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English

A Blueprint for Women's Fulfilment

A Reading of Three Novels
in the Early Fiction of Margaret Drabble

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Introduction

In the modern literary tradition, starting in the 1950s, there is a clear break with earlier traditions to hush up certain aspects of women's lives and experiences. In modern literature however, and especially after the Women's Movement got under way in the 1960s, it was, and is, permissible to write about every aspect of a woman's life. Experiences of childbearing and the rearing of children as well as career and relationships are explored by women writers – the experiences and dilemmas that many women face today. We wallow, and are allowed to, in all the gory details of pregnancy, birth, nursing, and sex.

Margaret Drabble started writing in this period alongside other distinguished women writers, such as Doris Lessing, Edna O'Brien, Iris Murdoch and A.S. Byatt. Drabble depicts the conditions of modern England and specifically the conditions for women. Her novels are a fictional history of women's lives; they form a chronology that moves from young women and young mothers in their early twenties to mature, successful and worldly women in their fifties. Drabble is also regarded as the "novelist of maternity" by many critics to indicate one of the most important themes of her novels.

Drabble's writing in the 1960s and 1970s takes up themes that explore the complexities of the lives of modern educated women, such as motherhood, loneliness, longing, love, career, and pleasure, themes that are still topical today. The three novels discussed in this essay all show women who break away from the traditional role for women in society and how, by focussing on her heroine's problems, Drabble shows how women can adapt in a society that is changing. Both with regards to the age of her protagonists and the stages in life they pass through there is a clear concurrence with Drabble's own life, as her heroines progress through life, somewhat in the tradition of the Bildungsroman, at the same pace as the authoress herself.

Margaret Drabble is not an ardent feminist or a writer of experimental novels. In many ways she continues the Victorian tradition in her style of writing and her emphasis on the every day details of her heroines' lives. These details, for example the maternal experiences of Rosamund Stacey in *The Millstone* of breastfeeding and of holding a baby in one's arms or Jane Gray in the throes of her first orgasm, give voice to the female experience, and provide her novels with a very obvious sense of reality. Although written forty years ago, Drabble's themes and solutions to her protagonists' problems very much belong to modern society. Women today still juggle the selfsame

questions posed by Drabble's protagonists: How to combine motherhood and career; how to keep your independence in the interaction with a significant other?

In several interviews Drabble explains that each novel can be seen as an exploration or a journey where, as she describes to Diana Cooper-Clark, she is "trying to find out where we are going" (22). In another article, quoted in Joanne V. Creighton's *Margaret Drabble*, Drabble writes: "We live in an unchartered world . . . there are whole new patterns to create" (32). What this pattern is, however, is not always evident, that is for the reader to find out.

This essay will argue that Margaret Drabble has developed such a pattern, that there is a blueprint for fulfilment in the life of the modern independent woman to be found in her early work. Three of Drabble's novels will be examined, moving from *The Millstone* (1965) and *The Waterfall* (1967), with their descriptions of two young heroines' pregnancies and lives with infant children, on to the more mature main character of *The Realms of Gold* (1975). These three books form a chronology, both in regard to when they were written and, more importantly, to the different stages of a woman's life that they represent. This will make it possible to see how Drabble perceives the demands of society and different relationships influencing a woman's actions, her search for identity, and the direction and fulfilment of her life. The pattern will be traced through three themes which are made visible in the novels in varying degrees. These are single motherhood and the role of the family, missing husbands and sexual fulfilment, and career and social interaction.

The method is an analysis of the texts where the selected novels form the basis and structure of the essay. The secondary sources are used in direct connection with the novels and have been chosen for their usefulness as being in agreement with or opposed to the argument. The authors of the secondary sources consist of critics, academic scholars, reviewers and interviewers, all with different points of view, but all interested in Drabble's work. Among them are feminists like Elaine Showalter and Ellen Cronan Rose, but also more neutral observers as Susanna Roxman and Joanne V. Creighton. Ian Wojcik-Andrews, Susan Currier and Margaret Morganroth Gullette describe her work as being in the tradition of just the Bildungsroman whereas D. J. Taylor and Anthea Zeman have looked on the novel from a social perspective, Taylor concentrating on class issues and privileges and Zeman providing insights into the novelist's work as statements of the period of time in which they were written and their function as guide-books for women.

Single Motherhood in *The Millstone*

This chapter will focus on the first novel in the chronology of three, *The Millstone.* This novel was written in the early 1960s, and published in 1965. Its main focus is on the theme of single motherhood, a social phenomenon still viewed as stigmatising at this time. Of the other two themes, career and social interaction is also of significance for the argument, whereas missing husbands and sexual fulfilment is least important because of the protagonist's lack of interest in intimate relationships. In novels from this period, Taylor explains, "the elevation of the very young girl, in her teens or early 20s, into a symbol of social change" comes about (248). Yoshiko Enomoto sees these fictional girls participating "in the formation of a new gender identity" (117). The heroine of *The Millstone*, Rosamund Stacey, is such a girl.

The new female identity that Drabble forms for Rosamund in the guise of an educated, single mother from the middle-classes goes against the social mores of the mid-1960s. Rosamund's motherhood is not planned. At the beginning of the novel she is still a virgin, a state she herself feels is unusual in her social circle of writers and other literary people. She has tried to hide the fact of her virginity because it felt like a "scarlet letter embroidered on [her] bosom" (*The Millstone* 18). To be known as a virgin would be like wearing the mark of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, but, Roxman confirms that "the new kind of outrage is diametrically opposed to the old: abstinence from sex, not any longer sex itself, is unacceptable in modern society" (23). One night Rosamund takes an acquaintance, George, home and has her first sexual experience. She ends up pregnant and Drabble will show how Rosamund comes to terms with this unwanted pregnancy and an illegitimate baby.

Rosamund's initial reaction when she realises she is pregnant is shock. She then proceeds to try to abort the baby, but her attempts do not seem whole-hearted. After one such attempt she concludes that having a baby would be a just punishment for being a woman: ". . . it would serve me right, I thought, for having been born a woman in the first place. I couldn't pretend I wasn't a woman, could I, however much I might try from day to day to avoid the issue? I might as well pay, mightn't I, if other people had to pay?" (*The Millstone* 16). Rosamund has been imbued by her feminist mother with the sense of being equal. As the quotation above shows, Rosamund now realises that there is a limit to equality, a biological difference that she cannot change. She says: "I was trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life, and I was going to have to learn how to live inside it" (58). Creighton points out that "'to be equal' seems to her

mind to necessitate a denial of her femaleness as if it were a debility to be overcome" (52). Drabble's own view is a confirmation of female biology. Lynn Veach Sadler stresses that Drabble "wanted to communicate the experience of childbirth, the importance of a child, the feelings one has for it, and the changes it brings to one's life" (26). Motherhood, single or otherwise, is not necessarily a biological or social trap, "a millstone", but a milestone, because even if her initial reaction is one of shock and a feeling of punishment, Rosamund's pregnancy and motherhood will prove beneficial to her on a personal plane.

Drabble makes clear that pregnancy and becoming a mother can make a woman more mature and self-aware. She demonstrates that these two states are bonds that connect women, and opens the heart to the surrounding world. It is a meaningful and fulfilling experience. Rosamund learns this too as she takes a few steps out of her selfish shell and, as Wojcik-Andrews believes, is "physically and psychologically educated through her unwanted pregnancy" (7). Rosamund tells us that, "I had always felt for others in theory and pitied the blows of fate and circumstance under which they suffered; but now, myself no longer free, myself suffering, I may say that I felt it in my heart" (*The Millstone* 68). She believes that pregnancy and motherhood must have meaning and will reveal a new scheme to her, different from the one of her earlier life.

Part of that scheme is love. Rosamund finds love. She says, "Love, I suppose one might call it, and the first of my life", when she first holds her daughter in her arms (102). The baby, Octavia, is someone to love and to receive undemanding love from. Rose is suspicious of the pureness of Rosamund's feelings and instead interprets Rosamund's love as a selfish, self-centered love, where Octavia is seen as an extension of Rosamund herself (18). It is true that Rosamund is so taken with this feeling that she wants to keep it to herself. However, it is easier to agree with Showalter's explanation that this "interaction between mother and child, the love that comes unbidden like the operations of grace, is for Drabble the most instructive and surprising human relationship" (306). Motherhood develops a sense of responsibility. Drabble stresses that a mother can no longer be entirely selfish but must see to the needs of another person wholly dependent on her.

Drabble imparts the importance of women to be independent. It is evident, however, that the independence and emancipation Rosamund confesses to might not be true independence but loneliness. Rosamund reveals how few real friends she has and the estrangement from her parents and siblings when she finds out she is pregnant, concluding that "there was nobody to tell, nobody to ask" (7). Rosamund's family is not

very important to her. The family members seem to prefer as little contact with each other as possible. Drabble, however, means to show how the conditions and values that have been part of one's past and one's upbringing are crucial for determining one's present personality. Rosamund has been brought up to believe in the importance of self-sufficiency, which in her case has been turned into a solipsistic lifestyle. She now fears that her independence is threatened by her baby, because she "did not see how I was going to get by on my own" (39). She might have added how she was going to get by on her own **anymore**. Octavia's heart condition and Rosamund's dread for her and struggle with the hospital staff to be able to see Octavia after her surgery reveals a new level of independence and strength in Rosamund. Carol Seiler-Franklin confirms this view of a new independence: "It is only now that she begins to stand on her own two feet and become truly independent. At last she must give up her diffident attitude and fight for her rights" (113).

Rosamund's reasons for not seeking marriage to Roger or George and establishing a family of her own are also found in her selfishness and her urge for independence. In answer to George's statement that she never seemed to want a husband, Rosamund replies, "'No . . . perhaps I never did'" (171). Rosamund's views of marriage come from the examples of her siblings' marriages. From her point of view they are both disappointing and have proved to be mistakes for both her brother and her sister. Drabble's views coincide with that of her heroine. She says in an interview with Nancy S. Hardin in 1973: "I don't know why one gets married" (277). At this time Drabble was separated from her husband whom she had married fresh out of university. They divorced in 1975.

The second most significant theme in *The Millstone* is that of career and social interaction. That her sister should be willing to renounce her education and instead marry and have three children is incomprehensible to Rosamund. Drabble emphasises the importance of a career for women and that it need not be hampered by pregnancy and motherhood. It is true that the one thing of which Rosamund has been sure throughout this period in her life is her work and her future career. Indeed, it has not suffered through her pregnancy, on the contrary she "was working extremely well at this time and with great concentration and clarity" (*The Millstone* 68). She has never imagined her career to be compromised. Nonetheless, at first she seeks to hide her pregnancy from her pupils, afraid of their reactions, but she notices that most people accept her approaching motherhood as long as she achieves what is expected of her. She has confidence in herself as a professional and says: ". . . I simply did not believe that

the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of difference to my career" (112). We find that her confidence in this part of her life is well placed. At the end of the novel Rosamund's thesis is about to be published and has been well received in the right circles. She has also secured a job at a good university, and she is working independently on a book about Cowley and on a chapter in a survey of poetry. She will, she concludes, "in the near future be Dr Rosamund Stacey, a form of address which would go a long way towards obviating the anomaly of Octavia's existence" (155).

In Rosamund, Drabble has created an ambitious, goal-oriented young woman who strives for independence and equality. If she finds herself limited by her female biology, she certainly is assured of her place in the academic world, and she finds satisfaction in the quality of her work. Taylor "wants to admire Rosamund Stacey in her struggle for independence and self-fulfilment, but her dreariness as a person makes this very difficult", he thinks (166). Rose, on the other hand, disagrees with the interpretation of most critics who "believe that Rosamund Stacey has achieved that desirable feminist synthesis . . . that by remaining single she has established her independence, while through her motherhood she has affirmed both her flesh and her bonds with humanity" (21). Rose does not object to Rosamund's person like Taylor, but resents that Drabble did not make her a feminist heroine, defining herself in relation to non-patriarchal values and that Rosamund instead is successful because she thinks like a man. It is hard to agree with both these views. Why not admire Rosamund? Yes, she is still selfish and a go-ahead; but why should this not be admirable? Because she has found a strategy that works, even if that strategy is being a woman behaving like a man? It depends, supposedly, on your definition of independence. Rosamund has at least found an independent career, acceptable and admirable to society.

Drabble illustrates society's response to Rosamund's pregnancy and decision to keep her baby in the reactions of her friends, family, doctors and hospital staff. Marriage is the accepted state in which a baby should be born. The doctor Rosamund first sees shakes his head when she tells him she is not married, but, she suspects, "more in sorrow than in anger" (38). Later, in the hospital clinic we see that it is unusual and might be a stigma to be an unmarried mother as Rosamund is called **Mrs** Stacey as a courtesy. After having given birth, however, it is surprising to find out that a sign bearing a big "U" is attached to Rosamund's bed, singling her out as Unmarried. When Rosamund tells her boyfriends that she is pregnant, Roger believes that she is brave and offers her marriage, which Rosamund declines. If marriage is not an option then abortion, still not legal at this time, or adoption are the alternatives. Rosamund's other

boyfriend, Joe, thinks she must be out of her mind to keep the baby and "forbids" her to have it because it will destroy her life, and offers her money for an abortion. Learning that it is too late for that, he concludes that "they won't let you keep it", they being interpreted as society's representatives (41). Rosamund's attempt to abort her baby proved even more controversial than Drabble's subject matter of a single mother. Drabble explains in an article in *The New York Times* that "when my novel *The Millstone* . . . was broadcast on 'Woman's Hour' in the 1960s, I had to broadcast a defense of myself for allowing my heroine even to contemplate an abortion" (3).

Rosamund's sister Beatrice's response to the news that her sister is having an illegitimate baby is the response that best shows how these situations were handled by families in their social class at the time. Beatrice is appalled and feels sorry for her sister. She believes it a terrible mistake to keep the baby and urges her sister to have it adopted, both for her own sake, for the couple who wants a child, and for the baby's sake, which then would not be stigmatised by the mark of illegitimacy. Beatrice is the first person to think of the consequences for the baby and reminds Rosamund that "a baby isn't just something you can have just because you feel you ought" (78). The baby and Rosamund, Beatrice says, would suffer from the handicap that illegitimacy would entail in the kind of society that exists. Rosamund has sought approval and sympathy from her sister, but becomes annoyed by the content of this letter and even more determined to keep the baby. It is clear that in the end, however, she is aware of society's likely judgement herself. "Rosamund knows," claims Enomoto, "that a society governed by middle-class values does not embrace those who refuse to conform, and she expects to live 'in the dark and the cold in the years to come' . . . raising a child born outside the socially accepted institution of marriage" (119).

It is not for everybody to be able to make the same choices as Rosamund, Drabble implies. Rosamund does not have to pay as heavily as her sister fears for her unwanted pregnancy or later as a single mother. Her social position simplifies her contacts with the health service and society in general. Rosamund admits this. On the night she is taken by the ambulance to the hospital for her delivery she says: "I was glad too to be going from so good an address. I felt that by it alone I had bought a little deference . . ." (*The Millstone* 96). It is her privileged social position that allows her to keep Octavia in a society that otherwise viewed unmarried mothers with suspicion. Rosamund admits: "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.

I would not recommend my course of action to anyone with a shade less advantage in the world than myself" (111-12).

Roxman also emphasises Rosamund's privileged status and concludes that "Rosamund does what a man would have done, had he suddenly been faced with parenthood. This means that she is privileged also as a woman in refusing the baby to be an obstacle – a millstone – but rather a pleasure . . ." (69). However, Rosamund's privilege comes above all from her social class and not from her gender. Taylor confirms that "Rosamund survives the potential embarrassment and humiliations of single parenthood merely by virtue of her social position" (165). An added advantage of this status is that Rosamund is able to earn her own living.

The last of the three themes in this study, that of sexual fulfilment and missing husbands, is the least important to Rosamund. However, it is significant for Drabble's blueprint, because either consciously or unconsciously, Rosamund chooses to reject both sex and a more lasting relationship with a man. In the novel's first few pages Rosamund tells us that she has never really loved a man and certainly not in the flesh. "I did not know," she says, "that a pattern forms before we are aware of it, and that what we think we make becomes a rigid prison making us . . . . When Hamish and I loved each other for a whole year without making love, I did not realise that I had set the mould of my whole life" (*The Millstone* 7). Rosamund does not grasp the concept of sexual fulfilment, never having experienced the kind of love that can be shared between a woman and a man. Rose is in agreement with this view: "What Rosamund is actually rejecting is one of the consequences of sex, intimate involvement with another human being. It is love she is rejecting, not sex . . ." (15). However, Rosamund is not to remain a virgin, because Taylor determines, "[no] Drabble heroine of the 1960s manages to retain her virginity" (229-30). So Rosamund has sex for the first time with George, mostly in order not to offend him. She is afraid he will think she does not like him if she says no. It is not a very satisfying experience for either of them. They part company and Rosamund waits for George to call her but he does not. Neither does Rosamund contact George, another pattern she establishes during her pregnancy and after the baby is born.

Her reason for the rejection of sex and intimacy is above all that she is afraid that it would encroach on her independence. It might be that Rosamund recognises in George the kind of independence she craves and believes that in making him her partner she must give up that independence and, like her sister, take up the traditional role of wife, having to give up her career and to share Octavia. Independence in *The Millstone* "is double-edged – a virtue but an impediment because it separates people", confirms

Sadler (26). There is a distinct tension between Rosamund and George. George seems genuinely interested in Rosamund and has been keeping up with her rather specialised work and Rosamund often thinks about George and how he would make her feel less lonely. However, neither of them makes a move towards the other and Rosamund has the sense that she has spared him both guilt and sorrow in not telling him about his fatherhood. Valerie Grosvenor Myer states that Drabble "considers that Rosamund treats George badly" and that "'George would have been delighted to have both her and the child, had she given him the smallest sign of wanting him'" (42). This is rather dubious, however, because George, as we have seen, does not seem to be interested in being in touch with Rosamund after their one sexual encounter. "George's behaviour is as peculiar as Rosamund's", writes Myer and one has to agree (47). True to her pattern Rosamund does not see how she could incorporate George in the life she envisions for herself. Rosamund is first and foremost a career woman and it is obvious that both Rosamund and Margaret Drabble cannot see how a woman could combine an independent career with marriage. We leave Rosamund, single mother with an only child, a good job, independent, emancipated, but alone, an example from Drabble's early fiction that, as Myer emphasises, was "about just that, young academically educated women facing the choice between career and marriage, implying the impossibility of combining the two" (14). The following conversation between Rosamund and George confirms this opinion: "'You can't have everything,' said George. 'No, indeed,' I said. 'And I have more than most people, I admit.'" (*The Millstone* 171).

The Millstone is a step in Drabble's attempt to knit a new pattern for women's lives. In her personal, and thus selfish, choice to raise Octavia alone, refusing to share her love or divide it with anyone, Rosamund recognises that "it was no longer in me to feel for anyone what I felt for my child" (172). Sadler calls Rosamund "a study of character privileged beyond most of us, yet for whom life is a puzzle" (34), bringing to mind the image of Rosamund's jigsaw puzzle and her dream of "small blue irregular shapes composing the cloak of the Virgin Mary" (91). In most renderings of Mary and the baby Jesus there are only the two in the picture and a conspicuously absent Joseph. Joan S. Korenman affirms that motherhood brings Rosamund "the greatest pleasure [she] has ever known; however, it also limits [her] possibilities and isolates [her] in a world that includes only mother and child" (62). In conclusion, motherhood and career are evident in Drabble's blueprint for the independent woman in this novel, but not necessarily a

husband or a family. In the next chapter there is also a missing male, but in the shape of a husband who has left his wife and children for another woman, leaving the door open for the lover.

Sexual Love as Salvation in *The Waterfall*

Jane Gray, the heroine of *The Waterfall*, in many ways resembles Rosamund Stacey. They are both academically educated young women and mothers, sharing the bewilderment of their lives after university and struggling to find balance and meaning. Rosamund found joy and love solely in motherhood, but, writes Korenman "by the time she wrote *The Waterfall*, Drabble apparently felt dissatisfied with [this] solution" (63). Jane, too, finds love and independence, but through sexual and romantic intimacy with a man, a man who is not her husband, because Jane, unlike Rosamund, is married. Her husband Malcolm, however, has left her to live with another woman after beating Jane up, two months before their second child is born and the novel starts with Jane alone in her bedroom about to give birth.

Yet the main focus of the novel is not on Jane coping as a single mother but on her love affair and it was Drabble's intention, she confesses to Hardin, to make "the passions of Jane and James . . . an example of sublime, romantic passion" (292). Drabble calls the novel "the most female of my books", because of the emphasis on Jane's experiences of love and sexual awakening (Rose 49). Thus this chapter, like the novel, is dominated by the theme of sexual fulfilment and love. The other two themes, single motherhood and family and career and social interaction will therefore be treated very cursorily in this chapter and will be incorporated in the rest of the analysis. However, they will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

Love, as for Rosamund, has been absent in Jane's life. She has never felt at home in her family and has been trying to hide or conceal her true nature, feeling it would not be accepted. There is a reluctance in this heroine, as well, to connect with her family. Like Rosamund, she reflects on her past as a means to understand where and who she is in the present, but in the present she avoids all contact. However, she is forced to accept help when the baby is born, from her cousin Lucy and her husband, and from her mother who takes care of the older child, Laurie.

With Jane, Drabble stresses the difficulty for the young educated woman to manage life after university. Indeed, affirms Rosalind Miles, "in the free-floating yet direction-seeking 1960s, Margaret Drabble struck an important sexual nerve of the time when she became the first English woman to give voice to the delusive promise of the freedom and equality of university life followed by the cold douche of matrimony and child-bearing" (161). In an interview for *The Oklahoma Review*, Drabble confirms that "I was really puzzled by what was happening between being a student and being an adult

person" (1). After university and before marriage, Drabble gives Jane a job and points out that she "had lived in a flat full of girls, whose chat about sex and food and clothes and books had given [her] an illusion of life and company" (*The Waterfall* 99). This period, described by Jane as an illusion and by Drabble as the time before you became an adult, was at this time only seen as an interlude before entering into marriage. Seiler-Franklin confirms that Drabble's writing "reflects the attitude of a society which only accepts women's working for money as a temporary occupation before marrying, for a woman's main duty is to look after her husband and produce his children" (84). But who is to say that Jane's life before marriage was not as real, or more so, than her married life with Malcolm?

It is a bleak picture Drabble draws in her description of Jane's wedding and the reasons for entering into married life. The dreariness serves as a contrast to Jane's later change. The wedding is described in the imagery of a sacrifice where "one might well lay one's head upon the block or jump from a high window" (98). We can understand from Jane's words that her marriage was not a happy one, like most first marriages in Drabble's novels. Jane compares being married to being like the living dead and her married life is described as a cold, barren landscape. It is a loveless marriage, in which sex is painful and frightening. She lives "in an ice age of inactivity" (7), silt forming on the windows, dust thickening on the furniture. After the separation from her husband Jane is left alone to cope with the home and the children. She refuses any further contact with Malcolm who himself, much to Jane's chagrin, makes no effort even to see his children but seems strangely indifferent to his family. Jane will not let Lucy call him after the baby is born, "and Malcolm, the missing husband, dropped from between them into nothing . . ." (12). She has no job herself but lives off Malcolm, who sends her money. She is a shadow of herself, afraid to go outside and unable to cope with reality. This fear of going out was not unusual for the contemporary middle-class wife, writes Zeman, who after "their years of looking after little children at home . . . lose their nerve" (148). They are afraid of going back to a work place, but it must be done and "the woman's novel, being the guide-book that it is, has passed on the message" (149). Jane needs to wake from her dream-like state.

Drabble has made a pattern visible in *The Waterfall.* Through the use of narrative technique and imagery, she will show how Jane finds her way to an independent life. For, like Rosamund and other Drabblean protagonists, Jane's intellect is divided from her heart and her body. It is in contrast with caring for her first child that Jane "felt split between the anxious intelligent woman and the healthy and efficient mother – or

perhaps less split than divided" (*The Waterfall* 103-04). This split in Jane is made obvious through Drabble's style of writing. There are two narrators: third-person Jane and first-person Jane, making the narrative itself split and divided. "She has", writes Rose, "divided herself into Jane, the woman (whose experience is liquid and formless), and Jane Gray, the artist (who gives form, order, and shapeliness to that experience)" (61).

Love, in the shape of her cousin's husband James, will save Jane from this division and her inertia. In retrospect Jane says that "in my second childbirth, as I bore Bianca, I think I could feel . . . that I was coming together again, that I could no longer support the division, that my flesh and mind must meet or die" (*The Waterfall* 104). Jane starts to heal: "It was as though all the waiting and the solitude had resolved themselves into some more hopeful expectation, though of what she did not know. Deliverance seemed at hand . . . . This close heat would surely generate its own salvation" (10). Love can change a person, is Drabble's message in *The Waterfall*; love can create "new courses", "new ways", and "new landscapes" (229). Jane finds sexual fulfilment and it sets her body, heart and mind free. Gullette states that for Drabble's heroines "discovering their own sexuality (as opposed to culture's female body) ranks as one of the best self-taught lessons in their adult education" (99). James completes Jane's transformation. He is her salvation. Their love affair and their passion will water her inner landscape just as she waters her dry and dying plant, and it will come alive again. Jane discovers what it is like to be loved and cherished, and to love someone back: "that sequence of discovery and recognition that I would call love" (*The Waterfall* 46).

Their affair is at first very physical. In contrast with her dry married life the imagery of love is one of water and other liquids. Drabble imbues Jane's change with this imagery in most poetic and romantic language. James' confession of his love for Jane is likened to a "willing blind suicidal dive into . . . deep waters" (36), and her first orgasm is described as if she is falling down a waterfall:

> . . . slowly, for the first time ever, just as she thought she must die without him forever, she started to fall, painfully, anguished, but falling at last, falling, coming towards him, meeting him at last, down there in his arms . . . down there at last in the water, not high in her lonely place . . . . (150)

Jane loves James at first to the exclusion of everything else. Their love is "as the miraged oasis, shivering on the dusty horizon in all the glamour of hallucination: blue water, green fronds and foliage breaking from the dry earth" (208). It is an image of a paradise with "miles of verdure, rivers, fishes, colonial birds, miles with no sign of

ending, and, perhaps, beyond them all, no ending but the illimitable, circular, inexhaustible sea" (209).

Creighton questions the elaborate, poetic language in the description of something that could be viewed as merely trivial and wonders if we should view Jane's love as "an initiation into adult sexuality and full achieved self-hood" or "are we suspicious about all this oceanic and birth imagery", that could be seen as evidence of a self-centred world view (60)? Elizabeth Fox-Genovese also warns against "the female voice (a particular, not universal female voice) that organises experience in inflexible, if deceptively confidential patterns" (241). Trying to illustrate a specific experience, it seems that Drabble pays a price for showing that sexual love can act as a saving grace and she has been forced to acknowledge that she feels guilty about having written a book that describes "an experience that is not wholly universal" (Hardin 292). Many readers find no guidance in *The Waterfall*, she admits, because they do not believe it possible "that one can be saved from fairly pathological conditions by loving a man" (293). It is difficult to fully agree with those who criticise Drabble's original, explicit intent to write a novel about romantic love. From some perspectives an extra-marital love affair can, of course, be seen as trivial, but does it matter whether this is a personal or universal experience? Surely love as a theme is universal while the experience of love for each human being is wholly personal? It must be remembered that Drabble has made Jane a poet and an authoress, like herself, re-writing a period in time that has been significant and life-changing for her, so naturally her use of imagery would be poetic, but with a serious intent. Drabble here uses the word "loving" and thus proves that the sexual aspects of Jane's and James' affair deepen into real love. Drabble makes this evident in the narrative by having Jane cease to use the imagery of water. Instead she replaces it by a visit to a real waterfall when Jane and James visit Goredale Scar, in the Pennines. Jane elaborates that "it is real . . . it exists. It is an example of the sublime", just as Drabble wanted to write this novel as an example of a sublime love affair (*The Waterfall* 236).

Furthermore, Drabble indicates the importance for women not only to react, but to act themselves when she makes James do more for Jane than release her sexuality. He also brings her out into the world again, taking her and the children for outings in his car, releasing her from the fear of strain and unfamiliar places that she has been experiencing since her first pregnancy. When James is away on a holiday with his own family, Jane can at last summon the courage to take the children out alone to the nursery group and to the Zoo. "I was saved", she says, "I was released from my enclosure . . ."

(161). Jane and James also set out for Norway together, but they only reach northern England when a car accident puts a stop to their holiday. Jane and the children are unhurt but James is seriously injured and lies unconscious for weeks. Drabble here makes the accident, like Rosamund's accidental pregnancy, serve Jane as the final catalyst for change, a positive change because it forces her back into the surrounding society and later to the world of work which she has been excluded from for many years. Jane has to take control of the situation, mainly because of the children who force her to take action. She decides to stay in the northern town to await James' recovery or death. Their situations are now reversed. Jane becomes the saviour as she fights for her lover's life. "I saw him revive, slowly", she says, "as he must have felt me revive for him at the beginning of the year: I felt so strong watching him, I could measure my own change" (223). "Love has to cost something", acknowledges Zeman, "and one of its prices is change" (173).

Jane thanks James for her new decisiveness and independence, because after his recovery he returns to his wife and rehabilitation while Jane returns home and starts clearing up her house and her past. Roxman explains that this is regarded by feminists as "a benign result of her love affair" (38). Like Rosamund, Jane is privileged to have the means, socially, academically and financially, at her disposal to pursue a career and at the end of the novel she has found this independency. She embarks on a career in publishing and her poetry is issued. In order to be able to work she engages an au pair girl to mind the children. Although Malcolm first sues for divorce, it comes to nothing. They remain married, but separated, with Jane raising the children single-handed. Jane still pursues her love affair with James, who stays married to Lucy. "I was hoping", writes Jane, "that in the end I would manage to find some kind of unity. I seem to be no nearer to it" (207). She is wrong. We can see how she has come together, been made more complete, found her pattern, her "I". This is clearly shown by Drabble's use of the narrative voices, which have now become integrated in the first person. Jane no longer feels compelled to talk about herself from a distance in the third person. The woman who saw herself as a romantic fairy tale princess has become a real woman and she and her love have survived the step into reality.

Drabble has portrayed Jane Gray as a winner, like Rosamund Stacey. Their personal and selfish choices to love, a child on the one hand and a man on the other, have been beneficial to them both. Yet Jane has had to pay in guilt and in the knowledge that society does not approve of her solution. She does not condone her own actions and confesses that: "I was paralysed, I was numb with guilt. I did not think I could ever

endure it" (226). Still, both Malcolm and Lucy have their own extra-marital liaisons. As with Rosamund's illegitimate child in *The Millstone*, Drabble portrays a social taboo in the adulterous affair of Jane and James. The amoral aspect is made even worse by the fact that it is her cousin's husband, a cousin who she regards as a sister in all ways and has always admired. Drabble says in an interview with John Hannay that "there's something about the particularly violent passion that *The Waterfall* is about that cannot be accommodated socially" (145). The fault lies perhaps not in Jane and James and their spouses, but as Drabble seems to suggest, with the social construct of the institution of marriage. Currier agrees as she sees *The Waterfall* as a female alternative to the Bildungsroman: "In spite of the immoral (according to the old code) dimensions of this relationship, Jane finds in it a new world" (180). Fox-Genovese, on the other hand, disapproves of this generous interpretation of Jane's fulfilment believing that "the exclusive, accidental, personal, and even selfish quality of individual fulfillment underscores the limitation of Drabble's vision. Limitation not because happiness is wrong", she writes, "but because, by accepting the social context in which it can only be so fleetingly personal, Drabble consistently portrays it as occurring at others' expense" (237).

Despite the obvious immorality of the affair and the rather repulsive fact that it started so soon after Jane's delivery, there is a message of love, and the saving power of love, in *The Waterfall.* We can agree that it has been a selfish choice, but one that Jane could not deny herself; "there was nothing to be done about such beauty, except to try to keep it", Jane says (*The Waterfall* 45). Drabble has, stresses Zeman, aligned herself with other women writers who feel the need to "reiterate the importance of a climate of mutual acceptance in matters of love; [who] know that women's comfort requires that they should lead their sexual lives in an atmosphere of kindness, understanding, generosity . . . . Only in such a climate, is it possible to enjoy the fact . . . that Eros itself . . . is grounded on selfishness" (176-77). As in *The Millstone* there is no conclusive ending, which Jane finds odd and it is open for the reader to interpret. One is bound to answer her that of course there is no ending, life goes on. "Yes," Jane would answer, "perhaps the pattern is not completed" (232). It is not an ideal pattern according to the traditional way of thinking – a separated, single mother having a married lover – but Jane is as happy as she can be.

As indicated initially in this chapter, the emphasis has been on sexual love as a means of salvation and fulfilment. The other two themes have been given little space, because Jane herself did not stress them. "I omitted," says Jane, "I could not find a place

for them in my narrative" (47). This does not mean that Drabble has lost her active interest in these social issues. As in *The Millstone*, Drabble has managed to show that there is strength and love to be found in motherhood. In her isolation Jane finds that her only contact with the outer world was her son Laurie, as "he alone could reach her" (136). The responsibility and love of a mother towards her children are stronger perhaps than any love for a man. In the car crash Jane's first thought is for her children, not for James, and she admits that "when I thought, at first . . . that he had died and the children escaped, I was relieved: I would have wished him dead, poor love, to spare them" (208). Drabble's label as "the novelist of maternity" is still valid. Still, while Jane cares for her children, her love for them has not been the means of her fulfilment. Joan S. Korenman affirms that "while the earlier maternal love [in *The Millstone*] has been likened to religious grace, Jane uses religious terms to refer not to motherhood but to sexual fulfillment" (63).

Another prominent feature has been Drabble's obviously strong opinion about the bleakness of marriage. There is still a long way to go before the emergence in society of the marriage of equal partners, where both spouses work and share responsibility for the home. "It seems to me", agrees Enomoto, "that . . . Drabble discard[s] the institution of marriage and home, which have long been linked with gender roles, to present women as individuals" (124). Or is it the shortage of other possibilities for educated women that Drabble objects to? She seems to suggest that marriage stifles a woman's individuality and independent choices and is impossible to combine with a career. Remember how Rosamund could not comprehend her sister's choice of not using her education to pursue a career. Before her marriage Jane had a job and some poetry published, which is still read. During the period of separation from Malcolm and later when James is in hospital, she writes new poetry, but not really with the intention of publishing anything. However, as indicated before, as Jane takes charge of her life again, she also revives her artistic and professional ambitions. She has been privileged, affirms Roxman, with "emotional and erotic privileges" and the "privilege of personal liberation, as well as those of artistic talent and achievement, are put on a par with these" (84). This is why Drabble stresses the urgency of an independent career, both for a woman's self-image and, of course, for her independence.

If what was missing from Rosamund's life in *The Millstone* was a fulfilling, intimate relationship, in *The Waterfall* Drabble sets out to correct this. Another aspect is added to the plan – romantic or sexual love, the love of a significant other. However, the blueprint is not ideal, because it is difficult to perceive of fulfilment for women in

general, when the greater part of the scheme is made up of love based upon an extra-marital affair. There are also other aspects missing, which will be addressed by Drabble in the next novel to be studied in this essay.

Family, Friends, and Fulfilment in *The Realms of Gold*

In this last chapter, we meet Frances Wingate, the main character of *The Realms of Gold*. About ten years older than the two former heroines, Frances in her mid-thirties, and Drabble herself, have mastered many of the difficulties that faced Rosamund and Jane. Frances has been married, but is now divorced, a parallel to Drabble's own divorce in 1975, the same year as the publication of *The Realms of Gold*. She is a mother of four and she is established in her career as a successful archaeologist. If in *The Millstone* the focus was on single motherhood and the love of a mother for her child, and *The Waterfall* stressed sexual love, in *The Realms of Gold* all three themes are of equal significance. A new husband is gained, the importance of family is stressed and even if the heroine has a successful, fulfilling career, it is the way she interacts and connects socially that becomes important. This chapter will discuss all these themes starting with that of sexual fulfilment and missing husbands, continuing on to career and social interaction and finally to single motherhood and the role of the family.

The Millstone and *The Waterfall* both presented one protagonist. In *The Realms of Gold*, Frances is the heroine, but she shares the stage with several more characters, above all her younger cousin Janet Bird, who serves as a contrast to Frances and a reminder of what Frances' life could have been like without her privileges of education, money and social status. Other characters in this human network are her cousin David Ollerenshaw, her nephew Stephen, and her lover Karel, whose perspectives serve to oppose or support hers.

In *The Waterfall* Drabble emphasised the importance of sexual love and an intimate relationship with a man, whereas Rosamund in *The Millstone* feared intimacy. In *The Realms of Gold* the problems of Rosamund and Jane with sex are inflicted upon the secondary character, Janet Bird. She has become an expert in avoiding having sex with her husband. The experience is hateful and humiliating to her and she wonders, "Wasn't one meant to enjoy sex rather than grit one's teeth and bear it" (176). In contrast Drabble depicts Frances as a woman comfortable in her sexuality. Gullette declares that "with age, her protagonists have become kinder to themselves. They no longer see themselves as 'dangerous' women, in whom sexuality is likely to go out of control. Far from it. Having gained freedom to choose their love objects in a modern, male way, they eschew the next male step, promiscuity" (99). Having been divorced from her husband for many years Frances is not averse to casual sexual encounters. However, in the beginning and throughout most of the novel Frances misses her married lover Karel,

with whom she has broken after years of close relationship. Frances' break with Karel is due to the confusion she feels concerning marriage. Marriage, and what it entails, is in this novel presented as a social dilemma for women. This modern, independent woman is locked between the need for affirmation and the conventional myth that only by offering her marriage can Karel prove to her that he loves her, on the one hand, and on the other she has adopted more progressive ideas about the importance of her own independence and career and confirms that "that wasn't it, at all . . . she didn't much want to marry Karel. She was quite happy on her own" (*The Realms of Gold* 79).

In Frances' and Janet's reflections about marriage we once again find ample evidence that Drabble's dismal view of the institution of marriage that became obvious in *The Waterfall* is still valid. However, it grows clearer in *The Realms of Gold* that what Drabble objects to is perhaps not marriage itself, the union of two people, but the reasons why young people enter into marriage and especially the social trap it can become for the young woman. There is something wrong, Drabble insists, with a society that cannot offer young women alternatives, other possibilities. Janet wonders why it is proclaimed natural by doctors and vicars to "dread marriage, to feel ill and get cystitis when newly married" (132). Mary Jane Elkins explains that "Janet understands, as does Drabble, how society's authorities use the concept of the natural to oppress and confine women" (115). Janet, whose relationship with her bullying husband Mark is really horrible, did not love Mark when she married him and asks herself why on earth she agreed and concludes that "there was some conspiracy afoot, to make people believe that marriage was necessary and desirable" (*The Realms of Gold* 129). Frances, too, at twenty-one, had known it was a mistake to marry Anthony but gave in to his insistence that he loved her. Again, as in *The Waterfall*, marriage is described as a sacrifice: "there is some tribal insanity that comes over women, as they approach marriage: society offers pyrex dishes and silver tea spoons . . . as anaesthesia against self-sacrifice . . .the woman lays herself upon the altar, upon the couch, half numb" (130). One happy marriage appears in *The Realms of Gold*, that of solicitor Harold Barnard and his wife Mary. Frances, comfortable in their company, wonders how they have managed to stay so pleased with each other and concludes that it might be because there does not seem to be any children around, which "would bear out her own theory [and Drabble's?] that one could manage a man or some children, but not both at once; a conclusion markedly at odds, alas, with the arrangements both of nature and society" (314). Perhaps it was just luck, she muses.

The Realms of Gold establishes Drabble's idea of love as a saving grace. Love is "the last resort, the last deliverance" (27). Frances is lonely without Karel, with a heavy feeling in her chest, questioning why she had left him. She concludes that "she had been rather afraid of him. He had been something of a salvationist" and she was "rather afraid of being saved" (17). The contrast to Jane in *The Waterfall* is obvious, who accepts James' love without question, whereas Frances is reluctant to give up her independence. In the end Frances realises she must give love and Karel a chance and sends him a postcard telling him she loves him. It will be nine months before the postcard reaches Karel, due to a postal strike. Karel, upon receiving her message, leaves everything to go to her and they are reunited. "Love", says Karel, "was such a rare commodity, too rare to waste" (94).

With Frances and Karel, Drabble gives a picture of a more mature love, making clear that love is important for women at all ages. It is not without passion, because sex is still an important aspect of love, but it is love on more equal terms. Jane Gray, too, found sexual fulfilment but with a man who, we suspect, might not be her intellectual equal. Frances has found a match, both sexually and mentally, in Karel. They share a loving bond, accepting one another's shortcomings. With gentle comedy Drabble makes Frances maintain that "she was growing older, but Karel would not mind. Her skin was over-exposed and veiny, she had wrinkles round her eyes, her hair was coarse and growing coarser, but Karel would not mind. Her teeth – no, she drew the line at looking at her teeth and wondering what Karel would think of them . . . " (267-68). Frances and Karel do get married in the end. Is this an attempt of Drabble to resurrect the institution of marriage, provided it is entered upon for the right reason, for love? Frances is happy and full of joy in her love and life with Karel. She gives thanks to fate that "had left them with so much, with each other" (354).

If Frances is lucky in love, she is also lucky to have a successful career, showing once more Drabble's insistence for women to have a meaningful occupation of their own. Zeman acknowledges that "by the seventies the word is going out . . . that it is only by being economically and intellectually as determined and attached to current discoveries as a man that a woman can hope to survive and override the roles society will propose to her" (145). Frances is that kind of woman. She feels at ease working mostly with men and also moves easily at all the different levels of society, dealing with people from all social classes, from well diggers to ministers. As for Rosamund in *The Millstone* she has no doubt about her work and its importance. Frances' great discovery, the Saharan trade town of Tizouk, has made her very well known in her field and she is

proud of her accomplishments which are fulfilling to her, something we learn as she is introduced at a lecture at the beginning of the novel:

> She sat there, neatly, happily, listening to the long list of her achievements: she let them flow over her, reassuring, relaxing, comforting, like water full of compliments. I did all that, she thought to herself, as she heard the catalogue of her accomplishments: I, me, I stole all that from nature and got it for myself. I am a vain, self-satisfied woman, she said to herself, with satisfaction. (*The Realms of Gold* 30)

Again, Drabble uses water imagery to imply fulfilment and happiness, whereas when Frances feels depressed it is expressed as a dry place. It is easy to smile with Frances and to appreciate her success, acknowledging that she has established herself well in a male-dominated area. Critics differ in their opinion of Frances. Fox-Genovese argues harshly that "Frances's musings, as indeed Frances herself, captures the strength and weakness of Drabble's novels. Frances is a fatuous, self-satisfied bitch; too good at everything by half, not to mention too rich and unencumbered" (238). Gullette, on the other hand, stresses that "always quick at self-judgement, Drabble's heroines have moved, over time, from self-deprecation to self-appreciation" (99).

One of the reasons for Frances leaving Karel had been because she felt he had been keeping her from her work, which up till then had been the most important component of her life, apart from her children. Her career has been defining for her personality, for her self. In the eyes of other people, Frances is first and foremost defined as a career woman. When Janet first meets her she remembers a magazine article about Frances' life as a working mother. Her brother Hugh "had always thought that she put her career first, in selfish ruthlessness . . . . But perhaps it wasn't so" (*The Realms of Gold* 207). In *The Millstone* Rosamund choose her career over intimacy. Jane Gray added sexual love to the pattern. In *The Realms of Gold* Drabble gives a more nuanced picture. While emphasising that career is important and can be fulfilling, she also demonstrates that it must not become everything. For Frances in her loneliness it loses its charm and she even wonders "why bother? What did it matter, one archaeologist more or less?" (231). Still, "work was all that was left, with Karel gone and the children growing" (230-31).

Drabble once more describes the life of a single mother. However, Frances manages her household very differently from Rosamund and Jane. Unlike Jane in her life with Malcolm, Frances when married had "refused to submit. Obstinate to the last degree, she had pursued her career, her interests, her own self, in his despite" (22). After her divorce, she continues to work hard, taking the smaller children with her on her travels

sometimes, while leaving the older ones at home with au pairs or in the care of their father and his new wife. Older than Rosamund and Jane, Frances' four children are older too. Her youngest child is eight and Frances no longer feels needed to the same extent as before. Nevertheless, her children are clearly one of the central components in her life and motherhood is the one thing she feels she has been biologically programmed for. The children had "kept her so busy, worrying about them even when she wasn't with them had kept her so busy, guilt about them . . . had occupied the surface reaches of her being with its endless little squalls and tempests, so that she had hardly had time to worry about herself" (209). Maternity has been, and is, a rewarding experience. Now, however, Frances worries and wonders as Drabble lets her pose the universal female question: "What were women suppose to do, in their middle years, biologically speaking?" (13). Frances does not have to worry; she will be kept busy with other family matters. Responsibility, when her father needs her help with arrangements around Constance Ollerenshaw's death, makes her suddenly see "herself as an adult, her parents declining feebly to the grave. The matriarch, arranging funerals. It was a role she might have expected, but it seemed to have come upon her rather suddenly" (294).

It is interesting that family should have such a strong influence in *The Realms of Gold* given that Drabble seems to mistrust marriage and what Frances calls the traditional "two-parent family". Frances, conditioned by her own broken marriage, at one point sees a father with two children cycling together in the road. She smiles at this picture until the mother joins them, destroying the harmony she had felt:

> Such symmetry, such ideal union utterly excluded her . . . . She wanted them split, broken, fragmented. She couldn't believe they were really happy as a foursome: one of the parents must be a drag . . . . Any other balance was impossible, unthinkable . . . . She could not conceive of family love. (239)

However, family in the wider sense cannot be ignored, either in the past or in the present. As in the two other novels Drabble insists that there are answers to be found in a family's history, life and traditions that can explain a person's present personality and life. Frances, again unlike Rosamund and Jane, connects and interacts with her parents, her brother, and her nephew. Like the archaeologist she is, she also digs up new family members, both dead and living, who become important to her. At the end of the novel she has collected a big family of her own making together with Karel. Yet this is not a traditional nuclear family, but the new modern constellation, where two adults merge their two sets of children. This family, like the octopus Frances sees at the beginning of

the story, extends its arms in many directions incorporating also parents, siblings, cousins and friends.

All the aspects of the themes that this essay has studied come together in *The Realms of Gold*: children and family, sexual fulfilment in a newfound husband, a career and social connections. Yet Frances is openly searching for new ways of fulfilment. It would seem that she has enough to occupy her time with her career, her children and her home still to organise, her new role in her family, and her lover; but for her, as for many middle-aged, middle-class, educated women, there comes a stage in life when a woman needs to find something for herself. The soul needs new food to grow. Korenman asserts that *The Realms of Gold* suggests "that without insensitive spouses, helpless children, and thwarted careers to divert attention, one may be forced to confront the meaninglessness of life" (62). Through Frances Drabble poses the all-inclusive question: "The past had been so full: over-full. What of the future? What on earth could it still hold for her?" (*The Realms of Gold* 18). Frances feels "a malignant and meaningless growth of grief" in her breast (19). This spiritual loss and search for meaning takes physical form in first her tooth-ache and in the lump in her breast. Frances has always worked hard and kept moving to avoid the feeling of despair that overcomes her in periods of calm. Acknowledging that she is in a stagnant phase in life, like Jane and perhaps Rosamund, Frances sets out actively searching her past for the answer to these feelings of emptiness. Behind her search, writes Sadler,

> . . . is the insistence on setting oneself right with family, past, nature, and humankind and the belief that to do so is to enter the 'realms of gold' as much as is possible in this world. The task delineated is for the middle-aged, who have gained enough success at living and being to permit them to think about values and about relations to the world at large. (100)

Frances returns to her father's Midland home, where she also has spent her childhood summers. However, she finds no real answers this first time in Tockley, except an acknowledgment of her roots and the labour of her ancestors that has brought her the privileges she has today.

As in the two former novels, Drabble makes use of the unexpected in the form of two accidental meetings, here with Frances' cousins Janet and David, and two deaths, to induce change in Frances' life. Frances meets her cousin David at a conference in Adra, Africa. They have not been aware of each other's existence before. Frances is overcome with emotion because of her loneliness and recalls, "when the organizers of the conference had asked her to fill in her next of kin on her travel and insurance form, she

hadn't known whose name to put" (267). Now she has found a family member whose company she enjoys very much. A hitherto unknown great-aunt, Constance Ollerenshaw, is at the same time found dead in horrible circumstances of neglect and this news makes national headlines. Frances has to rush back from Africa to take charge. Returning once again to Tockley, in Constance's cottage she finds clues to the family's past and achieves her earlier wish "to know where she began and the family ended" (101). In the beautiful cottage, so different from Tizouk, Frances "felt curiously at home, and private, feeding twigs into her own hearth" (309). She also meets her young cousin, Janet, with whom she starts a lasting friendship. The funeral of Constance is quite happy for Frances, now reunited with Karel and with her cousins, brother and father at her side. The next funeral is not quite so happy. Frances' young nephew has killed himself along with his baby daughter, believing life to be humiliating and destructive. In an effort to come to terms with Stephen's death, Frances comes to realise what is a big part of the message of *The Realms of Gold*: ". . . if one can salvage one moment from the sentence of death let us do so, let us catch at it, for we owe it to the dead, to the others, and it is all the living and the lucky can do for the dead, all they can do, given the chance, is to rejoice . . ." (354). The purpose of life is simply to live life to the fullest and be as happy as possible because life itself is grace, with both hardship and moments of joy.

Many critics, especially those with a feminist point of view, find *The Realms of Gold* disturbing because of Drabble's insistence on a personal, rather than a political, solution and have the impression of Frances at first seeming a feminist's dream but as the novel progresses find her too good to be true. Fox-Genovese criticises "the complacent and utopian mirror she offers up to thirtyish, educated, middle-class, female readers" (238). She is also suspicious of Drabble's endorsement of "the superwoman image", which she believes a "wilfully innocent denial of complexity, conflict, and struggle with respect to female being and potential achievement" (234-35). Drabble defended herself talking to Hannay in 1987, saying: "Well, they may find it unsatisfying, but do they find it unrealistic? I mean, is one portraying life as it is, or life as it should be?" (148). Twenty-three years later in an interview for *The Oklahoma Review*, Drabble has changed her opinion and agrees that *The Realms of Gold* might have been too optimistic, innocent and hopeful and says that "I just found it rather sad that I once had such hopes for humankind" (5).

It is difficult to fully agree with the overly critical voices. Maybe Frances is depicted as too good to be true, but such energy and perseverance are still admirable and

we could all use a bit of her strength. In her solution to her life quest Frances comes out happy. Why should anyone grudge her this? She has had to struggle through pain, illness, doubt and deaths, and chooses to rejoice, to live. Should one, nevertheless, wish to read the novel from a feminist point of view, one could, as Elkins, state that it might seem that Frances as a representative of modern women has taken "her rightful [place] in the world and now can turn [her] attention to other issues" (111). However, Elkins observes, "society's expectations remain – these women are the nurturers, the caretakers of personal relationships, the self-sacrificers. And however glamorous their work, they remain on the periphery of the larger power structure" (111). The compromise that Frances makes concerning her career is necessary for her personal fulfilment. As most women, she does not have a political agenda to fight for equality or women's rights. The important point that Drabble makes is that Frances has the possibility to make a personal choice. The choices she makes and her professional sacrifices may actually constitute part of the blueprint for modern women, however despicable they appear to ardent feminists. The majority of women do not have the luxury of being pure feminists and do not wish for this extreme, but only for personal happiness and balance in their lives.

In *The Realms of Gold* Drabble stresses the importance and need for human relationships and connections for fulfilment, the need to be a part of something bigger than oneself. In love, Frances and Karel join their two families and Frances buys Aunt Con's cottage as a country home. "It was", Frances says, "not quite as spectacular a rediscovery and reclamation as Tizouk, but it offered many private satisfactions" (357). They stay in touch with both David and Janet, and Janet with Frances to light her way at least starts to believe in the possibility of change. Rose affirms that "for some characters . . . *The Realms of Gold* holds out the promise of and end to isolation through the establishment of new bonds of kinship" (97). Their family is family in its many facets and wider implications: the family as a community. Frances is the glue holding this community of friends and family together. She has found fulfilment in a personification of Drabble's blueprint, successfully combining family life and career, having found love in a man who is her equal in every way. She has found her way, discovered a pattern that is not straight-forward, that is not a feminist's dream. But why should critics expect or even demand this of Drabble, or of any woman writer? Frances' scheme is modern and full of motion and life, and to Frances (and many other women) it can be, and is, fulfilling. She has found new ways to fill her time and life with meaning: "digging her garden, painting walls, writing articles, riding" (*The Realms of Gold* 357). "Her

energies, which she had feared were going to waste, were properly taxed at last", organising and keeping her large family together (355). She has had to make compromises in her career, "but one can't have everything" the omniscient narrator throws in, mimicking the earlier point of view from *The Millstone* (358). Unlike Rosamund, however, Frances acknowledges that the price for complete independence is too high. Still, Frances has much more than most women and "with Tizouk behind her and Karel before her, she felt herself a made woman, in every sense. Flattered and courted, she flourished and blossomed. She enjoyed the attentions of the public: she enjoyed even more the ability to live at last, in private" (68). She has found what Rosamund did not comprehend and Jane could not find: "the secret of being a woman, and living with a man" (*The Waterfall* 128).

To conclude, *The Realms of Gold* adds a wider social aspect to Drabble's blueprint. It is not enough to remain at home, in private, but it is also dissatisfying in the long run to live one's life in public, only through one's career. A balance is needed in all things, and Frances has found it. Roxman provides an interpretation of *The Realms of Gold* that is much more appealing than the unduly critical ones and also in accordance with the conclusions of this study. The emphasis is put on the Empedocles image and his philosophy that Frances discusses with Stephen and Hugh. Roxman explains that Empedocles' view of history is cyclic (just as Frances' professor tried to impress on her) with two forces, Love (uniting the elements) and Strife (separating), alternating in the ruling of the world and "there was once . . . a Golden Age when Love ruled and Aphrodite, goddess of love, was worshipped; and in due time this age will return" (38). We can deduce that the world in *The Realms of Gold* is governed by strife, a world where people are separated, but Frances in finding and coming to terms with her present through her past, brings about this "Golden Age", a realm of gold, connecting and combining her new family and home.

Conclusion

This essay set out to find a blueprint for fulfilment for the modern, independent woman in three novels of Margaret Drabble's early work. Three themes were investigated to support the argument: single motherhood and family, career and social interaction, and missing husbands and sexual fulfilment. The evidence from this study proves that there is indeed a blueprint emerging from these novels. The three heroines in the stories progress through childbearing to motherhood, from isolation to intimate relationships and on to the finding of their selves.

Drabble like no other writer manages to show the different stages of a woman's life. Through her heroines she outlines the expectations for women in modern society and searches for the opportunities open to them for an equal and independent life. It all depends on women's ability to reconcile the different roles they have to play, to overcome the obstacles in circumstances and their own personality and past that life has put before them, and on their ability to learn from their experiences. In the style of a modern, female Bildungsroman, the grown up woman's own search for enlightenment and completion is in focus. Margaret Drabble conveys what it feels like to be and become a mature woman in novels like *The Millstone*, *The Waterfall*, and *The Realms of Gold*, the last novel a complete guide to the modern woman who after a period of searching and learning can, and will, have it all: career, loving man, children and a stable home.

If the themes this essay has pursued in the three novels can be said to be universal, the manner in which they are presented and the heroines' choices and solutions, however, are more personal, even selfish, in nature. Does Drabble search for and present a universal blueprint for woman's fulfilment or does she suggest that it has to be a personal pattern made up of one's history, circumstances, personality, and family? The blueprint is certainly not the one exemplified by the constricted life of Janet Bird in *The Realms of Gold*. On the contrary, women need to make conscious choices, about marriage, about careers, about the present and about the future. They need to act and react. We find the embodiment of Drabble's blueprint in Frances Wingate, who, like Janet and Jane Gray, was stuck in a destructive relationship in her first marriage, but defied her husband and society's expectations and chose her own way in life. Of course, she was privileged in having money enough to do this, to be able to pay for help in minding her children so she could pursue her career.

What are the important aspects of the blueprint? In the first two novels Drabble stresses the importance of independence for women. In every kind of relationship, mother to children or husband and wife, there must always be a dependency of some kind but Drabble tells us that real independence lies in the possibilities and opportunities that society should provide for women to choose from. Independence, as in the freedom to choose their career, a career that is satisfying intellectually, socially and financially. Independence, as in the freedom to live their private lives as they choose, single or married. Love is the other important aspect. There is healing and salvation in love, whether it is maternal love, the love for one's children or sexual love, the importance of an intimate relationship. Finally, Drabble emphasises human love, the bonds of family and kinship and a connection to something bigger than oneself.

Women today still face many of the same sorts of dilemmas as Rosamund, Jane and Frances, showing the universality of Drabble's subject matter. To be unmarried and a single mother is today socially more accepted than in the mid-1960s and made easier. However, it can still be "a millstone" when considering the restrictions it imposes on the freedom and independence of the particular woman. Jane's choice, to stay married and keep her lover while pursuing her career, would perhaps still be controversial; but in many ways her choice puts her in the same situation as Rosamund: alone with her children pursuing a career, with the added bonus of having occasional romantic love in her life. Rosamund's and Jane's selfish solutions seem to isolate them, leaving them alone and cut off from family and friends. Frances, on the other hand, has come to realise the importance of continuity, of being part of a history, a process. Her good relations to both her family background and to the world around her work against her egocentricity and make her less selfish. She is also in every way a modern woman and has grabbed hold of the freedoms and opportunities society now offers women and, at the end, manages to balance her different roles, finding satisfaction both professionally and privately. Fulfilment requires meaningful relationships and connections: to children, to family, to past and present, to husbands or partners, to colleagues and community.

Forty years on, Drabble's message is still relevant and important. Much in society has improved for women: their opportunities are greater than ever before. However, more and more women succumb to the spiritual emptiness felt by Frances. Women's needs to find balance and meaning are also greater than ever. Margaret Drabble and other women writers are still very much needed to report on the conditions in society and the experiences of modern women, to show women what is important in life and, above all, to help guide women in their search for their own "realms of gold".

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