to "keep [his] hold on the redeeming facts of life" (HD 23) and that it is this "devotion to efficiency," shared by the Englishmen on the cruising yawl on the Thames, that would save them from surrendering to "the savagery" and "the wilderness" (HD 6). In *Maps of Englishness*, Simon Gikandi argues that devotion to the work ethic was used in nineteenth-century imperial travel narratives to differentiate white colonizers from black colonists--stereotypically depicted as "subject[s] alienated from labour and the cognitive value of work"--as a means of justifying the imperial enterprise (109-10). This statement of the social value of the work ethic is the

closest Marlow comes to describing "the idea" that he associates with "colonists" as opposed to "conquerors" and that, he says, alone "redeems" the imperial enterprise (6-7). According to Marlow this "idea" embedded in English society is very different from the "sentimental pretence" (7), the "philanthropic pretence" (25), fronting the economic exploitation by that "Continental concern" for which he worked in the Congo (6). What is so disturbing for "Englishness" in Stephen's musings is the suggestion that the "English" devotion to hard work and efficiency is as "unreal" in terms of accomplishment as the pretence of philanthropy.

It is Stephen's view that the aid workers gathered in Aranyaprathet represent agencies founded "on false premises" in the sixties when "it had seemed that the West would soon be sated" or "fall sick of its own greed and glut," and that it would be to its advantage

to cure [the] excess, to redress the balance, to purge the system and lance the deadly swelling, to level the food mountains ... and to spread around the good things of the earth. (124)

Such did not turn out to be the case and the aid workers who were driven to leave their home countries because "there is no longer any place in the West for self-sacrifice, dedication, brotherly love, compassion [or] community," now find themselves huddled together for comfort, for an illusion of purpose, while the powers and superpowers play their ruthless, merciless, muddled, indifferent games. (124)

This is one of the reasons that Stephen compares the workers to the "displaced Khmers" and refers ironically to the quarters of the "International Committee for Resettlement of Displaced People" at Aranyaprathet as "the camps of the displaced West" (124).

The contradiction involved in these "displaced" Westerners working to prepare displaced Khmers for resettlement in the West is part of the complex relationship between "Good Time and Bad Time," one of the "interpenetrations" that the narrator invites us to

contemplate at the beginning of the book (3-4). According to the narrator, "it would be easy to say ... that we thrive on atrocities, that we eagerly consume suffering" given the speed at which "[t]he dead and dying travel ... these days" and the rate at which we "devour" them "at breakfast with our toast and coffee, and ... on the evening news," but that the relationship "is not so simple as that." She says that "[w]e need them as they need us" (4).

In the case of the international relief workers, she may mean that "Good Time" needs "Bad Time" so that there is somewhere for its own "displaced" people to go, somewhere they can be given an "illusion of purpose" so that they will not cause trouble at home. Stephen thinks that the illusion of purpose to which the workers remain "faithful" despite their disillusionment is a feeble replacement for the sense of purpose lost with the breakup of empire. As he "sips his acrid tea" at the ICRDP camps, he thinks,

Oxfam, UNBRO, ICRC, ICRDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, FPP, FHH, WR, COER: these acrimonious acronyms cluster like flies round the wounds of sick nations. The missionary, the priest and the lady with the lamp have given way to the relief worker and the photojournalist and the television reporter. (124)

Once educated to fill roles as missionaries and colonial civil servants charged with spreading what was claimed to be a superior culture, they now find themselves attempting, ineffectually, to spread the wealth. That Drabble sees this show of humanitarianism as a new form of colonization is suggested in the comparison of it to flies moving in to colonize open sores and depositing their eggs in the decomposing matter. Alix's friend Betty Sykes, a liaison officer with UNICEF, thinks it is "all a bit freakish" and "weird" the way people like herself have "spread all over the globe" and she can find no explanation for it except for their schooling (190).

Although Stephen "feels at a great remove" from the workers at Aranyaprathet (123-24) it is due to the fact that he does not share this "illusion of purpose" and not to the

fact that he himself has any sense of "real" purpose. He is as "displaced" as they are. In fact, he is less able to adapt to the eighties than they are. For one thing, he is less willing to accept the spread of American culture and "still nourishes hopes" that Vietnam and Kampuchea will be places "where Coca-Cola is not king" (123). It is Miss Pornpip, as intelligent as she is attractive, and taken beyond her parodic role as the "petite Lust" of Stephen's story (41), who points out to Stephen that his dislike of modern materialism may stem from his country's loss of economic superiority and control:

"Britain is poor country," she informs him. "Post-industrial country. You import from Japan, from Korea, from Thailand. You no more manufacturing. You cooling, we heating. You protectionist now. You senile now." (61)

This, she suggests, may be why Stephen now views "the onward march of progress" (156) as "a parody of progress" (125) and thinks that humanity "needs a Big Idea," something along the lines of Pol Pot's Year Zero, to halt the onward march (83). She points out to Stephen that wandering the world in search of "simplicity" is not likely to accomplish anything. According to her, there

[i]s no simplicity. Is only onwards. Is no way back to village. No way back to childhood. Is finished, all finished. All over world, village is finished. English village, Thai village, African village. Is burned, is chopped, is washed away. Is no way backwards. Water find level. Is no way back. (105)

This is a view that became prominent in Drabble's novels of the seventies and eighties as a counter-argument to the nostalgia for a rural England invested with a purity and simplicity lacking in contemporary England. It is also a counter-argument to any "traditional" way of life which does not wish to acknowledge or include change. As Victor Li points out in an article entitled "Towards Articulation: Postcolonial Theory and Demotic Resistance,"

The relegation of cultural authenticity to the past in effect freezes or halts the process of historical and cultural change and denies that a culture may be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things or that it may develop and grow through inter-cultural addition, adoption, or even appropriation. (169)



In *The Gates of Ivory*, Miss Porn-tip goes on to argue that, in her experience, village life was accompanied by "poverty and sickness," and that, from her perspective, life in Thailand is "better now" than it was before the American influence: there is now "better life expectancy" as well as "more liberty, more democracy" and everything in between, from "more rice" and better technology to "more Coca-Cola" and "more chips" (106). Miss Porn-tip does not like the taste of Coca-Cola any more than Stephen does, but, unlike him, she does not find it objectionable "on ideological grounds" (122-23). If Stephen were to take Miss Porn-tip's advice, he would "[f]orget old ideas" and "[c]hoose" the present (106).

Not having been educated to do that, Stephen goes off to Cambodia in search of the village, the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot. He does find the first two, or rather he is found by the Khmer Rouge, taken prisoner and forced marched to "a small, almost deserted hill village" (351-54) composed of four aged people, "one young woman, ... a few children and some dogs" (354) where he is able to witness "the death of the village" (357). There is no sign of the men who had made the clearing for the village and who may or may not have "gone off ... to fight," who may or may not have "been killed, purged" (357), and there is also no sign of the elusive Pol Pot.

Stephen does not even get the great moment of illumination that a fever-induced Kurtz-like emaciation promises. Often delirious, "ghastly" and "skeletal" in appearance, his skin like "the luminous yellow-white parchment of old bone" (359), he has only "a small pride in having got to the other side" (355). He realizes that

there would be no revelation, no confrontation, no lights from heaven would flash, neither God nor Pol Pot would speak from the burning bush. There would be no message to take back to the shores of the living. There was simply this place. (355)

He goes on in a reference to Plato's parable of the cave to say that the village "was not even

very real," that "[i]t was the shadow of a shadow on the wall of a cave" (356). The implication is that if Stephen were to describe it, his description would be the shadow of a shadow of a shadow. Stephen need not have gone to Cambodia to gain this knowledge. We learn later that at the age of seventeen, he had seen the search for simplicity as not only vain but also defeatist. Looking through his copy of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* after his death Alix finds a note signed by Stephen and dated 28 June 1951 in which he wrote:

The illusion that simplicity once existed is analogous to the myth of Paradise: it fosters a sense of exclusion and exile. But as for man there is no Paradise, so there is no simplicity of emotion; we imagine that we once experienced it, that we once felt directly and received simply the impact of the senses, but we are thereby excluding ourselves from a realm which never existed and which cannot exist .... (421)

The narrator comments that Stephen's "last message is his first" (422). It is a message that Drabble conveys throughout her *oeuvre*.

Stephen is to get neither a spiritual nor a material reward for his journey to Cambodia, and even he has to admit that the journey was motivated as much by a desire for the second as for the first. For all his high moral tone concerning the materialism of Miss Porntip, for all his disappointment in the materialism of Konstantin, who loses his status as a "spiritual hero" in Stephen's eyes when he suggests that he and Stephen collaborate on a book (107), Stephen knows that he himself is not "beyond reproach," that he is not as "pure in heart" as he would have liked Konstantin to be (107). Concerning his disappointment with Konstantin, we are told that "[h]e tries to quell his doubts about photojournalism" and asks himself,

Why, as a trade, should it be any worse than his own? Is he himself, hanging around on the edge of events, a parasite, a maggot on dying flesh, is he himself beyond reproach? (107-08)

The fact that he compares himself to smaller carrion eaters than the "vultures" to which Liz compares writers who travel to trouble spots (13) is another way in which Drabble

diminishes "Englishness."

Illustrating a point made also by Alan Sinfield in *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain*, that imperialism and colonial exploitation involved "cultural plunder" as well as "economic plunder" (116), Drabble reminds us of Western writers who made the same or similar journeys and who returned with one or the other or both. The most obvious example of the writer as plunderer that we are given in *The Gates of Ivory* is André Malraux who returned from the Cambodian jungle with "crates full of priceless statues" (73-74). But, according to Drabble, he is only one of many who have ended up selling the places they visit, sometimes literally but more often figuratively. Stephen himself

had cashed in on the [Paris] Commune, he had turned it into fiction. The Commune had done him proud on the market. Gide had sold the Congo. Malraux had sold the spoils of Angkor. This was what writers did. They seemed to purvey messages, but in truth they sold commodities. Art was nothing but a trading speculation. (357)

In order to cash in, however, one has to survive and return with the plunder, and Stephen does not. Just at the point that he seems to be recovering from the fever, he is taken from the village and the care of the young woman to a clinic where, it is later reported, he died (388-89).

That is not to say that there is to be no plunder since by the time Liz reaches Hanoi and receives the news of his death from Gabriel Denham the "vultures" are gathering over Stephen himself (391): Gabriel and his film crew are in the preliminary stages of making a "biofilm" of him (395), and Hattie Osbourne has bought an option on his life (246-49). "[P]oor Stephen," Liz recognizes, is now to be "[r]ecycled," like the metal plate taken from his ankle before his burial in the clinic graveyard (390), like his white suit (395). The shadow of "the mad Englishman" in life (52), he is to become the shadow of a shadow in death as he enters "[t]he shadow world" of the semi-fictionalized documentary film where

earlier he had seen a Kampuchean refugee "playing the role of a Kampuchean refugee" and "survivors of the killing fields" working as extras in *The Killing Fields* (103).

Considering Stephen's disdain for this "Hollywood dream world" (102), being turned into a movie is hardly the kind of fame he would have wanted. He may, however, have wanted the "named Cocktail." Wryly, the narrator tells us that as they sit in the Authors' Lounge of the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok, Liz drinking "her second Pett Petrie" (named after Stephen's fictitious contemporary rival) and Miss Porntip sipping "her second Gore Vidal," their sadness over Stephen's disappearance

is connected with the names of the cocktails, with the nature of fame, with the nature of ambition. So, one wanders off into Bad Time, into a nightmare of Blood and Sweat and Tears, into Year Zero, clutching a talisman, hoping to be allowed back across the dark river to the immortality of a Named Cocktail. They have all been out there—Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Paul Theroux, William Golding. They have ventured into the dark spaces of the globe and the white tracts of the heart, and returned to this triumph. So it goes. (349)

According to Miss Porntip, it was Stephen's "dream," also, to have a cocktail named after him (348). Had Stephen returned, we can be sure that she would have arranged it, but like the epiphanic moment of illumination and "the Great Cambodian Novel" (349), this triumph too is denied him.

Of course, Drabble is mocking not only Stephen but the adventuresome Englishmen who preceded him. By including Conrad in the group and by replacing the "triumph of the spirit" that Leavis found to admire in him and his work (*GT* 227) with the "triumph" of the "Named Cocktail," she is also mocking "the great tradition." This is a humorous example of the doubt that is cast on the Leavisite reading of Conrad throughout the book. A more serious example, though it is not without its humorous moments, is the reference to "the spirited correspondence in *The London Review of Books* about Conrad's alleged racism" (237). All six of the characters who refer to this question find some evidence of racism in

his work and three of them have no doubt but that he is "racist." Miss Porn-tip--who is, as the narrator points out, "aligning herself firmly ... with Chinua Achebe and other literary intellectuals"--thinks that Conrad is a "racist sexist swine" (100); self-titled "oddball" Hattie Osborne (26) calls *Victory* "a wonderfully racist piece" (32) and sums up Conrad as "an amazing racist old reactionary" (47); and the "exotic" Simon Grunewald (448), a homosexual who is, as part of his "quest for the Noble Savage" among the head-hunters of Irian Jaya, actually and most emphatically "sleep[ing] with a cannibal" (118-19), is just as sure that "Conrad *was* a racist." According to Simon, Conrad "did not understand the savage mind. Or the savage body" (119).

While the judgement of these characters is complicated by the fact that they stretch or break the limits of "English" plausibility represented by "St John's Wood" (448), it is supported to some extent by characters who do not. Liz, firmly ensconced in her house in St John's Wood, thinks that there is "plenty" evidence of racism in *Victory* (237); her stepson Alan Headleand, a political theorist as firmly ensconced in "[a] colony of old rooks" (178) at one of England's "more ancient redbrick Northern universities" (175), also "suspects Conrad of racism" when he rereads "An Outpost of Progress" with its reference to the "two poor whites at a trading post in Africa" who are "confronted with 'pure, unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man' in the shape of a few indigenous merchants and villagers" (173-74); and even Stephen, Conrad's admirer, has to acknowledge (in the form of an unanswered question in his diary) that Conrad's

work features a preponderance of brown hairy brutes, slaughtering savages, filthy scoundrels, noxious beasts, niggers, stupid animals, abominable idiots, poor devils, poor specimens, cannibals, murderous half-castes, cunning thieves, common desperados, and lying rascals[.] (145)

One wonders why Leavis did not comment on this preponderance? Did he see the "brutes" et al as being the equivalent of, in his words, "the human hurricane of fighting

coolies" subdued by "a handful of ordinary men" (226-27), "ordinary British seamen," that is (225), who "in a triumph of discipline—a triumph of the spirit" (227) go among them "as a routine matter-of-fact course, to restore order and decency" in *Typhoon* (226-27)? Did he see them as being a necessary "contrast with the tradition and its spiritual values" (228), a contrast to "the kind of human achievement represented by the Merchant Service—tradition, discipline and moral ideal" (242)? Or did he intentionally or unintentionally misinterpret Conrad? When Alan considers "An Outpost of Progress" in terms of Stephen's question about whether "the crowd [is] always assumed to be morally inferior to the individual" (which Stephen followed with a reference to Conrad's "Outpost") (137), he wonders:

yet is it not, in a way, the cultural relativism of the poor whites that Conrad is attempting to expose? And when Conrad uses the word "crowd" does he really mean *crowd*? He was after all, a Pole writing a foreign language. Maybe he means "society"? Is the problem here partly semantic? (174)

While Alan's musings complicate the question of Conrad's alleged racism, they raise other disturbing questions about Leavisite literary criticism, for in raising doubts about Conrad's belief in a superior "English" morality and about his use of the English language, Alan is reading Conrad against the grain of that criticism. If he can be read in this way, then Conrad himself may have been writing against the grain of the "Englishness" which the Leavises have tried to pin on him.

Indications are that Stephen also read Conrad against the grain of Leavisite criticism. We are told that Conrad's attraction for Stephen was "his loneliness, his restlessness, his temptation to despair" and that the dreams that Conrad's and Stephen's boyhood reading reinforced were "[d]reams of escape, dreams of distance" (45). What Stephen hoped to escape was the horror of English middle-class domesticity and country life: the "life of gumboots and dogs and dances and pig ignorance" of his two brothers who "had married respectably, replicas of mother and sent their offspring to Moxley Hall"

(105). Stephen's mother is another of those "domestic ghost[s]" who use the home as a retreat from hurtful social encounters. Stephen says that she "did not like friends in the house" and that she "elevated the family as sanctuary" because she was "frightened, increasingly frightened of other people" (104). He remembers her as "red-faced, solid-salt-of-the-earth, bitter, bad-tempered, coy, immature, self-sacrificing, and deeply, deeply, self-centred" (104). Within the family she was immune to the criticism of others and able to maintain a sense of superiority over others:

The Coxes ruled supreme in a nest feathered with family jokes, rituals, catch phrases, memories. All other families were ignorant, feckless, ill-bred, over-bred. The Coxes laughed at other people. They laughed at other people because they were not Coxes. (104)

It was this impenetrable, suffocating domesticity that caused Stephen's own "loneliness, ... restlessness, ... [and] temptation to despair" and drew him to like elements in Conrad's life and work. Leavis does not deny the presence of those elements in Conrad but what gives Conrad a place in "the great tradition" is his "victory" over them (*GT* 252-53). According to Leavis,

The characteristic Conradian sensibility is that of the creator of Heyst; that of the writer ... intimately experienced in the strains and starvations of the isolated consciousness, and ... deeply aware of the sense in which reality is social, something established and sustained in a kind of collaboration .... (*GT* 252)

For Leavis there is no question but that "reality ... is domestic" (*GT* 243). For Stephen, and for Drabble, there is a need to question that reality.

The point of view of "Englishness" on "reality" is represented in *The Gates of Ivory* in Liz's attempt to make sense of the "Do-It-Yourself Novel Pack":

[M]uddled, confused, irritated by her own ignorance ... Liz moved on, and came at last across something that she understood. It was a small booklet headed "Atrocity Stories." These made sense. They also confirmed that she and Alix had been speaking on the telephone about a real person, about a Stephen who had really existed and whom, in the real world, they had really known. He had thought some of the thoughts they had thought ....

She heard, for a moment, his clear light voice speak.

But then she lost it again in scraps and scrawls and jottings. Where was the story in all this, where was the glue that would stick it all together? (20-21)

Here again is the equation of reality and plausibility with the known, with culturally shared views, and the attempt to dismiss the unknown or the unfamiliar as implausible or not "real." Liz's attempt to dismiss the unfamiliar Stephen of the disjunctive and disruptive package of fragments as having no objective reality is matched on the national level by Britain's refusal to acknowledge Kampuchea: when Liz rings the Foreign Office to inquire about a visa she is told "that Kampuchea does not exist. It has not existed for Britain for many years" (66). But, because Liz has known Stephen (or at least she thinks she has), because he has "existed" for her in her "real world," she cannot just ignore the "complex presentation" (5) of the unfamiliar that she has received from him: "Stephen Cox hangs between two worlds. He is a go-between. Fragments of him drift on the river, surface from the mud" (275). These fragments intrude on Liz's "comfortable" (138) "deeply bourgeois" (215) life and eventually she goes off to Southeast Asia on a rescue mission, hoping to find Stephen and return with him to "the real world" of England as "Mrs S. Cox," the identity she assumes before leaving Thailand (374). There is a time when Stephen himself thinks that "[h]e should have deafened himself to [the] sirens" and married Liz:

She would have saved him from the flux .... She would have organized him, and given him credence, and kept him alive.

... She had husbands, children, a large house. She had bank accounts, investments, employees, employment. She was plugged into Reality and Property. (363-64)

Even the narrator admits that "the story of the search for and discovery of Stephen Cox" which "could perhaps have had a happy ending: perhaps, even a wedding" "would have made a much more satisfactory narrative" than the one we are given in *The Gates of Ivory*



(138). She warns us, however, that we are not going to be able to "take refuge with the known" and ignore the "large box of papers on [Liz's] knee" because, although "we are not so keen on them" as we are on Liz and her "comfortable, Good Time" drawing room in St John's Wood, "there they are" (138).

Drabble has taken the epigraph and the title for the novel from Homer's *The Odyssey*, Book XIX. The epigraph consists of Penelope's reply "to the stranger" who has interpreted her dream of the killing of her flock of twenty geese by the eagle as the killing of the suitors by Odysseus who has now returned home. In her cautious and prudent reply, Penelope distinguishes between "false" dreams which she says "come to us through the traitor ivory" gate and true dreams which she says "appear to us through the polished horn," but there is an irony present in this allusion to Homer which also questions the opposition of the "real" and the "unreal." Ironically, since the "stranger" is in fact Odysseus in disguise, Penelope goes on to express her fear that her dream of the eagle came to her through the ivory gate. I think it is also fair to say, as Karen Patrick Knutsen does, that "by association" the title refers also to the gates of horn and probably alludes to Harry Levin's *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* and that Drabble goes on to deconstruct the "binary thinking" which would associate the gates of ivory with "fictitious dreams" and "romanticism," on the one hand, and the gates of horn with "truth" and "realism," on the other, by showing in the words of the narrator that these "worlds overlap and intersect" (Knutsen 584-85).

If Penelope fails to recognize Odysseus, what chance do any of Drabble's characters have of knowing who or what is "real" in the novel's "shadow world"? What chance does Stephen have of finding Pol Pot who is said to have "[e]ighty-seven aliases" one of which may be 87 (130) and of whose whereabouts there are numerous conflicting reports (129-30). What chance does Mme Savet Akrun have of finding her missing son

Mitra when he is "[o]ne among many" dead or missing (106), and it is impossible to know how many, Drabble suggests, since the numbers recorded in "the hostile counting house of history" are often, as Stephen notes, vague (140) and "the Khmer Rouge are the folk monsters of the modern world" (46).

Calling apparent "facts" such as numbers into question, Drabble makes it difficult to decide who the "real" monsters are. The point is made by Alan "puzzling over" Liz's "questions about group behaviour, ... about whether or not people behave worse *en masse* than as individuals," and trying to "reconcile" his "contradictory positions on this issue" (173). Unable to decide whether "the individual is progressive and flexible, while the mass is primitive and punitive" or whether "the savage selfish individual [is] socialized for the higher good of the group" (174), Alan translates the theoretical question into questions on specific situations, one of these being a question posed by the whole book:

Was the charismatic leadership of Pol Pot a socializing influence, binding the exploited peasant of Cambodia into a purposeful society? Or was it a barbaric, primitive influence, deconstructing the institutions of society and family into "pure unmitigated savagery," into the killing fields of genocide? (174-75)

Being a don, Alan ends the list of questions with the direction, "Discuss" (175), and when all is said and done, that is the direction we are given by Drabble as well. Among the "Atrocity Stories" Stephen collects, the "villains" include the French in Vietnam, the Vietnamese in Cambodia, and even "kind Uncle Ho" himself (142-43). From one of the camps of the displaced Khmers, Stephen collects "Survival Stories" which, we are told, are "very like atrocity stories" except "they have different endings. For the narrator, that is" (148). In these the "villains" are the Khmer Rouge. Stephen also collects "reunion stories" which, we are told, "do not always end as well as one might wish" and, which are, in any case, balanced by the international adoption stories of so-called "orphan[s]," who are actually "lost" children whose "mothers ... meanwhile suffer from guilt, loss, anger, grief,

uncertainty" (161). The "villains" in these adoption stories are not from "Bad Time" Cambodia but from the "Good Time" West.

The question raised by these adoption stories and a reference to "Operation Babylift" is whether the freedom of choice that we value in the West is extended to refugees and immigrants and particularly whether freedom of choice extends to all who live in England. By contrast with Stephen's claim that being English means that he is "a free man" who can "choose" and that he is in Southeast Asia by choice (61), the narrator says that with respect to the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees living in England, "[m]any of them did not want to come to England at all .... Many of them would have selected, given a free choice, other destinations. But they were not given a free choice" (99). Assuming the voice of those who see themselves as being at the centre of English life, the narrator feigns astonishment at the refugees' "nostalgia" for their old ways of life, astonishment that "[t]hey are not wholly grateful" for being brought "into Good Time from Bad Time" (199).

The same self-complacent, self-satisfied superior attitude about "Englishness" is evident in the case of Lady Muck's hostel for unaccompanied Cambodian minors in Glydale where Alix's old school friend Betty Sykes and Betty's friend Rhoda Lee work as liaison officers for UNICEF. Betty tells Alix that she spends her time "trying to persuade the Foundation that it can't try to turn all its little Cambodian orphans into little English children overnight" (190). According to Betty, "People think they can do *anything* to children. And that the kids will be grateful. Ooo, lovely, they'll say, when they see hot water running out of a tap, ooo, lovely, let's all be British" (190). Earlier when Betty spoke of working with a "wealthy lot" with "funny ideas," trying "to bring them up to date" on "multicultural society and assimilation," Alix thought she meant the Cambodians (189). Of course, she meant the "English" Lady Muck and her cronies.

The question that Drabble raises here about the "English" understanding of the

nature of multiculturalism is one she will pick up again in *The Witch of Exmoor* and link to the question of the experience of Asian and West Indian immigrants from former British colonies who began to arrive in Britain after the breakup of the empire. Betty's complaint about the founders of the refugee youth hostel being out of date on the nature of multicultural society illustrates a point made by writers and critics such as Hanif Kureishi and Homi Bhabha. Bhabha argues that

[t]he Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*; and the reason for this is made clear in the stammering, drunken words of Mr "Whisky" Sisodia from [Salman Rushdie's] *The Satanic Verses*: "The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know what it means." (6)

What it means according to Kureishi, is that "[i]t is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was" and who have to make "the major adjustments to British society" as it is in the present ("London and Karachi" 286). Much that Drabble includes in *The Witch of Exmoor* illustrates the need for such adjustments.

## Chapter 5: "Jump For It"

That Drabble took another break from writing fiction after completing *The Gates of Ivory* is not surprising. What may seem surprising after her intense questioning of the focus on the individual is that she spent the next four years writing a biography. It is only on the surface, however, that she seems to have done an about-turn, since the life she wrote about did not lend itself to the narrative simplicity or neatness of traditional English biography. Although it is entitled simply *Angus Wilson: A Biography*, the book, longer than any of her novels, is more like a social chronicle at times. As Lorna Sage points out in her review of it for the *TLS*,

The most striking thing about the biography is the manic pace and scale of Wilson's social life, a crowding-in of names and places that becomes quite pathological .... If Margaret Drabble has trouble finding a clear path through this human jungle, you can see why. Another kind of plot [from the earlier one of the lonely insecure child] has taken over, one in which the moves are sideways and self-conscious, and where the "world" gets wider and wider all the time, so that any structure you find is infinitely questionable and frangible. (25)

I would suggest, however, that the expansion in Wilson's life was not something that bothered Drabble but rather something that appealed to her as a particularly noticeable attempt to escape the narrow confines of "Englishness." Wilson is a writer who, in his life and in his work, challenged the "norms" of "Englishness" by living openly as a homosexual and by writing about the homosexual subculture, and writing about him gave Drabble an opportunity to focus once again on the questioning of "Englishness" which is so important in her own work.

In the Preface, Drabble credits Wilson with "br[eaking] down the categories and confines of sex and gender, and wr[it]ing as a liberator and a pioneer" (xviii). In the biography she explains why:

Angus explored new territory. Some ... recognized the familiar: heterosexual readers discovered the strange. From either perspective, this was new ground. It had not been trodden and retrodden by generations of clumping moralising novelists. Here was freshness of insight and a questioning of sexual stereotypes: women as well as men welcomed this re-assessment of the normal. If some men weren't really "men," then, thank God, maybe women didn't have to be women. (182)

She also points out that Wilson wrote perceptively about women in his fiction (Preface, *AW* xviii) and she credits him with anticipating, in his lectures and talks, both the Women's Movement (183) and the feminist criticism of the late nineteen sixties (378-79). She describes his Albany Trust Lecture on "Literature and Sexual Freedom" as "a bravura speech in which women and homosexuals were equally seen as victims of a puritanical patriarchy" (380) and notes that one of the themes of the lecture was "the social distortion of women in a male power structure and their revolt against it in literature" (378). What this means is that Drabble sees Wilson as identifying and supporting a subversive tradition of protest against the sexual repression of "Englishness," a tradition to which she herself belongs.

Equally important for Drabble is that Wilson was a perceptive "analyst of social class" who spoke and wrote in support of a "classless society" for England (189). In this regard she notes that he benefitted from his "knowledge of a homosexual culture which cut across class" and included "a wide social range" (205). When it comes to cherished beliefs of the upper middle class, she argues that his early stories "were in their own way as iconoclastic and irreverent as [John] Osborne's plays were to be" (168) and she sees him as "a forerunner" of the rebellious mood of the late 1950s, of "the anti-establishment protests of Kingsley Amis, John Wain and Osborne himself" (168-69).

At the same time, she points out that Wilson, "unlike some of his successors, had first-hand inside knowledge of the great institutions which they came to mock and undermine" and that he "wrote with the authority of experience, from a familiarity with the

old régime and its instincts for power" (169). The appeal for Drabble in writing about this subversive insider who was capable of blowing up some of the myths of "Englishness" from within is obvious: as we have seen again and again in her fiction, her own main strength as a novelist is a similar familiarity with the tradition she subverts.

Even more important for Drabble, Wilson, she says, "demonstrated that it was still possible to write a great novel" at a time when the universities in England "were intent on bringing literature to a halt at the end of the nineteenth century" (Preface, *AW* xviii). She records the "almost overwhelming" impact that her unaided discovery of Wilson's novels had on her at Cambridge in the late fifties and early sixties: "It was as exciting as learning to read for the first time as a child," she writes in the Preface (xix). Elsewhere she has said that reading Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* gave her courage to overcome the negative atmosphere of Cambridge under Leavis and to begin her own career as a writer (Interview with Firchow 105-06).

There is no doubt that Drabble finds it particularly gratifying that in his teaching and in his literary criticism Wilson opposed the Leavises. She says that as a teacher, [h]is reading lists were anarchic--he jumbled extracts from George Orwell with Lewis Carroll's descriptions of Humpty Dumpty, and recommended Meredith, Zola, Diderot and Richardson in a manner that defied Leavis's attempts to define a great tradition. (364) She even notes that he once said of two of his students in California that they were "just as bigoted as Leavis's followers" (376). She goes on to point out that in response to the Leavises' assessment of Charles Dickens, Wilson questioned not only the Leavisite method but also the Leavises' integrity: she notes that he "protested vehemently against Leavis's ... [early] censure of Dickens's work" (389) and that he said in a review of their revised assessment in *Dickens the Novelist* that "the Leavises had swung round from opposition to sympathy so sharply that they now veered towards the partisan" (392-93).

Drabble also argues that Wilson played a major role in challenging the Leavisite view of the adaptability and plausibility of the traditional "English" novel. She writes that in his Northcliff Lectures,

[h]is general thesis was that the provincial English novel of manners was inadequate to the violent age of Buchenwald, and that the English had tended to lock themselves in a citadel of false security called country life. They refused to believe that evil or violence could invade them or their land. They lived in willed ignorance, and their novelists encouraged this. Hence, he suggests, the comfort drawn from Jane Austen and E. M. Forster, the bewilderment that greeted a writer of ideas like Powys, the outcry against his own "evil" characters .... (291)

She argues that the emphasis he placed on "the existence of the dimension of evil" was, among other things, "a reaction against the particular cosiness of English fiction" (291); and of his exposé of the coldness, prejudice and hypocrisy of village life in *Hemlock and After*, she says,

Jane Austen and E. F. Benson would hardly have recognized this vision of rural England, and at times the novel seems like a deliberate subversion of a particular genre of English fiction. (177)

The same can be said of Drabble's own versions of provincial English life and of rural England, particularly in novels such as *Jerusalem the Golden*, *The Realms of Gold* and *The Radiant Way*--versions which are based on her experience of growing up in a "grim grey" area of South Yorkshire in the North of England and which are anything but golden (Interview with Wachtel).

According to Drabble, Wilson was always impatient of the limited scope of the traditional "English" novel--always, as he put it, "seeking some escape from a certain narrowness of world and theme imposed upon [him] by former rigid standards of realism"--and she says that his impatience reached a peak just as he was about to begin writing *As If By Magic* (406). With respect to this novel, she credits Wilson with having written about global concerns ten years before John Updike was "to identify the rise of the



global novel." She says that Lorna Sage may be right to believe "that the book was before its time," that "its carnivalesque, flamboyant qualities would have been better received if reviewers had been able to invoke Bakhtin" (446). She points out that this is his "most picaresque book ... covering continents" and this, together with the fact that it was written in various countries on various continents, means that it "embodies displacement" on a global scale (413).

What Drabble traces in Wilson's work is the progressive widening of his territory from the early "specialis[ation] in the domestic macabre, in family manipulations, in social embarrassments, in acute analysis of fading fashions and progressive ideologies" to the later "move[ment] into other, very different areas both in Britain and the world" (Preface, *AW* xx). Accompanying the movement into a wider world, there is, as Drabble shows in the biography, a corresponding movement away from the realism of "the English novel" into experimental fiction. It is a similar expansionary geographical, spatial, cultural, intellectual and emotional movement that we have been tracing in Drabble's own work—from the early novels focussing mainly on the English "home" and its outdated male-favouring gender expectations, through the middle ones where the focus widens to include English institutions and their anachronistic devotion to the old imperialist culture and the notion of "English" superiority, to the trilogy where the focus widens even more to include the "two nations" within England and England as a "parochial, insecure country" (*RW* 171) with a paralysing fear of uncertainty. Like Wilson, Drabble found it necessary to experiment with the novel form as she moved into these wider areas, and there is in her work a corresponding opening out of the form from the early parodic novels written against the grain of "the English novel" to *The Gates of Ivory*, a hybrid text containing a parodic novel within an indeterminate form.

*The Witch of Exmoor*

The movement is reflected in miniature in *The Witch of Exmoor*, the novel Drabble published in the year following the Wilson biography. Although it is much shorter than any of her novels since the sixties, it has a much wider scope than the early novels. In it she not only airs again, in summary form, many of her old "grudges" against English life (Interview with Wachtel), but also includes some new ones and, at the same time, manages to move beyond England and engage in a global postcolonial debate on culture. The form she has chosen for this novel is an economical hybrid mixture of elements of the realistic novel with those of fairy tale and legend, a form which recalls the "romantic realism" of Dickens (*Great Expectations* is a good example) and has affinities with "magic realism."

The key to the inclusiveness is the character of the "witch," Frieda Haxby Palmer, who has been described by Drabble as "a sociologist" and "a battleaxe," as "sort of a rogue journalist ... with a lot of energy" (Interview with Wachtel). There is no missing the similarity between this witch and her creator, of course, and Drabble has admitted that Frieda acts as a persona for her in some respects (Interview with Wachtel).

It is no surprise that Drabble's parade of "wild" women should culminate in the figure of the witch, since all of these women are social dissenters in one way or another and the writers among them--Sarah in *A Summer Bird-Cage*, Jane in *The Waterfall*, Kate in *The Middle Ground* and now Frieda--all believe at some point, that they possess the power to subvert the "norms" of "Englishness." The difference between the others and Frieda is that she is older now than they were and she has witnessed not only the death of the egalitarian dream of the sixties but also the acceleration of the reactionary mood that followed. Through Frieda, Drabble is expressing what seems to be her greatest fear: that is, that the reactionary mood will continue into the next millennium and that, ironically, England will be destroyed by attempts to preserve the façade of an "authentic Englishness."

This irony, present in Drabble's critique of "Englishness" since the beginning of her career, informs the opening scene of *The Witch of Exmoor*: a gathering of Frieda's offspring--Daniel, Gogo and Rosemary--together with their spouses and children at the Daniel Palmers' renovated old farmhouse in Hampshire where they carry on a convincing imitation of rural "Englishness." Musing on them as he strolls through the farmhouse garden and inhales what is to him the "unpleasant" "smell of old rose, of old England" (17), Nathan (Rosemary's husband) thinks that

[s]een from afar, the Palmers ... might seem to carry the assumptions of the British middle classes, carried on from generation to generation. But they come from nowhere. They have turned themselves into members of the English middle class by sleight of hand. Their manner, their voice, their pretensions--they appear to date back for centuries, but as Nathan knows quite well, they date back no further than Frieda Haxby Palmer and her missing husband, whoever he may have been. Nouveaux, that is what they are. But totally convincing. (20)

What perturbs Nathan about these second-generation middle-class professionals is that they fail to question their "Englishness," fail to see that it depends on their having learned what Simon Camish in *The Needle's Eye* called the "art of misrepresentation" (NE 138). They have none of the doubts that usually accompany the movement upward through the classes in Drabble's fiction, none of the anxieties suffered by Simon and others (Francis in *The Realms of Gold* and Kate in *The Middle Ground*, for example). Unlike Drabble, also a second-generation, middle-class professional, the second-generation Palmers have no sense of the struggle which preceded their easy assumption of privilege: according to Nathan, they "had slipped quietly up the ladder after [Frieda]" and now "smile ... from their perches like smug saints mounting a cathedral coping. As though they had always expected to be there, as though nothing short of revolution could dislodge them" (20-21). We are reminded of the narrator's comment in *The Radiant Way* that only people without imagination would not experience something akin to Liz's social fears (RW 183), and, by

the fact that the Palmer children "showed little curiosity about their absent father" (*WE* 137), we are reminded, also, of the narrator's observation in *A Natural Curiosity* that a lack of curiosity is "non-existence" (*NC* 253). Deficient in both imagination and curiosity, Frieda's offspring are unconscious of the disadvantaged position they would have been in had Frieda not struggled for them and are blithely unaware of, or unconcerned about, the unfairness of the social system which allows them their privileged position. Unafflicted by the guilt that has pursued Drabble since childhood, they think that they have and always will have "everything that is pleasant" (*WE* 1).

Even Nathan, who has taken part in "[t]he selling and packaging of England" (18) and who is quite aware that what surrounds him in the Daniel Palmers' garden is "the myth of rural England which has been so successfully marketed to the affluent English" (17-18), is almost convinced of its "reality":

And it is not entirely a myth, for it is here, and now, this little wood, these insects, that calling bird. There is some kind of fit, however clumsy, between the image and the reality. Daniel's farmhouse, more comfortable now than ever in its working days, is hundreds of years old, and this little wood is older than the house. Ancient coppiced woodland. Vegetables have been grown here for centuries, and for centuries roses have scented and corrupted the air. And who is to say that Daniel and Patsy [his wife] do not work as hard as any farmer? They work. (18)

Nathan even goes on to remind himself that Patsy actually does bake her own bread as opposed to buying "'Home Baked' biscuits from the factory" (18).

At the same time, however, he feels a "deep unease" about what surrounds him, about this process which seems, on the surface, to connect England to its past and to carry on some "authentic" kind of "Englishness" but which actually serves only to gild the present, to obscure the past, and to hinder the future:

The rural England of the advertising commercial is superimposed on the palimpsest of the England of Hampshire in the 1990s, and that again is superimposed upon the reality of the past, the unknowable reality of history. The layers of image fade, fuse, fix, peel, wrinkle, part. (18)

According to Drabble, the only continuity ensured by this process is the persistence of the class system and of social inequality. Although the actors may change, the system does not: the narrator notes that the middle-class Palmers "live in affluence" and "are surrounded by a cast of extras who effortlessly reinforce [their] sense of superiority" (120). Like Simon's affluent friends in *The Needle's Eye*, they need to have in their midst others who are less fortunate than they are if they are to maintain this superior air.

The Palmers are in for a rude awakening when, in a characteristic manner, Drabble reveals the family secrets. While her offspring play the part of gentlesfolk in Hampshire, Frieda sits at Ashcombe, the dilapidated castle on Exmoor to which she has retired in order to write her memoirs, and wickedly relishes the prospect of discomposing them. We are told that she

sits here, and addresses herself to her final questioning, her last revenge. This must be clear, she believes, even to her dim-witted family .... As the Witch of Endor raised Samuel to terrify Saul, so she, the Witch of Exmoor, will raise Gladys Haxby, Ernest Haxby, Hilda Haxby, Andrew Palmer. Her nice clean ambitious well-educated offspring will be appalled by their hideous ancestry. (66)

This family narrative turns out to be very similar to those in the earlier novels and through it Drabble reminds us once again of the effects on the lives of two generations of women of the value "Englishness" attaches to domesticity.

Of Frieda Haxby Palmer's mother, Gladys Haxby, we are told that she had been obliged to give up her job [as a schoolmistress] when she was married. That was the law in those days. Married women did not teach in schools. Or not in peacetime. (115) Married to Ernest Haxby, a "deferential farm labourer ... put upon by all and sundry," while thinking herself "equal to the best in the land" (70), Gladys became one of the ghosts of "Englishness" and, like earlier versions of the type (Simon's mother in *The Needle's Eye*, Kate's in *The Middle Ground* and Liz's in the trilogy), she transferred her own

unrealized ambition to her children (135). Bored (115), and with a grudge against life equal to that of Francis's grandmother Ollerenshaw in *The Realms of Gold* (70), Gladys "died where she had lived, at a good old age, in the little cottage in Chapel Street in Dry Bendish" (28-29) after years of "morbid attentive unwilling servitude" on Frieda's part (29).

Gladys, like the other frustrated mothers of her generation in the earlier fiction, is clearly based on Drabble's own "dominant," "difficult" and "painfully depressive" mother who also had to give up teaching after marriage and, again, after a brief period during the Second World War when women were called on to fill in for men fighting in the war (Interview with Wachtel). Drabble has said that her mother's depression caused her own "childhood depression" (Interview with Wachtel) and in *The Witch of Exmoor*, we are told that Frieda "came to dread her mother" (135) because the thwarted ambition for a career as a schoolmistress was channelled into her position as a matriarch in the home (137).

Frieda's dread of her mother, the most alienating of the emotions felt by offspring in similar situations in Drabble's fiction, affected her relationship with her sister as well. This sibling relationship, characterized by rivalry and parasitism, is also familiar from the earlier novels, and there is little doubt but that it is based on Drabble's relationship with her older sister, A. S. Byatt. In fact, the two conflicting versions of her relationship with her older sister that Frieda records are very similar to the conflicting fictional accounts of their relationship given by Drabble in *A Summer Bird-Cage* and by Byatt in *The Game*, a riposte to Drabble's novel (See Myer, *RG* 24).

Sorting through her memories and the "many versions of the story" of her relationship to her mother and to her sister, all of which, she says, are "false" (113), Frieda might be Drabble reviewing the many versions of this story included in her fiction, searching for a way to record a "truth" that could not be depicted in a realistic mode and

finally deciding upon the fairy-tale form as the one most suited to conveying the extremity of the fear and apprehension suffered in childhood. As Angela Carter noted in her introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*,

Fairy-tale families are, in the main, dysfunctional units in which parents and step-parents are neglectful to the point of murder and sibling rivalry to the point of murder is the norm. (xix)

As Frieda remembers it, Gladys was like the wicked stepmother: "She loved her pretty older daughter Everhilda, who was fair and delicate, but she was cruel to Frieda who was plain and dull" (113). As a result of this maternal discrimination, the relationship that developed between Hilda and Frieda was, like those in so many fairy tales, characterized by intense rivalry. We are told that Frieda "came ... to hate her sister" (135), one of the reasons being that when they were children, "Hilda Haxby had tried to kill her little sister Frieda in the old mill by the river" (73). The two versions of this incident given by Frieda are like two versions of a Grimm fairy tale: in the first version, Frieda is the slave and victim of her "cunning" older sister; in the second, it is the older sister who is enslaved by the younger and whose vitality is being sapped (113-15). Both versions end with the older sister's attempt to kill the younger one.

The rivalry of the sisters Hilda and Frieda is carried into adulthood and, as in a fairy tale, there comes a time when the sisters compete for the prince. Much-abused Frieda thinks that by marrying her sister's lover, Andrew Palmer, she is finally outdoing Hilda, but this is the point at which Drabble departs from the fairy tale pattern--the "happily-ever-after" ending in marriage--and shows us the misery that awaits Frieda as wife and mother.

One of the most painful of the ironies of the situation is revealed when Hilda kills herself and her child fathered by Frieda's husband Andrew. Frieda had thought that it was she who "had appropriated her sister's admirer" (82) when, in fact, Hilda had "procured [her] for him" and had continued "an on-and-off affair" with him over the years (244-45).

The situation is reminiscent of Jane's appropriation of her cousin Lucy's husband James in *The Waterfall* but there is a further irony here in that the man chosen by the rival sisters "hadn't wanted either of them" (137). According to Frieda, it became clear early in her marriage to Andrew that he "wasn't seriously interested in women," though he would continue the pretence until "[h]e had destroyed one, and done his best to destroy another" (137). Again, we recognize a familiar theme in a new combination: to the rivalry of sisters and the appropriation of another's husband is added the marriage to a homosexual.

Another new twist is that the homosexual husband eventually stops repressing his homosexuality and runs away to Ceylon with another man as a way of shirking responsibility and avoiding the consequences of the trouble he has caused (137). Earlier versions of this type (Stephen Halifax in *A Summer Bird-Cage*, Malcolm Gray in *The Waterfall* and Stuart Armstrong in *The Middle Ground*) had not admitted their sexual preference although their wives suspected quite early on in the marriages that the men did not really care for them after, as Kate puts it, "sexual relations" passed the "courtship" stage of "talk and kisses and caresses" (*MG* 37). Immediately following that stage came the same "disappointment" and "frustrat[ion]" that Frieda experienced (245), and when Frieda sums up Andrew as "[a] coward and a traitor" (138) her thoughts reflect those of Drabble's earlier women characters about their husbands. What bothers Drabble about these men is that they lie to others (sometimes even to themselves) about their sexuality and proceed to make women's lives miserable because they do not have the courage to challenge the "norms" of "Englishness." She found support for a "moral" condemnation of the type in Angus Wilson. In her biography of him, Drabble says that Wilson, who was open about his own sexuality, "tended to disapprove of homosexuals ... who married as a cover," and she notes that "[h]e disapproved of Bernard [in his novel *Hemlock and After*] because of the harm his hypocrisy had done to others" (182-83).



If this combination of sordid stories from the past were not enough to shock her "nice clean" complacent offspring, there is the additional fact that Frieda resents the limiting effect of motherhood on her career ambitions: she writes in a memo to herself, "It was a mistake having three children. It was a mistake having any .... They were a problem. Think what I might have been, might have done, if I hadn't been burdened" (247). This complaint is a refrain in Drabble's fiction, but never before has it been uttered without ambivalence. In Drabble's earlier fiction, women of Frieda's generation qualify negative comments like these with positive comments on the experience of mothering whereas Frieda claims that she "never thought motherhood was all it was cracked up to be" and that she found her children "hideous" from the beginning (247). Reading the memo on the computer after Frieda's death, her granddaughter Emily thinks, "It's slightly depressing to find that your grandmother wishes your father had never been born" (247). Though Frieda's response is deliberately exaggerated and amusing, it reflects a serious comment on the hardship suffered by women trying to juggle a career and a family in a society which expected them to make domesticity their primary responsibility no matter what else they were doing. This position is addressed by Carolyn Steedman in her book *Landscape for a Good Woman*. Steedman says that "[i]t is to marginal and secret stories that we have to look for any disturbance of the high and bland assumption that the wish for a child largely structures femininity" (106). She remembers her mother saying to her, "Never have children, dear" because "they ruin your life" and remembers also that as a child she was made aware over and over again that she and her sister were "burdens" (17). This point is articulated also in Liz Heron's introduction to the collection of stories entitled *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (1985) where she speaks of the differences between the lives of women of her own generation and those of their mothers' generation (8).

A second reason for Frieda's resentment of her "ambitious well-educated offspring" is that they do not share her interest in social justice. In the interview with Wachtel, Drabble said that Frieda feels that "things have not only stuck but gone slightly backwards" in English society as the millennium approaches; it is a feeling Drabble shares, and through Frieda, she is once again asking why it is that some people are privileged and others are not, or, as she put it in an interview, "why people become immobilised" (Interview with Wachtel). She is at pains to point out that for Frieda and her offspring, as for her own parents and herself, a good education was "the upward ladder" into the comforts of the middle classes, a privilege for which Frieda, Drabble's parents (and Drabble, to some extent) struggled, but for which Frieda's offspring did not, a difference which mocks any claim that the social system rewards those who deserve it. Drabble is not suggesting that it should. She is merely pointing out that it does not and, therefore, cannot explain discrimination between the privileged and the underprivileged on that basis.

That dominant versions of "Englishness" have tried to justify discrimination in this way is a point made earlier in this study in references to discourses on gender, class and race (discriminating between "good" and "bad" in terms of women, homosexuals, blacks). Here I want to recall analyses of the discourse on race because it is in *The Witch of Exmoor* that Drabble finally broadens her survey of the "condition of England" and attempts to widen the notion of "Englishness" to include questions of race and ethnicity, an attempt which is complementary (and not oppositional) to the concept of "Black British" promoted by Hall, Gilroy and others. In "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation" Chris Waters argues that after the large scale immigration in the postwar period, "Englishness" came to include the white working classes in a way it had not before, but excluded Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, that "then race could play the role that class once had in debates about national cohesiveness" and that "the rhetoric of difference in which the

working class had once been inscribed was now reserved for the Black migrant" (225-27). He points out that the code words in this rhetoric included "[p]rimitiveness, savagery, violence, sexuality, general lack of control, sloth, irresponsibility" (227). Drabble does not refer to this discursive movement within "Englishness," but she does allude to this rhetoric and to an intersection of race and class discrimination in the case of Will Paine who is of mixed Afro-Caribbean and "Anglo-Saxon" English ancestry and also working class.

Focusing on the experience of recent immigrants and their families she examines the extent to which current constructions of "Englishness" allow for their participation. Among the half dozen characters in the novel who are not "pure-bred English" (78), the one said to be least able to "cope with ... Englishness" is Nathan Herz (237). We are told that "[i]t is a mystery to Nathan" how the Palmers manage to look as if they belong to the English upper middle class even though "they have come from nowhere" while he and David D'Anger will always be "outsider[s]"(19). The only explanation he can find for their exclusion from "Englishness" or "Britishness" is that he is Jewish and David is East Indian Guyanese and that, as it is presently constructed, "Englishness" is ethnically and racially exclusive: "The D'Angers and Herzes can never be British," Nathan thinks. "They have the wrong genes, the wrong skin, the wrong noses" (20). Through Nathan, Drabble is raising a point made by critics such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Simon Gikandi who have argued that "Englishness" in its dominant forms is a discourse which paradoxically insists on an "intrinsic and racial purity" (Gikandi 51). Gilroy has expressed the argument trenchantly in "One Nation Under a Groove: The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Racism in Britain" where he writes: "Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the white people" (qtd. in Gikandi 50).

For these critics it is particularly paradoxical that "Englishness" should attempt to

dissociate itself from blackness when many of the black people living in Britain moved there from its ex-colonies and claim "Britishness" or "Englishness" as part of their historical rights—rights conferred upon them when they were made subjects of the British Crown. The claim is alluded to in *The Witch of Exmoor* by David who points out that he "was brought up to think of Britain as [his] home, even when [his family] lived in Georgetown" (56), and David is only one of five black or coloured characters who can claim a British heritage. The others are Lily McNab, Saul Sinnamary, Will Paine and Benjamin, David's son. The last two of these were born in England and can claim "Britishness" on the dual basis of their mixed-ethnic heritage which includes that of their fathers as colonial black subjects and that of their mothers as white "Anglo-Saxons."

Drabble pays more attention to the men in this group than she does to Lily who is not developed much beyond her role as the child psychotherapist who tries to help Benjie to come out of his depression, but we do learn that she has achieved a comfortable position within "Englishness." The suggestion is that having money eased the way in her case: we are told that her parents were Indian Jews from Calcutta where she was born, that she was educated in Scotland and that she is married to a barrister (231); we are also told that she somehow raised the money for the very expensive training to become one of the "fewer than 350 child psychotherapists in the United Kingdom" which, Drabble notes in an aside, has "refused to finance" this kind of training (230). That she now, in middle age, has her office in a terraced house in "an expensive district," is well-heeled and is "not to be daunted" (231) suggest that Lily feels at home in the comfortable middle-class world of "Englishness" and her advice to Benjie to forget his non-English affiliations and affinities bears this out.

David D'Anger also has managed to do well for himself in English society despite the fact that he may never be considered British. There are several reasons for this: he is

handsome and charming (3), intelligent and ambitious (19). These qualities have helped him in his career as an academic (a much "courted" one [48]) and as a television commentator; they also help him to become elected member of parliament for a marginal constituency in West Yorkshire (21). David knows that he is "a man for whom the time is right. Handsome, clever and black, he is political plausibility personified" (48). At the same time, he has, we are told, "astutely allied himself to the clan of the Palmers, which gives him added credibility" (22). It is also clear that the Palmers expect to gain from the alliance. They, too, believe that "David is the coming man, and they will back him" (22) for that reason and because of "their confidence that they will always end up on the right side of any shift or redistribution of power" (20).

Were it not for their complacency, the Palmers might feel threatened by the game David tries to get them to play after dinner on the last evening of the family weekend in Hampshire at the beginning of the novel. The game is called "The Veil of Ignorance" (4) and is later identified by the narrator as "John Rawls's Theory of Justice as Parlour Game" (79). As David explains it, the game involves "unimagining everything that you are and then working out the kind of society you would be willing to accept if you didn't in advance know your place in it" (4). It is clear that although "[t]hey are willing to play David's game" (4), the Palmers (except for the Daniel Palmers' daughter Emily) do not want to play according to the rules because the object of the game is to construct "a just society" (5) and that would mean, as Daniel Palmer quickly realizes, "giving up all this," by which he means the privilege he and his family enjoys under the present class system in England: "What I have, I hold. That's my motto," Daniel says (6). Nathan thinks that what "David D'Anger's game had illustrated [is] that revolution will never come, or not in this millennium. What we have, we hold" (21). Later the narrator says, "So there you have them .... The middle classes of England" (22-23); and she asks in exasperation, "Is there

any hope whatsoever, or any fear, that anything will change?" Her answer is that,

[a]s Nathan had considered as he walked the lawn, they are all of them already halfway up to their necks in the mud of the past of their own lives. Not even a mechanical digger could get them out alive now. (23)

Only later do we learn that Daniel had been rather irritated by David and the game and had, at least momentarily, wondered if David's desire for a just society could pose any threat to him (76-77). His conclusion, however, was "Surely not" (77).

There are suggestions in the novel that Daniel may be right about David not being a threat to him or the English middle classes. Early in the novel, however, the narrator hints that he actually might be. We are told that his wife Gogo thinks that David "would betray her again and again, not with a call girl or an actress or a pretty PA ...--no, he would betray her for Social Justice, that blind, blood-boltered maiden" (47). The narrator seems to agree:

David D'Anger is haunted by the fair vision of a just society .... You say he is an impossibility, and you cannot imagine him, any more than he can imagine the nature of the revolution which would bring about the world he thinks he wishes to construct. But you are wrong. The truth is that you, for David D'Anger, are the impossibility. The present world which we seem to inhabit is an impossibility. He cannot live at ease in it, he cannot believe it is real. He believes that the other world is possible. (47)

She concludes: "You know such men are dangerous. He knows that an absence of such men is dangerous" (48). Almost immediately after these comments, however, the narrator casts doubt on David's integrity when she notes that while David was at Oxford, [t]he Master of Gladwyn College [Sir Roy] ..., a well known seducer and corrupter of youth, had courted David, and it was widely rumoured that David had succumbed, for the old boy's manner remained remarkably indulgent over a period of years. (49)

On the basis of this and old Sir Roy's approval of David's marriage to a Palmer the narrator asks, "Had David D'Anger kissed the arse of the establishment?" (50) At a later point Will Paine suspects that David, now middle-aged, has done well because he has "joined the

English" (81).

The test of David's integrity comes in the form of Frieda's penultimate will in which she left the bulk of her estate and her copyrights to David "for the purpose of re-establishing the D'Anger family claim to the Valley of Eagles [in Guyana], and establishing therein the Just Society, to be founded on the principles of social justice, as discussed" (198). According to the narrator,

If Gogo D'Anger had shivered at the news of Frieda's second will which left all to Benjie, David D'Anger is struck with horror and guilt at the news of the first, which had left so much to The Just .... The perils of conversation, the dangers of philosophy, the pitfalls of speculation! Many hours over the years he had spent in discussion with Frieda Haxby, but it had never occurred to him that she took his ideas seriously. He had assumed it was all a game .... And now she had called his bluff .... At least ... she had thought of asking him to press the button. And then she had given him up and thought better of it. She had given him up, as he now gives himself up. (203)

Later, we are told that "David D'Anger knows that the Just Society is an impossibility" (205), and we leave him as the Member for Middleton, part of the party of government,

but it must be said that he is increasingly disillusioned with party politics and indeed with his own party .... The Just Society recedes over the horizon, in a haze of talk and compromise and phrase-making. Egalitarianism and redistribution are words to avoid, concepts to deplore. (268-69)

Despite these suggestions in the novel that he has given up hope in social justice, Drabble said in the interview with Wachtel that she thinks he still has the "social hope" she wanted him to have. While she admitted that she "almost lost him on the way," she insisted that he still has "a kind of hope" different from the "individual hope" which is all that sustains most of Britain. Drabble was referring to David's decision "to be a good constituency man ... [and] to chart [the] structure [of his constituency] like a good sociologist" (269), a decision which echoes what she said earlier about her purpose in *The Radiant Way* being to record rather than prophesy. David thinks that "[e]ven if he can't

change much, at least he can record it properly" (269) and in this he is reflecting Drabble's belief in the importance of providing the future with accurate sociological accounts of the present, accounts otherwise obscured by that "haze of talk and compromise and phrase-making" which constitutes the remaking of "Englishness" in the public forum.

One of the characters lost in the haze is Will Paine and through him Drabble asks her most troubling questions about "Englishness." One of the questions she forces upon us throughout the novel is why it is that Will is so fully excluded from "Englishness" even though he shares some of the characteristics which have contributed to David's relative success. Like David, Will is both attractive and intelligent. The narrator notes that in colour Will "could almost pass for white" but unexpectedly and provocatively adds that, "to be blunt about it, he is too nice-looking to be pure-bred English .... Will Paine is a beautiful hybrid, grafted on to old stock" (78). By contrast, the narrator says of "[t]he pure-bred English" that they

are a motley, mottled, mongrel ugly breed, blotched with all the wrong pigments, with hair that does not do much for them at all. The English are clumsy and gross and at the same time runtish. They do not make the best of themselves. Their bodies are thick, their faces either pinched and beaky like mean birds or shapeless as potatoes. (78)

As Drabble said of Wilson's presentation of the English to themselves in his early stories, this is "not a flattering portrait" (AW 168). It is a portrait which makes the "pure-bred English" appear to themselves to be ugly, mean and uncultivated, and desperately in need of new "stock." More to the point, however, it is also a portrait which mocks any claim for the racial purity of "Englishness" in a manner that recalls Daniel Defoe's *The True-Born Englishman*. In this satiric poem Defoe describes the English as the "mix'd Relics" of "all the Nations under Heaven" and says that it is "with easie search you may distinguish / Your Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman English" (qtd. in Lucas 18). As John Lucas points out, Defoe's poem is meant, among other things, "to demolish the racist myth of Englishness"



(Lucas 18), and I have no doubt that Drabble means to do the same in the ironic conjunction of "pure-bred English" and "mongrel breed." Seen in this light, Will's hybridity is not only part of an "English" tradition but also an improvement upon it. Even the Palmers admit that this is so: "How wise they had been, [Rosemary and Gogo] agree, to marry out, to alter the gene pool" (267).

What they are not willing to admit is the more pressing need for new ideas of social organization which would include rather than exclude young men like Will Paine. Will, on the other hand, is like Nathan in wishing that he "could push a button and send the whole lot spinning round" (81). He also wonders, as Drabble does, "What would happen ... if you spread everything thinly and absolutely evenly and gave everyone a bit of everything?" (81) Asked in 1978, "What makes you uneasy?" Drabble replied, "The fact that some people have more [money] than others" and she said she agreed with an advert in the personal column of the *Times* which asked "why some people are paid more than others" but got no answer and concluded that "there is no answer" (Interview with Milton 57). By having Will pose this question, Drabble is again recalling the long tradition of "English" dissent to which she is heir and which, as noted earlier, is based on the principle of the Great Society that "all things under Heaven ought to be common" (qtd. in Williams, CC 42-43). Like Drabble, however, Will does not have much hope that a policy of complete equality will ever become national policy in England: "These English, they are bred to hold on, like terriers," he thinks. "They hold on to their own interests even while they smile and offer shelter. Nothing will dislodge them" (81).

It is in connection with his perception of social injustice that Will notes the difference between himself and David D'Anger for whom it was not so difficult as it is for Will to find a place in English society. What is very troubling about this difference is that it seems to be explained by a difference in ethnicity and class: while David is of East Indian

ancestry and comes from a "distinguished" family belonging to "the expatriate intellectual, revolutionary aristocracy of Guyana" (20), Will, on his father's side, is of West Indian African descent and comes from a broken home in England. We learn that his Jamaican father disappeared long ago and Will was raised by his mother, a working-class woman in Wolverhampton, the area referred to by Enoch Powell as the "black belt" (qtd. in Gikandi 75). By the time we meet him, Will is unemployed and unemployable in England despite the fact that he is young, attractive and intelligent. He has also been in gaol for "peddling grass to the middle classes" (77) although he claims to have been carrying some only to a friend. Will's situation illustrates a point made by Krishan Kumar, that

something in the experience of Empire, both for the British and for the subject races, seems to have made a decisive difference to the fortunes of the Asians and West Indians who settled in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s [as compared with those of earlier immigrant groups]....[T]hey have experienced negative discrimination out of all proportion to their numbers in the fields of housing, employment, and education. (47)

Even Patsy Palmer who befriends Will, allowing him to sleep in the attic in return for doing odd jobs around the farmhouse and grounds, thinks that "[s]he will have to get rid of him" as "an unpleasant necessity" (59). We are told that

[s]he worries about him more than she would ever disclose. Her public line is confidence, but sometimes she admits that she is, very slightly, afraid. Not of him, but of what he represents. She likes him, and he makes himself useful. But she fears his category. And he limits her control. He cannot be contained in her frame. (59)

Like Evelyn Stennett in *The Middle Ground*, Patsy has the "righteous confidence" which comes from generations of privilege (77), and she is used to being able to control the bit players in the family drama. What Will represents is the need for a change in the present social system and she feels threatened by this. While Will is generally "pliant [or] suppliant" (81), he is also reserved, and his reserve repels her attempts to make him part of the frame of society that favours her. Will is aware that even though the Daniel Palmers

acknowledge him, "they don't rate him any more than they rate their poor dumb dog" (82), and he is not willing to accept the degradation of being "shown off" by Patsy as a specimen of "sociological interest" (77).

When Patsy does get rid of him, Will has better luck with Frieda who, when she tires of his company, thrusts a large amount of money upon him and sees him off to Jamaica. However, when it is discovered that Frieda disappeared at about the same time as he did, Will is wanted for questioning and the cloud of suspicion makes it impossible for him to return even though he does not like Jamaica and is "homesick" for England (219). Even when Will moves on to Trinidad, changes his name, gets a job as a cleaner and makes a couple of friends, the narrator is not hopeful:

The odds have been stacked against him all his life. He was born in the wrong place at the wrong time and of the wrong parents. You must have noticed that he has a good nature and an intelligence above the average. Given a little more help, he could have improved his lot immeasurably, but he stupidly drew the wrong lot .... The net will close in on him. He is a natural suspect. (251)

In an interview with Philip Marchand, Drabble defended what Marchand refers to as the "arch tone" of this authorial intrusion:

"I know it seems a fairly distancing and almost flippant technique, but in fact it raises a fairly serious question--what can Will Paine do in England?....

And the answer is nothing. We have given him nothing." (H9)

In the novel she says that there are in England no "plots that will set him free," that "[t]here is no place for him in the country of his birth," and she decides to send him to Australia as Britain did its "convicts of old" (261). She told Marchand that this was the "nicest thing [she] could think of for him" (H9). The last we hear of Will is that he managed to get past Australian Immigration ("He is not very black," the narrator notes [261]) and is in Sydney, "apprenticed to a landscape gardener" and happier, "healthier and stronger than he has ever been" (266).

By contrast with Will, Benjamin D'Anger seems to have a great deal going for him in England: he is, we are told, "a spoiled brat and a teacher's pet" (89); he is also Frieda's favourite grandchild and in her last will she leaves everything she has to him. It would seem that England has given Benjie everything, and yet, Drabble suggests, it almost destroys him. In the course of the novel he suffers a "form of [childhood] depression" triggered by his anxiety over the death of his grandmother Palmer and the inheritance (220).

It is the psychoanalyst Lily McNab's view that Benjie is suffering from the widespread "Emmanuel delusion" preceding the millennium (251), caused in his case by his parents:

They had pinned too much on this child, they had expected him to be perfect. Never has he been allowed a normal childhood. He has been asked to fly too high, and in response he has dived too deep. (251)

Near the end we are told that Benjie "is well aware that Lily McNab has been suggesting to him ... that he is not as special, nor as responsible, nor as predestined as he thought himself to be. He is not Benjamin, nor Emmanuel, nor Beltenebros. He can choose to be ordinary" (272). Her advice to him is to "abandon dreams of returning [to Guyana], and settle, as she has done, in England, and accept that for better or worse he is British" (273). Lily's advice reflects the argument of critics like Gilroy, Hall and Gikandi who wish to affirm the category of "Black British": they argue that blacks who moved to Britain from ex-colonies such as Jamaica and Guyana have a historical right to be there, that they are British and that Britain is their home.

There is no doubt that Drabble supports this argument, but there is something that is disturbing (and that Drabble wants us to see as disturbing, I think) about Lily's equation of being "British" with being "ordinary." It suggests that Benjie should act and think like every other "British" boy his age, that he should not only give up any wish to return to his

father's birthplace but also any sense of identification with the Guyanese half of his ancestry. As Hall, following Gilroy, in a critique of Raymond Williams's insistence on "long ... sustained social relationships" as the basis for "social identity," argues,

It should not be necessary to look, walk, feel, think, speak exactly like a paid-up member of the buttoned-up, stiff-upper-lipped, fully corsetted "free-born Englishman" *culturally* to be accorded either the courtesy and respect of civilized social intercourse or the rights of entitlement and citizenship. (360)

The distinction Hall makes between *inclusion* (in the sense of political inclusion as a British citizen) and *assimilation* is a very important one. The complete cultural assimilation demanded of the black British by the white British can lead to repression and denial, a point illustrated in Hanif Kureishi's comments on "try[ing] to deny [his] Pakistani self" in the face of racist treatment of Pakistanis in England in the mid-1960s ("London and Karachi" 270). As Gikandi notes, Kureishi "accepts the reality of his English identity but realizes that to the extent that this identity is based on *dédoublement* and self-alienation, it is essentially negative" (203). What these critics and writers, including Drabble, argue is that the "Britishness" or "Englishness" claimed by blacks must include the fact that, as Gikandi says, the histories and cultures of Britain and its former colonies have been, and continue to be "intermixed" (205). They are arguing for a "new reconceptualization of the culture of Englishness" based on this recognition (Gikandi 204).

The need for this recognition is expressed in *The Witch of Exmoor* by David's friend Saul Sinnamary, a British Guyanese-born poet who has taken advantage of his own hybridity by freeing himself from the concept of home and leading "a life of global restlessness" (213). He is able to do so, the narrator slyly notes, because his "reasonably salaried and tenured appointment at a distinguished North American college" requires him to teach for only "a few weeks of the year" and leaves him free to spend the rest of the time, "as his CV diplomatically puts it, between England and Guyana" but not necessarily

*in* either (213). Saul who is, Drabble says, "a romantic poet and ... knows about the effect of landscape on the soul" (214) has "kept his links" with Guyana as well as with Britain and he thinks that Benjie is "suffering from exile" from Guyana even though he was born in England and has an English mother (213). There is support for this view in Benjie's response to the story about the goatsucker of Guyana that Saul reads to him:

Saul's fine rendering of the cry of the nightjar-goatsucker is so moving that he begins to cry, for he is an emotional chap, easily distressed; Benjamin too begins to sob and they sit and hug and weep. Saul wonders if he has gone too far, but he believes in tears, he believes in emotion, he thinks the Guyanese half of Benjie has been repressed, and it will do him good to weep and wail. (234-35)

Drabble also believes in the value of expressed emotion and we are told that after this emotional release, Benjie "looks a lot more cheerful, and more alert" (235). The incident suggests that Saul may be right about the harmful effect on the boy of the value the dominant version of "Englishness" places on restraint and reticence. The narrator tells us of Benjie's mother, Gogo:

She is English, she does not show emotion. If she loves both her husband and her son, obsessively, fearfully, you would never guess it. She is the most severe, the most Nordic of Frieda's offspring. (49)

It is not until she becomes aware of the acute nature of Benjie's depression that she begins to show her anxiety (208) and not until she finds him unconscious, face down in the bath that she cries (218).

The fact that Benjie is recovering from depression without giving up faith in himself and the hope of doing something significant is one of the positive notes on which the novel ends: we are told that he "has pretended to go along with" Lily McNab on her advice about being "ordinary" and that "he has made the same pretence to his parents. But deep in himself he still believes that he has a special destiny" (272). Responding to an interviewer's comment that she used an "affirmative tone" at the end in connection with the

next generation, Drabble said "very much so"; she added that, to her, many members of the next generation (including her own grandchildren) "look wonderful" (Interview with Wachtel).

The depiction of Frieda's other forward-looking grandchild, her granddaughter Emily, reinforces this point. During the discussion of the game called "The Veil of Ignorance," it is Emily who provides the choral comments pointing out that the Palmers are unaccountably privileged and that England is not a "just" society: "'As these do us,' murmurs Emily" when David explains that "[i]f you cling to any trace of your existing self you will find yourself constructing a theory of justice and a society that favours you"; (4) "'Not to say practised,' murmurs Emily" when David remarks that it has been argued "that a numerically overwhelming mass of the very poor can constitute a just society" (5). At the end of the novel indications are that Emily is about to translate her awareness of social injustice and her qualms about being privileged into action: we are told that she

has elected not to go to university this autumn after all; she has given up her place at Newcastle, where she had been accepted to study archaeology, and has chosen instead to take a short course in something called Media Studies in a rechristened polytechnic in Glamorgan. (272)

The narrator notes that her parents "were not pleased" by this giving up of a privileged educational opportunity; nor were they pleased by her explanation "that she was 'sick of the past'" (272). Switching focus from the past to the present (which also includes the possibility of a romance with "Bristol Jim the photographer") (272), Emily embodies Drabble's belief that "you've got to jump ... got to take a leap" if you want to live in the present and bring about change (Interview with Wachtel). "Jump for it!" is exactly the advice Emily gives her younger cousin at the end of the novel" and, we are told in the last clause, "Benjamin D'Anger jumps" (276).

Drabble told Wachtel that in an earlier version of the novel she had included an

"optimistic coda" which others (her son and her publisher) considered to be "frivolous and ridiculous" and "trivial." She explained that in the coda the characters "think they are in heaven," her idea of heaven being "a brigantine sailing towards the Isles of the Blessed" (Interview with Wachtel). Although she allowed herself to be talked out of ending the novel in heaven, she managed to include the optimism. According to Drabble, the message of the coda was "Don't be afraid of death" (Interview with Wachtel). Minus the coda, the novel actually ends on a more optimistic note with Emily telling Benjie not to be afraid of life.

That her advice is to be taken on this level as well as on the literal is suggested by the aura of legend that hovers over Emily and Benjie's spur-of-the-moment expedition to Hindspring Point where the hind in ancient legend is said to have escaped from the knight pursuing her by taking "three mighty leaps ... down the cliff into the sea" (259). Lured by the shimmering water of the sea, Benjie and Emily forget about their appointment with the land agent and "run," "scramble," "jump" and "clamber" as "[o]n they go" from point to point:

They round the second point, but still they cannot turn back, for there, ahead of them, tucked under the hill, is the old kiln and above it is the third point of Hindspring. So on they go, and onwards, to the next point and the next. They are young and on they go. (275-76)

Clearly Drabble wants us to see a comparison between these young people and the hind and, by extension, with the hart in Wordsworth's ballad "Hart-Leap Well" to which she relates it:

Four roods the hart of legend leaped to Hartleap Well, four roods the hind of legend to the sea .... A rood (or a pole, or a perch) is five and a half yards (or five meters) and in early drafts of his ballad Wordsworth had allowed his hart to leap nine roods, not four; in his unromantic stampmaster old age he scaled down that leap, but maybe he was wrong to do so. In the genre of legend, all things are possible, and exaggeration bears conviction. It is only in this real world that the mud is heavy and sticks. (260)



We have seen that with respect to Will Paine, Drabble allowed him to reach Australia in three "bound[s]"--from England to Jamaica, from there to Trinidad and from there to Sydney (261). When she says at the end of the novel that "Benjamin D'Anger jumps," we can infer that for him, too, there are "plots that will set him free" and that maybe in his case these will be new plots created in England by young people who are more interested in England's future than they are in its past.

Drabble's decision to end the novel on this note of qualified optimism about Benjie's future reflects the side she has taken in the contemporary postcolonial debate over the merits of cultural separatism, on the one hand, and those of cultural hybridity, on the other. As we would expect from the expansionary movement in her fiction, Drabble is on the side of cultural hybridity. Her entry into this debate reflects her world travels for the British Council and a widening of her focus to include not only "the condition of England" but also "the conditions of post-colonial cultures," particularly in countries which were once part of the British Empire (*WE* 236). An indication that this interest was brewing at least two years before the publication of *The Witch of Exmoor* is the introduction she wrote in 1994 for a book called *As I Please: Selected Writings* by Salleh Ben Joned, a Malaysian writer concerned with cultural hybridity and multiculturalism in Malaysia, a writer Drabble had met on the Council circuit in Kuala Lumpur. One reason she recommends the book to an English readership is that it helps, she says, in understanding a country which has had a "very vexed" relationship with England (xiii) and another is that Joned writes as a cultural hybrid (a Malaysian and a Muslim with a Western education) whose "courage in trying to interpret one side of his heritage to the other, and hence to us" Drabble finds "exhilarating" (xvi).

Her enthusiasm for such cross-cultural attempts at communication is reflected in what she has called her "temerity" in creating characters like David D'Anger (Interview

with Wachtel). In the novel she has David express an awareness of the problem of positioning now experienced by white writers, a problem which he says is illustrated in the claim "that Philip Larkin is a racist bastard" because he did not include in his poems the small percentage of "coloured folk in Hull" (54). As David explains it, the white man is "not allowed to write or to speak *as* a black man, but he's damned if he doesn't recognize their existence and their otherness. Damned if he appropriates, damned if he neglects. It's a fine line" (54). That Drabble has David go on to describe this position as "the new white man's burden" suggests that she considers it suitable repayment for the former arrogance of some white male writers, Rudyard Kipling being a notable example. Nevertheless, and as we would expect, she is not willing to retreat into silence. She told Wachtel that she realized she was "taking a very big risk" creating a character like David given the concern on the part of some postcolonial critics about cultural appropriation.

Not only is she so bold as to create David, she is also so bold as to have him critique the opposition to cultural intercourse and interaction. The critique is included in a Sunday-morning conversation between David and his brother-in-law Daniel as, in her characteristic manner, Drabble engages us in the sociological and political subtext of the novel through our interest in the characters. The "domestic friction" in the relationship between the two (77) explains why it is that Daniel plays the game of "cultivated ignorance in the face of David's description of a seminar on Cultural Appropriation" which David has been invited to attend in Calgary, why it is that he "feigns ignorance of Canada's leading role in the debate on communitarianism and ethnic minorities" and why he claims to be left speechless by "the notion that a white man cannot write about or represent in court a black or brown man, or vice versa" (53). Daniel hopes to annoy David with this game as he himself was annoyed by "The Veil of Ignorance," but he is outplayed by David who readily

admits that, while he is "so deep into cultural appropriation that there's no way back for [him]," it is more useful to him "to dissemble a little, to play the communitarian game" in order to get part of the funding available for these seminars so that he can "attend the get-togethers, make friends and influence people" (54-55). David even ventures to suggest that the dispute over cultural appropriation is "all to do with funding," the keen competition for limited cultural funding. According to him,

"The Northern hemisphere is full of Canadians and Danes and Swedes and Germans busy studying post-colonial culture and digging into old colonial archives in order to get themselves on the next aeroplane out of the rain and down south into the tropical sunshine." (55)

More seriously, he goes on to make a point similar to that made by Victor Li in "Towards Articulation: Postcolonial Theory and Demotic Resistance" that, in Li's words, the "critical vigilance" (172) trained by some critics on "postcolonial theory's hegemonic ambition to represent or speak for the dominated and the oppressed" (167) is

in fact part of the problem they have defined so usefully. Their suspicion of postcolonial theory and their call for demotic resistance, after all, are couched in the same theoretical idiom and delivered from the same privileged locations as those of the postcolonial theorists they critique. (172)

According to David, those white postcolonial critics who object to cultural appropriation are in fact practicing it by presuming to write and speak "[o]n behalf of the benighted disadvantaged tinted folk who haven't yet learnt that it's their duty to reject all representation and represent themselves" (56). Drabble has David go on to describe the adoption of this position as "a new kind of colonialism. Cultural colonialism" (56).

At the same time, Drabble also casts doubt on Daniel's seemingly disinterested advocacy of "universal human nature and all the possibilities of cultural assimilation" (54-55) when she has David point out that the concept of human nature is culturally relative and that it is the US rather than Britain which is currently in a position to dictate the definition. As David puts it, "The Americans believe in a universal human nature. There's

a heroism in that. But they believe that universal human nature is or shall be American" (57). What David, and Drabble through him, expresses is an awareness that the notion of a universal human nature can be used by a more powerful culture, as it was by Britain during its imperialist heyday, to excuse the exploitation and domination of less powerful ones. What particularly irks the Englishman Daniel about the post-colonial situation, however, is that the relations between Britain and its former colonies have been reversed and Britain has passed from a superior to an inferior position: "[I]t's not as though Britain is the seat of empire that it once was," he says. "Most of the brain drain goes the other way now, to our ex-colonies" (57).

One question this raises is whether those ex-colonies have come any closer to creating the "Just Society" than England has. With respect to David's hope that "[m]aybe it's Guyana's turn next" (57), Drabble reminds us that his notion of setting up a just society in Guyana is not new: Saul asks David to remember that "The Reverend Jim Jones ... called himself a socialist" and "tried to set up the Just Society" there, an experiment which ended in the mass suicide of the 900 members of his People's Temple ("80 per cent" of whom were "poor black" Americans). He also reminds David of Michael X, "a conman on a smaller scale who had briefly been the Black Power darling of the Western World" and who set up a commune in Trinidad where "he had taken to drinking blood and murdering his recruits." Michael X also spent some time in Guyana in hiding until his crimes and the police caught up with him and he was arrested and returned to Trinidad where he was hanged (216-17). As the narrator notes in an understatement, "[t]hese were not good precedents" (217). With respect to both David and Saul's view of Singapore as "a twentieth-century miracle, a model for all Asian city-states" because "[i]t is rich and clean and wired up," Drabble reminds us that all this has been accomplished under "an authoritarian regime" (217) which, while ensuring economic stability and prosperity, has

curtailed certain freedoms--such as untrammelled free speech.

By contrast with Guyana and Singapore, Drabble chooses two former colonies of Britain which she suggests are in one way or another moving closer than Britain is to social equality. There is no doubt that she is deliberately provocative in her choice of Australia as one of these. Drabble notes in the novel that Australia was the site of a number of penal colonies to which England transported its criminals and she alludes to the fact that up to the early 1970s it practiced racial discrimination in its immigration policies (261); yet it comes out looking better than England in the opportunities it now offers to young men like Will Paine for whom there are no opportunities in England. It may be less surprising to "English" readers that Canada, and particularly Toronto, is Drabble's second choice. We are told that David

did not find Toronto alien. It allowed for him, as it allowed for the many .... Toronto had received over the decades Vikings and Vietnamese, Guelphs and Ghibellines, Italians and Indians, and had made them all welcome. Toronto was a young city, it had no age, no middle ages. It had made its own contracts. How fortunate, to start late in history, without the baggage of Britain. (204)

It may be that in her enthusiasm for its cultural diversity Drabble overlooks the fact that Toronto was settled in part by United Empire Loyalists who brought some of that baggage with them, or it may be that she admires Toronto because she thinks it is a place wherein "British" culture has been modified to the point where it can co-exist within a diversity of cultures. Writers like Dionne Brand and Marlene Nourbese Philip, both born in Trinidad but living in Canada, would disagree. Unlike David D'Anger (through whom Drabble expresses a stereotypical view of Toronto as welcoming of immigrants), they have found the dominant culture in Toronto to be "alien," and they have written about the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism that they and other immigrants have experienced in Canada (See Morrell).

The point, however, is that, whatever their faults and their limitations (and Drabble is clearly aware of those of Guyana, Australia and Singapore), these former British colonies appear to her to be active and changing. By contrast, when she looks back at Britain, Drabble sees a country controlled by people who seem to be so fearful of the future that they want to retreat into its past. It may be that what most bothers Drabble about contemporary Britain is its failure to take advantage of the opportunity offered by its influx of migrants and refugees which, in Kureishi's words, is the "opportunity for a revitalized and broader self-definition" ("London and Karachi" 286). It is a chance for a more inclusive and more complex sense of British identity than the predominant versions of "Englishness" permit. According to Gikandi,

One of the great ironies of the imperial century ... was its promulgation of cultural forms that brought together colonizer and colonized under the totality of the same. Empire robbed colonial subjects of their identities (that goes without saying), but it also conferred new forms of identity on native peoples, identities that stretched, albeit in uneven ways, all the way from British Columbia in Canada to the Malaysian Peninsula. (191)

What this means is that "Britishness" or "Englishness" might be envisioned, as Gikandi says it is in Kureishi, as "the sum total of the culture created in the colonial encounter," as a mixing or mingling of cultures, with a "cultural value that transcends the British Isles, a value that is encapsulated by the logic of the colonial and postcolonial experience" (203). In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble does her bit to help bring into being this conception of a multicultural identity. Exasperated by members of her generation for having failed to bring about any lasting changes in the dominant versions of "Englishness," she is yet hopeful that such changes will be brought about by the younger generation. Her desire is expressed in the hybrid moment at the end of the novel where she links realism and legend—a genre in which "all things are possible"—and embodies the "leap" into an uncertain but potentially vibrant future.

Ending with this leap, Drabble implies her faith in the future of a hybridized multi-ethnic, multicultural Britain. It is a faith that the Leavises did not share. Among the things that Mrs. Leavis considered to be a threat to her "poor" Britain and to "Englishness" at the time of her Cheltenham lecture (1980) was the presence of "unassimilated aliens" in England. This, together with urbanization, feminism and trade unionism, she saw as signs that the cultural cohesion, stability and order which she attributed to "[t]he England that bore the classical English novel" was on the verge of disappearing "forever," and she called on novelists in Britain to "reclaim their heritage as English novelists" and go about the business of defusing the tensions and disarming the threats (325). Drabble *has* reclaimed that heritage but she has *also* reclaimed that other heritage of "English" dissent which, I believe, prevents her from accepting as "fair" any of the revisions of "Englishness" that she and others of her generation (reflected in her characters) have been able to negotiate.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Leavis includes Jane Austen also but refers the reader to Q. D. Leavis's essay on her.

<sup>2</sup> Drabble's description of Kate's copy in *The Middle Ground* 37.

<sup>3</sup> Drabble's description of Emma in *The Garrick Year* (Interview with Hardin 281).

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Sloper claimed to be acting in her best interests when he threatened to disinherit his daughter Catherine if she married Maurice. Sloper knew that Maurice would jilt Catherine without the fortune.

<sup>5</sup> In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys creates an alternative story for the first Mrs. Rochester.

<sup>6</sup> These points are made also by Richard Hoggart in Chapter 10 of *The Uses of Literacy* entitled "Unbent Springs: A Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious" 239-49. Raymond Williams also makes the point about the young person from the lower-middle-class or working-class family feeling alienated from both the class he or she has entered by virtue of education and the class from which he or she started (*The Country and the City* 203).

<sup>7</sup> This is the argument of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the English pastoral and the picaresque see Drabble, *A Writer's Britain* 47-145.

<sup>9</sup> See also John Barrell's *English Literature in History 1730-1780: An Equal Wide Survey*, particularly Chapter I: "An Unerring Gaze: The Prospect of Society in the poetry of James Thompson and John Dyer," 51-109 for a discussion of this perspective.



<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the way these contrasting images of Britain are used to sustain the ideology of "Englishness," see Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*.

<sup>11</sup> In this instance, I am distinguishing Britain (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland which includes also Wales and Scotland) from England.

<sup>12</sup> On the inclusiveness and fluidity of Kate's family see also Wyatt 194.

<sup>13</sup> Wojcik-Andrews contains a good brief discussion of Drabble's inclusion of "underprivileged points of view" in this novel (*MD's Female Bildungsroman* 188-202).

<sup>14</sup> See Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

<sup>15</sup> This is a point about "Englishness" made also by Gikandi in *Maps of Englishness* 109-10.

<sup>16</sup> The accountant's remark on the native woman's "distaste for ... work" repeats the "negative stereotype" of black people as "idle" and inferior to white people which Gikandi discusses in *Maps of Englishness* 62.

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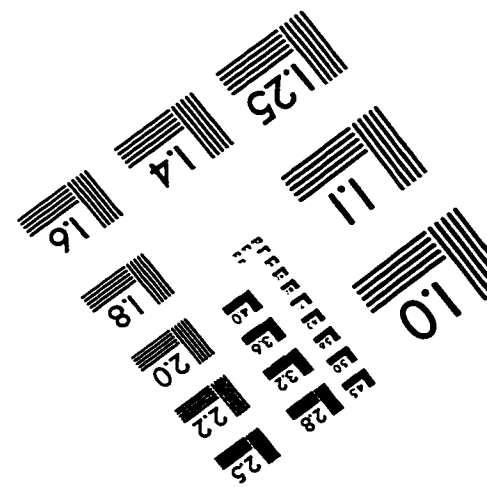
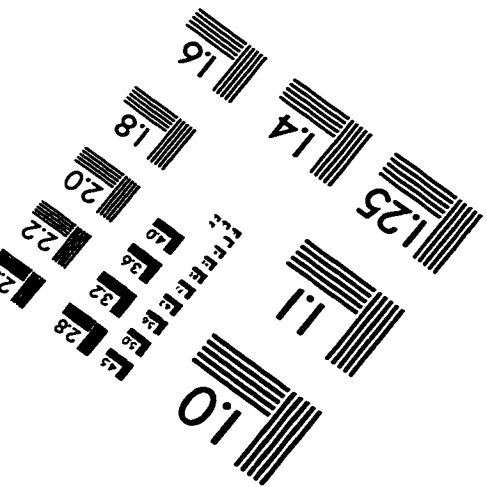
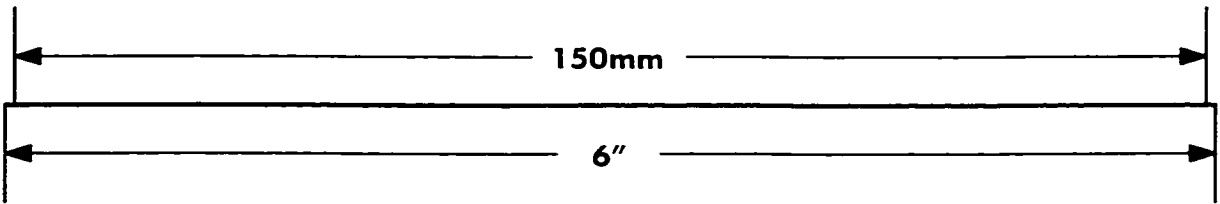
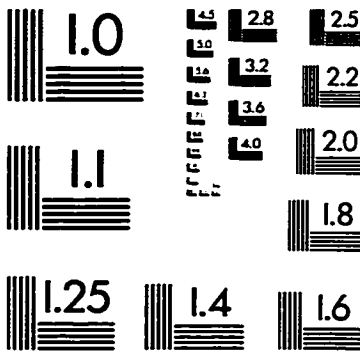
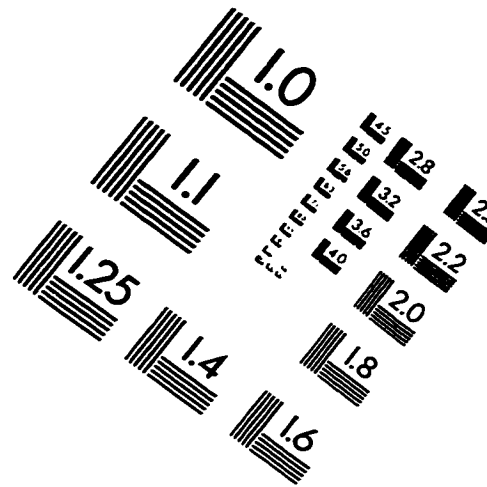
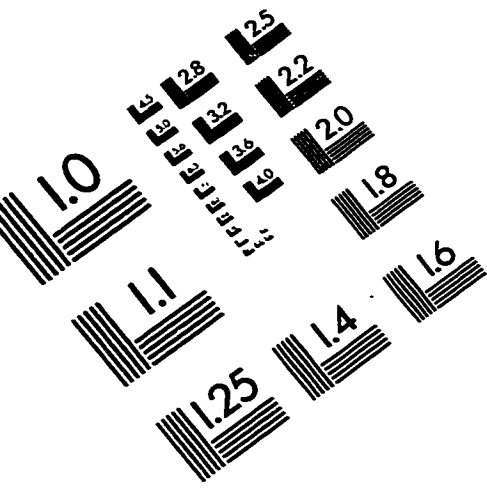
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