

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**A CHANGING VISION: WOMEN AND LANDSCAPE IN THE
FICTION OF MARGARET DRABBLE AND ANITA DESAI**

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A Changing Vision: Women and Landscape in the Fiction of Margaret
Drabble and Anita Desai

This thesis argues that landscape is a meaningful construct in the writings of Margaret Drabble and Anita Desai. In relation to their respective cultures, Drabble and Desai explore the predicament of twentieth century women. In this exploration landscape epitomizes a yearning for a sense of place in their women protagonists and embodies the evolving relationship between the subjective and the objective worlds inhabited by them. From the intense subjectivity of their earlier protagonists who were trapped in heterosexual plot mechanisms, the focus shifts in their fiction to wider social issues. The thesis traces this shift through an analysis of the use of landscape imagery, including the landscapes of domesticity - the room, the house, the garden - and those of the urban scene.

Drabble looks at the successful, upwardly mobile women of her times and charts their increasing concern for the common good. Anita Desai's women are housebound, and are looking for a means to sustain themselves through the landscape of their past. The father's garden and the island are two such metaphors of longing in Desai. Mediation between the house and the city demonstrates a shift in perspective in her later novels.

The approach to the topic has been guided by the writings on landscape of the authors themselves. In Landscape in Literature and in Feng Sui Drabble and Desai, respectively, give their views on the importance of landscape to literature and to their own "sense of place". Additionally, some use of psychoanalytic theory has been made, particularly the theories of Julia Kristeva which seem to offer insights into the relation between inner and outer worlds that are relevant to the argument of the thesis.

*With love and gratitude to my parents
who gave me the freedom to choose*

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used for some of the major texts:

SBC: A Summer Bird-Cage

GY: The Garrick Year

JG: Jerusalem the Golden

W: The Waterfall

NE: The Needle's Eye

RG: The Realms of Gold

MG: The Middle Ground

RW: The Radiant Way

NC: A Natural Curiosity

GI: The Gates of Ivory

LL: A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature

WW: Wordsworth

B: Arnold Bennett

JE: Jane Eyre

MM: Middlemarch

MD: Mrs Dalloway

CP: Cry, The Peacock

VC: Voices In The City

WS: Where Shall We Go This Summer?

FM: Fire On The Mountain

CL: Clear Light Of Day

Chapter One

Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "landscape" was introduced in the seventeenth century as a technical term used by painters. In its more general sense, also first used at this time, it came to mean "a view or prospect of natural scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view: a piece of country scenery" (Barrell, 1972: 2).

Since then it has come to mean much more than this cursory description suggests, for there is more to landscape than meets the eye. Although a landscape is the "appearance of that portion of land which the eye can view at once" (Chambers), this interaction between land and eye is not neutral and passive. It is not merely a fleeting sight or the transient image that the word "appearance" suggests.

The use of the term itself imposes a significance which is not present in talking about "a piece of land". Because of its association with painting, the term has come to mean "something composed", or a tract of land viewed in such a way as to present a composition, a scene within a frame which is specially looked at for its aesthetic, cultural, psychological or imaginative import. To this composition of a scene, the artist has brought his or her own cultural, social and sexual assumptions, so that landscape depiction is a conditioned construct, however "accurate" it may strive to be.

Beyond this, the tract of land which is viewed, turned into a "landscape" by the beholder, itself is culturally and economically encoded. As Knowles says:

Landscape is now defined as the product of man's manipulation of the physical environment. As such it is an expression of his economic activities, his social relationships, his artistic aspirations, his religious persuasions and even his recreations...

[it] is the richest historical record we possess (Knowles, 1983: 6-7).

Landscape, therefore, becomes an intricate expression of human existence. To be a part of a landscape entails a discovery and a loss, a past and a future, an awareness and a construction. Reed suggests in his introduction to the recent survey The Landscape of Britain that:

The landscape today is a palimpsest, a text upon which men and women have written their own social autobiography, without, however, being able to erase entirely the contribution of their ancestors, and the autobiography which is the landscape is almost always much more truthful than most other autobiographies in that it is written almost entirely unselfconsciously (Reed, 1990: xii).

Landscape in literature often mirrors the growth of the central protagonist within a specific socio-cultural and geographic milieu. As an autobiography it celebrates the life of the individual's ancestry. It is a heritage of one's past and is therefore a process that has developed over the centuries. For example, as Ann Bermingham suggests, the act of enclosure which so radically altered the English landscape was part of significant social changes. Above all, as a process it is always subject to renewal and reinterpretation. Landscapes by eighteenth-century writers have:

become sites for the expression of society's positive as well as often ambivalent feelings about the changing social order (Bermingham, 1987: 6).

"Landscape", then, is a complex exchange between the historical and sociological message the land itself carries and the perception and interpretation the artist constructs from this "appearance". This exchange is then perceived and interpreted by the viewer who likewise brings to the activity a cultural and individual mind-set which conveys its own signification. We learn to read landscape in ways which our culture instructs, and we in turn add our readings to the associative heritage accruing to

particular landscapes. This is a point made by Oscar Wilde in "The Decay of Lying" where he says:

Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence (Wilde, 1950: 61).

Wilde is talking about literary landscape where the representational and interpretative process undergoes a further complication, for the writer attempts in words to produce the visual effects of the painter - that is, the conveyance of a scene. Although the immediate visual impact is lost in literary landscapes, there is an imaginative gain in the psychological and connotative effects deriving from the cultural richness and instability of language. For Wilde, "Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its own purpose" (Wilde, 1950: 57). We could say, then, that in literature, landscape is accordingly moulded by the writer to fit her subject.

In Countries of the Mind Gillian Tindall traces how the actual topography is:

transformed into psychological maps, private worlds... [where] the physical settings... are essentially put to use as metaphors, emblems, or examples for ideas that transcend that particular time and place (Tindall, 1991: 9-10).

The writer inscribes her own dreams and preoccupations into the actual landscape thereby transforming the physical setting into a more profound and meaningful ensemble. Tindall agrees, however, with Naipaul:

about the two way transition that - a city or landscape does not simply endow a writer's work but acquires richness in turn from that work - it is possible to suppose that places, like people, can miss their chance. How would we now see the bleak, inaccessible moors of Yorkshire had we not benefited from Emily Brontë's transfiguring version of them (Tindall, 1991: 11)?

The Yorkshire moors would possibly have "missed their chance" had it not been for Emily Brontë. They would have remained obscure and unknown, unloved and unacknowledged. It is indeed a writer who accords an appropriate value to a place.

David Lodge emphasizes the differences between the seventeenth - and the nineteenth-century depictions of landscapes:

The sense of place was a fairly late development in prose fiction... The early novelists were scarcely more specific: London in Defoe's or Fielding's novels, for instance, lacks the vivid visual detail of Dickens' London. What intervened was the Romantic movement, which pondered the effect of *milieu* on man, opened people's eyes to the beauty of landscape and then to the grim symbolism of industrial cityscapes (Lodge, 1991: 20).

To this one might add Barrell's comment how in the late eighteenth century:

To display a correct taste in landscape was a valuable social accomplishment quite as much as to sing well, or to compose a polite letter (Barrell, 1972: 5).

It became an "activity" and a "composition", "with its own proper procedure" (Barrell, 1972: 5). Landscape reviewing was, therefore, not without an etiquette. In literature, landscape functions as a derivative of the writer's response. It points out her prejudices and sympathies. In effect, it becomes a critique of consciousness. For example, women in the fiction of Jane Austen were not only socially accomplished to read landscape but were conscious of the power that was associated with its appreciation. Along with it came marriage and security. The possession of "landscape", like Pemberley in Pride and Prejudice, became a luxury and a career. To be able to appreciate and own a meritable landscape they had to learn to play their cards well.

It is rather difficult to be able to write one precise definition of the term in modern times. For landscape is not just a tract of land under survey, it encapsulates a broad vision of life. It is to be viewed and reviewed.

It is subject to vision and re-vision. As a derivative of nature and culture it justifies the one and represents the other. The fact that people live and function within a specific landscape, accept one and reject another landscape, is beyond doubt a matter of great concern for literary artists. A writer's landscape moves and mediates between imagination and perception, cognition and recollection, a matter "Of eye and ear, both what they half create, And what perceive" says Wordsworth in his famous tribute to landscape. It is important to note here that both the eye and the ear draw their own impressions of what they perceive. It has been rightly suggested that, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger, 1972: 8). It is with the device of imagination at her disposal that the writer refurbishes what nature offers and man creates. Therefore the landscape becomes a mediating point between imagination and perception, nature and culture. And it is in the hands of writers that land takes on a distinctive metaphoric shape and a form. It rebuilds and reshapes its contours and espouses the complexities inherent in a modern society. In her understanding of a landscape a writer is always guided by her subjective impressions of the place.

Although in literature, the landscape of the current century has been increasingly affected by the vestiges of the past, it has also responded to the present needs of the individual and her community. As a construct of the mind, landscape in literature reveals the writer's subjective response to a particular place which may or may not be a geographic entity. Even if it is a purely imaginative land it still connotes values inherent in the actual landscape. Beyond this, the writer too has to borrow a formula, a set of elements in order to convey an authentic and an imaginative, if not an actual, sense of place. Landscape conveys the writer's constant strife to maintain a harmony between her desired self and the existing self. Particularly, in

women's fiction, if it functions as a site of feminine displacement it also restores and heals in times of extreme distress.

In her study The Lay Of The Land Annette Kolodny raises the question of the "landscape as woman"; her principal argument is that it is with the American landscape that the revival of the idea "landscape as feminine" came to be pursued:

Indo-European languages, among others, have long maintained the habit of gendering the physical world and imbuing it with human capacities. What happened with the discovery of America was the revival of that linguistic habit on the level of personal experience... [which] became the vocabulary of everyday reality (Kolodny, 1984: 8-9).

The idea which had so far been pursued as "linguistic habit" was actually realized with the discovery of America, where the land was not only viewed as a nurturing force but also as a threat to man. She had to be tamed in order to become habitable. The attempt to see the continent as a "woman" was already to civilise it, "casting the stamp of human relations upon what was otherwise unknown and untamed" (Kolodny, 1984: 9). As a land, America promised to be not only a place of riches and abundance but it seemingly became an Eden, a paradise, an ontological support for the earliest settlers. Explorers hoped to fulfil their "yearning for paradise" (Kolodny, 1984: 4) in this land of plenty.

Landscape becomes a tantalizing metaphor of yearning and sustenance, desire and incommensurability. It is both a force to be reckoned with and a goal to be sought for. In the process not only has it been stripped of her natural element repeatedly but also become an embodiment of the "female principle of gratification" (Kolodny, 1984: 4), and as a woman is said to personify the female Trinity, that is the virtues of a Mother, a Mistress and a Virgin.

In Staying Alive Vandana Shiva argues in terms that are similar to those put forth by Kolodny. To begin with, nature is a feminine principle. Women and land are viewed as nurturers. They work in "partnership" "as providers of sustenance, food and water" (Shiva, 1989: 42). Patriarchy has adopted various ways and means to subjugate and suppress women and nature. They have suffered simultaneously at the hands of men wishing to rescript a master-slave dichotomy. The parallels between women and nature have on one hand reinforced the spiritual superiority of women and, on the other, have led to further domination of women. She emphasises the recreation of gender in the following terms:

As nature came to be seen more like a woman to be raped, gender too was recreated. Science as a male venture, based on the subjugation of female nature and female sex provided support for the polarisation of gender... While on the one hand the ideology of science sanctioned the denudation of nature, on the other it legitimised the dependency of women and the authority of men. Science and masculinity were associated in domination over nature and femininity, and the ideology of science and gender reinforced each other (Shiva, 1989: 17-18).

Accordingly, the tools of modern science, responsible for the "de-mothering" of nature, are used to subjugate women and non-European peoples. Furthermore, she concedes:

Contemporary western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy or duality between man and woman, and person and nature. In Indian cosmology, by contrast, person and nature (Purusha- Prakriti) are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. Every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle, and this dialectical harmony between the male and female principles and between nature and man, becomes the basis of ecological thought and action in India. Since, ontologically, there is no dualism between man and nature and because nature as Prakriti sustains life, nature has been treated as integral and inviolable. Prakriti, far from being an esoteric abstraction, is an everyday concept which organises life (Shiva, 1989: 40).

The concept of landscape has been treated in various ways in Indian cosmology¹. The early Aryan invaders settled in the forests. Tagore remarks that:

in India it was in the forests that our civilization had its birth, and it took a distinct character from this origin and environment (Tagore, in Rao and Singh, 1939: 81).

Life in the forests brought man closer to the realm of the spiritual. His mind did not feel restricted and he endeavoured:

not to acquire but to realize, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings (Tagore, in Rao and Singh, 1939: 82).

Man was not separate from the Universe. Nor did he feel hostile towards it. Furthermore, he did not see the necessity to conquer or to subdue landscape. In Vedic hymns and the Upanishads the idea of landscape was intertwined with the cosmic union of the One in all. Whilst in India the people not only worshipped various aspects of nature, they also emphasised the harmony between man and his Universe:

The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and left aside (Tagore, in Rao and Singh. 1939: 84).

They were seen as an embodiment of the Eternal Spirit². Instead of fighting against nature man struggled to find his own place in the infinite order of things. It is in his communion with the Universe that man realized the strength of his being as well as the limitations of his indeterminate self. This attitude to landscape can be traced back as far as Vedic times. It has been expressed with great reverence and clarity in Classical literature. For example, in his introduction to Kalidasa's Kumarsambhava, Radhakrishnan points out that:

For Kalidasa rivers, mountains, forests, trees possess a conscious individuality as animals, men and gods (Radhakrisnan, 1962: xiv).

His women Sakuntala and Sita were the daughters of nature. And the natural life responded to their joys and sorrows. Sakuntala pays her tribute to nature:

na kevalam tata-niyogah asti mamapi sodara-sneha etesu.

[She says, "(I water the plants) not merely because of the fact that I am engaged by the revered sage Kanva to do so; I do it because I myself have an affection for them, as if we are all so many young ones from the womb of the same mother"] (Dasgupta, 1957: 180).

Indeed the landscape of the hermitage was not something to be feared; full of sages, it inspired men to live a life of contemplation. Spiritual seekers chose to live away from the commotion of the city. The landscape of the hermitage became a site of asceticism, of withdrawal and of meditation. In the hermitage men, women and children lived as members of a community striving for spiritual uplift. It also became a home for discarded and displaced women. This landscape had a certain purity and all its inhabitants, even birds, plants and animals are said to possess human qualities. Radhakrisnan explains it with an illustration from Raghuvamsa:

nrtyaṃ mayūrāḥ kusumāni vrkṣaḥ darbhān upāttān vijahur
hariṇyaḥ

tasyāḥ prapanne sama-duḥkha-bhāvam atyantam āsīd ruditam
vane'pi (R.XIV. 69) (Radhakrisnan, 1962: xiv).

In this passage from Raghuvamsa, Kalidasa describes the plight of Sita, who has been deserted in the forest. Rejected by her loved ones, she was made to leave the city and forced to seek shelter amidst the wild. Sita is inconsolable. Deeply disturbed by her tragic situation, the peacocks stop their dance and the trees shed all their flowers, and the female deer drop the grass from their mouths. The inhabitants of the forest too begin to weep with her. Moved by

her distress, the natural world becomes one with her. In his poetry, Kalidasa makes a strong claim that this world is a home of all living beings which is not exclusive to man. Landscape provided man with a perspective beyond himself. Therefore, the forests:

acquired a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconciliation where man's soul had its meeting place with the soul of the world (Tagore, in Rao and Singh, 1939: 87).

And the same could be applied to his attitude towards the other elements of Nature. Contrary to this, the American settlers refused to come to terms with nature; "in America these great living cathedrals of nature had no deeper significance to man" (Tagore, in Rao and Singh, 1939: 87). Tagore sees the West bound by "the city-wall habit". And for those who have been seeking spiritual rather than material fulfilment an escape from city life is called for.

The Indian attitude towards landscape is therefore central to one's understanding of Indian culture. Human life is of significance in so far as it can realize "the dignity and worth of life that is not human" (Radhakrishnan, 1962: xv). Shiva's contention is that man and woman should be equally conscious of their responsibility to nature. Both have an equally important role to play in the locus of life and should therefore work towards a gender-free harmony, or a "trans-gender"(Shiva, 1989: 52) society that can be realized when both are given due respect and opportunity to express and realize themselves. Only then will we be able to say that:

the feminine principle is not exclusively embodied in women, but is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, women and men (Shiva, 1989: 52).

And it is this "recovery of the feminine principle" (Shiva, 1989: 52) that can lead to the recovery of "humanity". In a gendered society Purusha and Prakriti will be repeatedly seen as diametrically opposed to each other.

In my study of the novels of Margaret Drabble and Anita Desai it is not simply the landscape "as woman" or the view that the landscape "is woman" that I shall be looking at. In their novels landscape functions as a principal signifier, it is not a mere outside entity to be enthused about, nor an absolute noumenon; in their fiction landscape is linked to the female bildung. As suggested by Indian cosmologists since times immemorial, and western critics such as Kolodny in the late twentieth century, land is indeed a metaphor for the feminine, and vice-versa. It could also be argued that this exchange is predominantly a male construct. In my study which is focusing on women writers' different and female use of landscape I shall be looking at cross-cultural attitudes. What I shall focus primarily on is the relation of the female protagonist to the "female" subject of landscape. In my thesis the fundamental proposition is that women not only identify with the landscape but their search for a sense of place is an essential corollary to their desire for self-fulfilment. Landscape becomes the site of female desire and female bildung.

There are, as we shall see, several responses to landscape in these authors. First there is the perceived link it creates between the public and the private worlds of women. The private landscape develops into a public one and will be examined in relation to the question of whether it is a significant voyage outwards that the modern woman is making in the novels of these authors. The aim of the thesis is to be able to establish a sense of a continuing relation between women and landscape, to be able to read those moments and metaphors in women's writing which highlight women's intrinsic desire to correspond with "the external rhythms" (a term borrowed from Drabble's A Summer Bird-Cage but used in a slightly broader sense here), that is, their need to enrich their lives with an illuminating encounter

with the landscapes of externality in all their forms. There is also, in the words of Horner and Zlosnik:

The quest for an alternative, more valid sense of sexual self and how that might relate to the creative self is the quest that informs much women's writing (Horner and Zlosnik, 1990: 10).

It will become clear that landscape not only provides the means for an alternative but situates the terms of the quest for self-fulfilment in some of these women.

Drabble and Desai are contemporaries. Desai was born in 1937 and Drabble in 1939. As novelists they have achieved a prominent place in fiction in English. Their novels are principally about women who establish a keen affinity with the landscape and who are equally influenced by their past and share an ambivalence towards it. Desai's earlier novels are solipsistic journeys by her female protagonists, and to a great extent the women of Drabble's early fiction are trapped in a state of subjectivism. In these early novels, landscape becomes an equivocal emblem of women's sense of boundary and enclosure. In their later novels, both writers have made a significant change in their approach by making a progress on the voyage out, away from the self-obsessed female towards women (and men) protagonists who are concerned with social issues. The domestic plot has been replaced by a greater concern for global issues.

In the work of each novelist, this transition has been tracked through an evolving use of landscape. Of course, one of my principal concerns is to recognize this common ground in the fiction of Anita Desai and Margaret Drabble. Their women are strongly influenced by their socio-cultural environment. My own position as an Indian woman studying in England is another facet of the same situation. It has not only exposed me to the differing needs of women but has enabled me to identify with the issues

which concern all women irrespective of their cultural and social backgrounds. As a product of post-colonial education in India, I have been exposed to British values through English language and literature. English is my second language and England my second home. I speak and write in English, my stay in England has added to my understanding of the language and literature. If my stay abroad has enhanced my cultural understanding, it has also problematised the archetypal Indian in me. To what extent I cannot say. This leads me to the central line of the argument. It seems to me that I have been wanting to negotiate between the metaphorical assumptions of the two women writers and have used landscape as a multiple construct to explore diversity in women and in women's writing. It also explains the necessity of choosing the concept of landscape in a broad sense. Indeed, as a stratagem, the concept is used, exploited, devised, criticized and read. It explores the relevance of a struggle for fulfilment in women's lives. Spivak suggests that it is "for the investigating subject to see that the projects are produced within a much larger textuality" (Spivak, in Harasym, 1990: 30). In selecting these two authors, I hope to be able to read the terms which signify women's position in two different societies. Here again, I am aware that such a pursuit cannot be held as universalist nor such an analysis absolute. It is neither a settlement of issues nor an answer to them. One might agree with Spivak that the whole aim of literary pursuit is to be able to ask and explore. It becomes an exercise in self-knowledge:

Since we are not looking for a perfect analysis, but we are looking for the mark of vulnerability which makes a great text not an authority generating a perfect narrative, but our own companion, as it were, so we can share our own vulnerabilities with those texts and move (Spivak, in Harasym, 1990: 27).

Spivak implies that the text becomes our companion and after having exposed to us our "vulnerabilities" it urges us to "move". It becomes, in fact, a tool of

understanding and encourages and extends "your idea of looking and seeing" (Spivak, in Harasym, 1990: 30). Of particular interest in this context is the contribution made by Desai and Drabble to the women question. Both of them concede a significant dialogue between women and landscape. Their women move with a strong sense of place.

Furthermore, the romance narrative culminating in love and marriage is of minimal significance in their writings. Their writing is, as described by DuPlessis in Writing beyond the Ending, "calling attention to the production of alternative rather than acquiescent ideas" (DuPlessis, 1985: 197).

Drabble and Desai belong to the post-Woolfian phase of women's writing and their women seek fulfilment in alternatives to the romance plot which is no longer usable; they are now confronted with a world of different complexities and challenges. In a world ridden with angst they seek self-fulfilment. The thesis explores the physical and the social boundaries within which women struggle to define themselves. To put it more tersely, they pause to become. Love and friendship are desirable ends but beyond them lies their desire for a broadening of their vision. It is as if they are attempting to realize the longing which heaved inside Jane Eyre as she contemplated the landscape beyond the love plot centred on Thornfield Hall:

... I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach (Brontë C, 1981: 110).

In its largest sense, women seem to be wanting to break the unremitting constraints that have blocked their "view", both in terms of experience and exposure. To this end landscape has a role to fulfil in their

lives. It gives a shape and an outline to their pursuit. It defines their predicament for them. It expands their vision of the self and the world.

In the course of the discussion it will become increasingly clear that Drabble has a definite literary tradition to draw on. She has been deeply influenced by a history of English landscape lovers and writers. She falls back on the literary history of her predecessors; she is culturally determined to a greater extent than Desai whose writing is far more subversive. As an Indian whose life has been coloured by her German mother, her Indian upbringing and the British colonial heritage, Desai has a variety of traditions to draw from. And yet she is as much a part of all these traditions as she is outside them. She draws not only from the European tradition but is equally interested in Indian folklore and epics. She writes with a consciousness of Indian mythology; her women are conditioned by their cultural and familial past. At the outset, these women seem submissive, but at another level passivity takes on a colour of rebellion. The movement from the garden to the city to the island and from there to the mountains and a final negotiated retreat into the garden forms a cyclical trajectory in her novels. The predicament of these women reveals that an alliance to the father is not inimical to the Indian scene. They are bound to their families and in her fiction Desai examines how some of her women have failed to strike a balance between the father's land and the house of their husbands. Much of their quest is associated with a yearning for a "sense of place". It could also be suggested that "regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape" (Kolodny, 1984: 6), is central to these women's lives. The absence of the mother has hindered the development of some of the female protagonists. The thesis argues that landscape features as a binary ensemble in the socialization of these women. If it gives us an insight into their lives, it appears to question some of their

notions of freedom and enclosure. The narrative draws attention to these women who seem to be caught in a "sulk". Having achieved little in their individual lives they are at odds with themselves and the world at large. In choosing to write about the inner world of these lives Desai explodes some of the stereotypes of Indian femininity. The final Desai novel I shall discuss, Clear Light of Day, shows a mediation between inner and outer, private and public, which is not dissimilar to the transition in Drabble's heroines.

It is not my intention crudely to compare and contrast the two writers but I shall read them as parallel representatives of their respective cultures and times. The use of landscape in relation to women makes it possible to consider the differences as significant derivatives. This in turn points to the socio-cultural structures within which women perform their specific roles. Above all, it locates a series of meaningful ensembles which characterize women's desire for individuation. Landscape not only becomes a point of reference but asserts itself as a point of mediation. By treating Desai and Drabble separately I wish to avoid the dangers inherent in comparison. Whilst acknowledging the comparability, it is precisely the differences in their approach to fiction and the role of women that I wish to follow in my reading of landscape in their novels.

It is also not my intention to use only one particular theoretical approach as representative of feminist criticism. I have, however, made partial use of psychoanalysis which could lay me open to charges of universalism [perhaps reductionism] in spite of two such culturally diverse writers as Drabble and Desai. But far from drawing any universalist claims in my thesis I intend to use the theory only as a conducive mode of enlightenment. In the main part, my own thesis derives its theoretical argument from the writers themselves. It is a particular use of landscape in their fictional and non-fictional writings that provides a firm basis for my

study. The essential guide-line is from my authors and it is to their inquiring spirit that I shall seek recourse in order to establish the framework of my argument in relation to their use of landscape.

Notes

1. There is no one view of nature in Hinduism. Various schools of Hindu philosophy posit different notions. I shall be examining the use of landscape from a limited stand-point. It is impossible to describe a vast civilizational complexity like "Indian" where plurality of history and concepts is the rule rather than uniformity.
2. Vedic religion was a result of an attempt to placate and propitiate nature. Almost all Vedic Gods were Gods of nature, for example Agni was the God of fire and Vayu, the God of wind. For a detailed description see J.L. Brockington's The Sacred Thread (cf Bibliography).

Chapter Two

Margaret Drabble: An Introduction

Margaret Drabble, the second daughter of John Frederick, a circuit judge, and Marie Moor Drabble, an English teacher, was born in Sheffield on 5 June 1939. Her parents were the first to reach Cambridge from their respective families. Like many other parents from working-class background they lived in times of rapid social and economic change. Her parents were very liberal in their attitude towards religion and joined the Quakers - The Society of Friends. Margaret Drabble was taught to believe in the light of God in everyone. Her childhood school was run by the Quakers and although Drabble is not a Quaker she does reflect the spirit of Quakerism in her writings. She is not a practising Christian nor does she have a strong monotheistic attitude towards God. This is modified by her deterministic humanism. Although Drabble claims to have no strict doctrinal faith, she does believe in the value of grace and prayer and will. A mother of three children, Drabble is now married (her second marriage) to the biographer, Michael Holroyd. She lives in London.

Drabble was sent to the Mount School in York and later graduated from Cambridge with a starred first in English. Like most young people she welcomed this change and a shift in place. Transport and living conditions in the Northern towns were poor and the social life restricted. Visiting an overseas restaurant was an event in itself as their numbers were so rare. When the time came for her to move away from the North she was glad to do so (see Appendix A).

However harsh her attitude to the North might have been (as depicted in her earlier novels) Drabble is aware of the stronghold of place in the development of the character. Her repeated reference to the landscape of

her childhood is now no longer a vilification but a continual sifting of a remembered and created landscape. The writer makes use of these experiences and goes back to the scene of her childhood again and again in her subsequent novels, with the result that the same place forms the steady base of her writings. We might say, then, that like Arnold Bennett whom she admires Drabble too has been deeply influenced by the life that she witnessed in provincial Northern towns. The material of Bennett's writing is very similar to her own and she claims having encountered in life what he posed in fiction:

Bennett's admiration of the views of the potteries is perhaps somewhat constrained, as was and is mine of Sheffield: no amount of goodwill can transform Sheffield into Rome, or Burslem into an old Flemish town, however much one may wish to try (B 5-6).

Like Bennett, Drabble has made great use of the constraints of the landscape in her fiction. Like him, she is drawn to the ordinary and the uninteresting. Like Bennett, who on becoming aware of the "fictional possibilities of the Potteries" (LL 217), made full use of them, Drabble too relies heavily on the landscape of her childhood. She concedes that "Beauty, in such a region, does not meet the eye: it has to be looked for" (B 2).

Drabble's exposure to literary culture through her degree training at Cambridge falls in with her own preoccupations with landscape. Although she has yet to write a novel as great as Middlemarch, George Eliot is one of the influential Victorians she strives to emulate. She shares Eliot's interest in public life and is aware of its impact on the private lives of the individuals. Like Eliot she is also interested in the preservation of socio-democratic principles. She claims to be an egalitarian at heart:

For some reason - perhaps because I am a writer and imagination is my trade, perhaps because I am a woman, perhaps because of my social background, perhaps because of

my Quaker education - I find it much easier to identify downwards in the social scale than upwards (Drabble, 1988: 24).

This consciousness of the weak and displaced is reflected in her writings. Her characters have sensitive minds and react to situations with deliberate candour. Sometimes they make mistakes in their judgement but it is their vulnerability which makes them humane. The character of Alix in The Radiant Way is a case in point.

As we look at her fictional and also her non-fictional writings we find ourselves responding to some of her key notions of place. In her short study of Wordsworth she points out the poet's underlying object is to explore "the workings of the mind". Like his Prelude which "is a voyage of discovery, not a journey to a fixed destination"(WW 85), Drabble sees her novels as dealing with unspecified rather than absolute truths, in search of "suggestions and possibilities".

There is, as we shall see, a complex continuity projected in the interaction between character and landscape. The whole idea of place is bound to her idea of character. But landscape, like character, is not static. It is like the past which alters "as the present throws its shadows backwards" (LL 270). Drabble develops this argument in her study on the British landscape. In fact, like Naipaul, she argues that we "see certain landscapes through the eyes of the writers that discovered them" (LL 8). Her book Landscape in Literature is an appreciation of the writer's landscape.

Landscape in Literature, is the point d'appui of my thesis. It is an assertion of Drabble's passionate involvement with the English literary landscape. As a major exercise it not only traces the changing attitude to landscape from the Middle Ages to the present century but is also useful in finding connections between Drabble's conscious presentation of landscape both in her writings and that of her predecessors. First of all, I shall briefly

bring out her own response to landscape in literature and by doing so will hope to recognize the influence of her literary predecessors.

Drabble observes the ancient attitude to landscape in literature with an unswerving curiosity. She follows the change in landscape very closely. She suggests that even Virgil who lived in the Golden Age was aware that:

... the Biblical vision of Paradise has, from the beginnings of time, been accompanied by the myth of the Fall. Man was born to labour; the fruits of the earth do not fall into the hand or offer themselves to the mouth, as some poets so prettily suggest (LL 48).

This awareness of labour and consistent effort did not stop the writers from creating "the Garden of Eden of unfallen man" (LL 49), as a visionary place distinct from the real world:

In the Middle Ages... natural beauty was considered suspect, a temptation of the devil, rather than an embodiment of the Lord (LL 36).

Gradually attitudes towards nature changed and writers began to see it as a powerful and beneficent force. Drabble argues that the images of plenty, lush abundance, and a fulfilling paradise were an attempt to flatter the moneyed landlords. The poet wrote with the reading public in mind and since it was the rich who could afford to spend time and money they saw to it that the interests of the rich did not clash with the misery of the poor. It is only in the eighteenth century that the so far invisible, unseen, unheard labouring class was brought into full view. Hitherto, the fear that "their intrusive presence would spoil the view" (LL 51) had kept them in the background. The voice of the ploughmen poets in the eighteenth century became the voice of the labouring class heard for the first time in literature. And among these poets Drabble shows great regard for Thomson, Clare, Stephen Duck, and Robert Burns. She has a particular fascination for Clare:

To him, the landscape was not a backdrop; the land was known intimately, tree by tree, field by field (LL 54).

He was one of the first to witness great historical changes in the English landscape. "The enclosure of the open field system" (LL 61) was introduced in his time. It prompted the growth of "rigid and arbitrarily controlled hierarchy", thereby investing greater power in the hands of the moneyed landlords (LL 147).

As Drabble points out, Clare was critical of these changes. He shared a deep intimacy with the land, and it is his interest in the "common" that is so moving. With Clare, Drabble shares an interest in the "commonplace". Seemingly, she has inherited his love of the scrubby, low, tatty, obdurate, crumpled, bleak landscape:

Clare loves moles and molehills... generally thought of as the enemy of gardener and farmer, blots on the landscape, but to Clare they seem to have represented some kind of anarchic primal freedom, the common freedom that private property and enclosure threatened.

[and then]

With what rapture he sings of the kind of scruffy, brambly, thistly, hillocky, rabbit-mined common that one can still find in odd corners, either protected, or unnoticed (LL 62).

Drabble too has retained Clare's interest in the common. She experiments with the routine and the mundane and aligns herself with the ordinary. The character of Rose in The Needle's Eye is a case in point. She rejects her father's property and considers possessions as threatening signs of closure and endorses the idea of "common freedom" without possessions. I shall speak of her in detail in my chapter on The Needle's Eye. But for now it would suffice to point out that "an extraordinary shift of meaning" (LL 63), in the word "common", to "not-so-common", by Clare, has brought about a shift in perspective too. It has transformed common-ness into "the wonderful, the rare, the vanishing, the highly prized" (LL 63). For Clare, the local dialect is

not only rich in expression, but also in spirit. He uses it with considerable felicity. The language of Clare's poetry has, according to Drabble, transcended the local and imbued the landscape with an intensely personal and authentic vision of the poet's "knowing eye". In Clare's poetry we encounter:

an Eden not lush like Milton's or Marvell's, but wild, open, even bleak, full of weeds and lonely birds, brambles and ants and snail-shells (LL 63).

What is lush and bountiful in Marvell and Milton is bleak and lonely in Clare. It is disturbing to see a touch of ^{the} tragic in his Eden, the poet's disillusionment with his times combined with an irresistible longing for the past. It was a loss he failed to come to terms with. Bound to a sense of exile, in his own home, even poetry failed to assuage his inner sense of loss.

Landscape in Literature traces the changing and modified relationship to landscape from one period to the other. The Romantics expressed a wide range of aspirations through the landscape. Few periods in literature had so great an interest in the locale as the Romantic. The Romantic spirit toyed with the idea of God and the secularisation of religious impulse gained ground. The idea of God became diffused with that of "sublime materialism". Furthermore, a new relation was forged between "man and the natural world" (LL 147). Immediately before them, it appears nature was viewed "through a Claude glass or a drawing room window" (LL 147); whilst a particular emphasis was laid on its beauty, the disturbing features were avoided. It was the Romantics who realized the psychological impact of nature on man and sought in it an answer to their unresolved quest. The desire for self-expression culminated in a desire for affirmation with the landscape. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy had their moments of "idyllic freedom" in their home country, while the Brontë sisters living in north

Yorkshire made the gloomy, quiet, isolated, wet moorlands the subject of their passion.

In Drabble, the Romantic concern is secularized even further with a sense of realism which brings her closer to the women writers, Austen, Eliot and Gaskell. Also, like the poet in Wordsworth who seems to realize that the "pantheistic approach is half fantasy, half pathetic fallacy" (LL 152), beauty in Drabble's landscape is a mixed product of perception and creation. For Wordsworth there existed a continuity between "man's thought processes and moral being" (LL 151) and this in turn was reflected in his attitude to landscape. For him and Dorothy the world itself had become "a living symbol", with a life of its own.

It is the drama between the "estate managing heroes" and the estate loving heroines of Jane Austen that throws a meaningful light on her landscapes. According to Drabble:

... Jane Austen proves herself the perfect student; her landscapes rarely stir the imagination, as do Wordsworth's or Emily Brontë's, but they are in a true sense picturesque - that is, they are composed as for a picture, with the appropriate ingredients, arranged in an appropriate order (LL 132).

Drabble's statement, that the landscape "is merely the setting" (LL 133), in Austen, has received a further focus in her Virago introductions to the novels of Jane Austen wherein she judges the use of landscape in more concrete terms. Austen uses the landscape with a more purposeful intent than is generally understood. It is the landscape which sets the equation between her protagonist's desire for love and the need for recognition. It is the landscape which articulates the lust for power and the prospect of wealth. It is the landscape which decides how and where its women will be situated. An entire series of associations emerge in Austen's distanced reflections on landscape, where the landscape provides both a prospect and a perspective.

It is not without a purpose. It invites us to the hearts of its many protagonists. It calls for love and commends marriage.

Like Clare and Wordsworth who were exiled "by age and change" (LL 83), George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell left the landscapes of their childhood, Eliot never to return because of the quarrel with her brother, and Gaskell having settled in Manchester. Both make the rural countryside something of an idyll, although one that they progressively qualify and reassess. The lost world is created and commemorated as much in Drabble as in Eliot and Gaskell. Perhaps it is from Eliot that she has been inspired to make use of it to convey "progressive political and social views" (LL 81) in her fiction, and to bring into it an assiduous spirit of inquiry and observation:

George Eliot's vision is essentially a mature vision; the child's memories are qualified by the woman's knowledge (LL 83).

For Eliot's female protagonist Dorothea, in Middlemarch, the sight of thatched cottages and choked chimneys, the sight of the people surviving in poor conditions establishes the need for an immediate reform. For Drabble as much as for Eliot landscape is an indispensable mirror of the people and is valued not merely for its aesthetic appeal but also the socio-economic conceptions drawn from it. She says of Eliot:

Her vision of the landscape and its inhabitants is practical, inclusive, benign: much as she loves the beauty of "old, old" trees and buildings, her heart is with the future, with Reform, with a greater sharing (LL 84).

While the Romantics shunned the city as a contaminating force the major Victorian writers made it their home. Gaskell was settled in Manchester and Dickens in London. The life in the city came to be identified with life amidst pollution and squalor, enterprise and change. The metaphor of the city is often associated with crisis and contamination as opposed to the country which is associated with continuity and community. According to Drabble, Gaskell's attitude to the industrial landscape is not as ambiguous as



Dickens'. She treats it with a mature and a sympathetic eye. The city of her times was undergoing industrial changes and Gaskell seemed more interested in its "causes and long-term effects" (LL 213). Drabble views Gaskell's attitude as "more composed and reflective" (LL 213) than that of Dickens. Her writings show profound understanding of the people within such a landscape. She is concerned not merely with the present but also the long term implications of the industrial revolution. Like Gaskell, Drabble is situated in an urban landscape and her writing provides a contrast between the city life and that of the country side:

The country gives a better start in life, it protects the growing spirit from contamination, and nature is the best teacher... adults writing their fictional or factual memoirs tend to look back on childhood as a golden age, and its heavenly aspects are inevitably reinforced if childhood was indeed spent in the country; the landscapes of infancy acquire a particular radiance which the passing of time brightens rather than dims (LL 247).

There has always been a tug of war between the claims made by the city and the country for better community and individual living. The urban writers gradually recognized the "restorative power" (LL 85) of rural landscape. In this connection Gaskell's retreat to the countryside for restoration is of particular significance, even though she sees rural cruelty and squalor, and she is not blind to some of its perils. She inherited her father's love of the sea and the love of the inland Midlands from her mother:

The modern concept of the holiday seems to have arisen in mid-Victorian England, and with it, the concept of nature as a healing respite from labour, the country as a rest from the dirt and grind of the city (LL 86).

Drabble suggests:

... but we, like Mrs Gaskell, enjoy the opportunity of watching other people at work, particularly when the work is so different from and apparently so much pleasanter than our own (LL 86).

Closely connected with a sense of place in women's fiction is Virginia Woolf. As a centre of consciousness the house acquires a new dimension in Virginia Woolf. It would be hard to place Mrs Ramsay elsewhere than in the garden and the house. In the same way, in Mrs Dalloway, Woolf reviews the inner and outer selves through the metaphor of the house of the present. The recreation of the landscape of Clarissa's past is suggestive of her inability to forget. She yields to memories, to the garden of her past. In fact, the more painful they are, the harder it is to forget. For Woolf, the desire to search and to recover rests upon her ability to write and like most artists, she lives and laments and recreates the many losses she incurred in life. Landscape becomes a metaphor of sustenance and survival in her. Remembering the past, that is looking backwards, not only involves "the act of seeing" but is a conscious "act of choice". Woolf too was attempting to situate herself through her memories. Her landscapes evoke a nostalgic retreat into the past:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach - though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it... We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves (Berger, 1972: 8-9).

Most of Drabble's novels are set in England and typify the English landscape. Very little in her earlier novels is outside Britain. Few of her women venture abroad. Exceptions like Frances Wingate and the man in The Ice Age are rare. Kate Armstrong is more her type. The fact that she stresses the Englishness of the landscape does not imply that she is confined to the local.

By stressing a character's response to landscape she is encouraging us to probe into the literary landscape of the character's predecessors, thereby establishing a connectedness between the reader, the

character and a cultural tradition, the past and the present signifiers of landscape. A point made by Sarah in A Summer Bird-Cage recurs in different forms in much of Drabble's fiction:

The only way to be recharged is to be put in touch with external rhythms. Otherwise one will run down from exhaustion (SBC 78).

A variety of meanings can be inferred from the term "external rhythms". One not only receives some sustenance through the landscape but having accepted it as something external to the eye, that which belongs to the outside, we require it to fulfil our inner selves. It is these "external rhythms" that Drabble addresses through the landscape. They are representative of the women's world, their internal moods and apprehensions. They are also symptomatic of the seasonal cycle or the life cycle.

I have selected some of her novels for a detailed analysis and excluded those which are less appropriate for the purposes of my study of landscape in her novels. I shall only briefly refer to them in the course of my discussion.

The landscape is more than a message in Drabble. It is also a memory, a remembrance of objects and relationships thought, loved and hated years ago. In Jerusalem the Golden, one of Drabble's youngest heroines Clara Maugham is caught in a rhetoric of emotions on her first visit to the Denhams. She cannot help contrasting her own situation to Clelia's. Not only does the room evoke her impoverished childhood but happy as she is at the moment she is also "sad in advance" for she knows that in times to come she will remember it all with deep nostalgia. Aware that she "was creating for herself a past" (JG 93), she can be seen struggling with the guilt of having left behind the dull, unfertile ground of her childhood. The room creates a specific interior within which the character's consciousness questions the nature of her fragmented self:

... one of the most charming features of Clelia's room was its sense of prolonged nursery associations. The childhood objects were not only lovely in themselves, they were a link with some past and pleasantly remembered time, a time not violently shrugged off and rejected, but a time to be lived with, in happy recollection, a time which could well bear remembering (JG 92).

Left with nothing but remorse for her family, Clara enters the world of the Denhams and is thrilled with what she sees. Their "garden seemed to have no walls, so thoroughly were its boundaries screened and disguised" (JG 106). Amidst this contrast is her life which she regarded as that of "a plant trying to root itself upon the solid rock, without water, without earth, without shade" (JG 26)... And it is only a small consolation to her that her mother, the woman who had lived such an insignificant life, had actually nurtured poetic interests before marriage. Jerusalem the Golden is a novel of escape. Unlike her mother, Clara escapes to the world of glamour and possibility.

Seemingly there is a continuity in women's desire to escape from their childhood. The unsuccessful mother-daughter relationship encourages withdrawal from the past. By continually focusing on the landscape of the past Drabble demonstrates that it is impossible for her women to shed the past and be totally rootless. For women who carry the past with themselves, the only possible move in the circumstances is to accept and reconcile. Its influence is not purely social or psychological but it also has a certain moral influence. It is through their landscape that one becomes acquainted with the women's inner world.

It is a vital key to human understanding. Several of her later books focus on the "return journey" made by the successful twentieth-century women "of our times". Choosing to retreat to the landscape of their past, they call attention to their desire to establish "a continuity between the shifting phases of our life" (LL 270). In the process is a recognition that a loss of place has become a loss of a part of themselves. An attempt is made to recreate

their personal history. The retreat is not always an act of choice but of compulsion. By putting the landscape of the past in contrast with that of the present Drabble is also questioning the validity of our memories. Is the remembered landscape different from the existing landscape? And if so what constitutes this difference? While one surrounds us the other has to be looked back on in time. And to represent it Drabble uses the language of nostalgia, deep regret and partial loss. Remembering reinforces the desire not to forget and also to retain links with those few shreds of one's history, both happy and sad. Simultaneously it becomes an obligation and a tribute, a pleasure and an escape, a loss and a retrieval. Thus the return journey is an ambiguous feature of her women's lives. Journeying backwards is a profound experience for most of her women as it enables them to put their lives in perspective.

Unlike Wordsworth, whom she sees as being fortunate in his birth for "his subject matter lay around him in his infancy" (LL 147), Drabble views the modern situation as problematic, particularly for women. For her women there is no such Golden Age, as they make their long and tedious journey to the past, the landscape of childhood, the remembered landscape which culminates in a world of repression, guilt, unfounded fears, betrayals and drudgery. The Golden world if it ever was, has become distant and alien to the modern eye:

For most of the inhabitants of Britain, the Golden Age can never have seemed as remote as now (LL 270).

The Golden Age - an age of prosperity and pure bliss, an age of unfallen man, of primeval innocence - is for most writers a product not only of the long-distant past but also of their fantasy.

As a post-Freudian, Drabble acknowledges the influence of psychoanalysis on the twentieth century literary landscape. She acknowledges that there is an interior landscape which belongs to the world

of the subconscious; I shall come later to this in my discussion of The Waterfall. In this respect, landscape is, in its natural form, a bearer of "organic vision", and is often expressed "in terms of sexual imagery" (LL 129).

Through her middle years, the interest has shifted and Drabble has become increasingly conscious of the urban landscape inhabited by Britons. It is in her recent fiction that the interior remembered landscape transmutes into an outer, social one. Conscious of the economic and cultural forces that determine the face of landscape Drabble has metamorphosed her private vision into a public one. I propose to study this metamorphosis and whether or not Drabble's vision offers an impetus to women's struggle in late twentieth-century women's literature.

Although much of Drabble's fiction is city-based and her women are enthralled by the aura of Oxford and Cambridge and London, there is also an attempt to evoke the sylvan and the idyllic in the common sights of the city. She is sincerely inclined towards "the interesting in the dull, the beautiful in the squalid, the passionate in the daily" (B 104).

She tends to use outdoor activities as decisive modes of relaxation. Perhaps moments like a picnic in the garden, or a walk in the woods, or a visit to a distant place in the countryside become a technical necessity for the building up of a denouement. Or a significant attempt is made to create an atmosphere of self-rumination by focussing on the landscape and making it a part of one's immediate vision. A leap into the woods, the fresh and the open, sometimes enables her characters to encounter and peruse their hidden selves. Like Wordsworth Drabble is striving to connect nature "with man's thought processes and moral being" (LL 151). Like Wordsworth she views the natural world "as a vital formative influence on man" (LL 152).

Lastly what is of significance in Drabble is the return journey from the South to the North. Like Thompson, Bennett, Lawrence and many others Drabble too has moved from the landscape of childhood, in this case from Sheffield to London:

a London swarming with crime and commerce, busy, crowded, half its life submerged literally underground, full of the most extraordinary contrasts and eccentricities (LL 213).

Like the characters in Dickens who feel "intense exhilaration... at the infinite variety of the London scene" (LL 213), women in Drabble secretly nurture this desire to escape to the much longed-for South. The North is pitted against the possible openings presented by the South. While one is identified as a "very image of unfertile ground" (the fictitious city of Northam in IG 27), the other with its "Bond 'street world [is] compelling, irresistible, uniting" (IG 112).

But lately, a London, with littered streets, ugly buildings, and crowded underground has received much criticism from her. She is equally critical of the appalling conditions in which people survive in working-class areas, the felling of trees and the gross commercial attitude of the capital. The changing face of landscape is partially responsible for the growing lassitude and a feeling of indifference among the masses. It is not that Drabble does not care for city life. She does love London with its art and aesthetics, Tate Galleries and British Museums. What she is repudiating is the concentration of population in and around London. She is conscious of the decline in London life and unlike her early heroine Emma, in The Garrick Year, is indeed aware that it leaves no "room for the placeless" (GY 121).

In her portrayal of the urban landscape Drabble has charted out the landscape of transition. In her later works one sees her becoming increasingly conscious of the possibilities of change in the Northern

landscape. For instance, when Liz makes her return journey she is surprised to see her Northam shining "below them in the darkening afternoon light" (RW 305).

It is not just any landscape that she is confronted with but "A curiously evocative landscape," (RW 306), and the North despite its low, grim topography contains patches of verdure. Drabble is critical but not unsympathetic to the landscape of the North. Situating her in a similar position to Lawrence and Bennett, one can very well argue that like them Drabble has retained her nostalgia for the past:

Both turned their backs on the districts that nourished them, yet both commemorate them in novels inspired by a mingled love and hatred (LL 217).

Remembering in literature compensates for leaving. It serves to substitute for physical absence. It is as Lowenthal says:

Those who sunder home ties often furnish new landscapes with replicas of scenes left behind (Lowenthal, 1985: 42).

This mingling of "love and hatred" is what makes the Drabblesque landscape so "curiously evocative" and challenging to the modern reader. Despite her critical eye Drabble does not claim to be a reformer; she is an observer. Her novels are full of possibilities and it is in these possibilities that she sees a solution to her women's predicament. None of these possibilities are presented as definite truths or final solutions but they are posed as choices. The choices that one makes are not always within one's control. And this is what makes her sympathetic to the thought of determinism:

I don't believe that this material world is all. I can't bring myself to think that that's even a sensible way of looking at things. And I'm not a total determinist either. I'm an almost total determinist, but there's a small area where grace operates, and prayer and will operate (Creighton, in Schmidt, 1982: 29).

Grace and prayer and will, the three signs of quasi-divine and quasi-human endeavour and relationship to God, express in themselves human acceptance of the illimitable. Landscape in Drabble encompasses this vision and seeks to relate it. Each one of her books is like a reflection of this vision. But what is more remarkable about them is a sense of "an open-endedness". From the enclosed world of Jane Eyre, who craved for distant lands and wished to explore new horizons, the modern heroine has made a significant voyage outwards and in the process has been able to fulfil her desire for "seeing":

The more you travel, the more sense you have of the complexity of the world, and some of what you see is real (Hannay, 1987: 136).

In her later novels Drabble has shown remarkable concern for global issues. Her later landscapes are intensely globalized and so is her vision of the world.

Drabble's moving away from the particular to the general, is not an attempt to exclude herself from issues concerning women but is a reification of the woman's world. And for this purpose landscape itself becomes a potent symbol of reification. Not only is her landscape resonant with the inner voices of women but it also transgresses the boundaries laid down for them and opens a new chapter in British literary history.

Chapter Three

The Waterfall: A landscape of desire:

I have always believed that a passion adequately strong could wrench a whole nature from its course, and that all the romantic accoutrements of torn skies, uprooted trees, gaping earth and white torrential waters, would follow meekly such a natural disaster (W 228).

In this chapter I wish to look at the depiction of romantic love in The Waterfall. Simone de Beauvoir reflects that woman's "otherly" position, that is, her status as the other in society is primarily a constructed notion and has been correlated to the myth of romantic love. It is in romantic love that a woman seeks to build a landscape of desire. She is ready to enter this landscape with little hesitation and having entered she desires neither freedom nor separation: "Only in love can woman harmoniously reconcile her eroticism and her narcissism" (de Beauvoir, 1975: 657).

For a "woman in love" the sole objective is to merge her identity with that of her beloved and this she does by complete submission. Her love is tinged with mysticism. She derives pleasure in the thought of submersion:

... with closed eyes anonymous, lost, she feels as if borne by waves, swept away in a storm, shrouded in darkness: darkness of the flesh, of the womb, of the grave (de Beauvoir, 1975: 658).

She concedes that love alone brings the promise of salvation to the woman in love:

... she no longer sinks in a sea of shadows, but is borne up on wings, exalted to the skies... When she *receives* her beloved, woman is dwelt in, visited, as was the Virgin by the Holy Ghost, as is the believer by the Host (de Beauvoir, 1975: 659).

In The Waterfall, Jane Gray writes her story of passion and survival. She looks at love, a "natural disaster", in a serio-comic manner. Love is marked with upheavals and remarkable changes in Jane. At the beginning of the novel we see her alone in childbirth, in a "cold empty house" (W 8), unwilling to set herself up "against fate" (W 7). It appears from her account that marriage to Malcolm failed to fill the internal void and she, like a "lonely virgin in her parsonage" (W 84), welcomes James, "the Holy Ghost". And it is "through him nothingness becomes fullness of being, and being is transmuted into worth" (de Beauvoir, 1975: 659). At the end of her story Jane Gray asserts that love has changed her. She acknowledges: "James changed me beyond recognition" (W 228). She is delighted that she, who had been "a disaster area", has now blossomed into a "new landscape" created by love and desire (W 228, 229).

The novel is set against the background of formulaic conventions of romantic love. Nineteenth century novels by

^{women} provide a constant parallel to the modern romance and Margaret Drabble gives an ironic twist to the classic plot in her story. Unlike the medieval concept of courtly love, the romance plot was treated with a genteel ambiguity in the nineteenth century romances. It worked towards respectability, aimed for marriage. Where it did not succeed it ended in death. And Drabble subverts the aim and the conclusion of the romance plot. The Waterfall does not aim for marriage nor does it end in death. It ends in self-awakening of the female protagonist. As a strategic discourse it becomes a restructuring of male sexuality and sexual relations in female terms. Woman does not remain an attendant, nor a passive recipient in the story. She manoeuvres the course of ^{the} romance plot with self-awareness and playful open-endedness.

Published in 1969, The Waterfall echoes some of the values of its time. The common catchphrase of the sixties - "You've never had it so good" - signified a dramatic change in the perceptions of the people. After the post-war austerity, Britain entered a period of golden optimism; marked with an increasing prosperity, the rapidly growing middle class foretold a change in attitude. Larkin concedes the sixties as a period of drastic change:

... And every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game.

So life was never better than
In nineteen sixty-three (Larkin, 1974: 34).

Drabble is aware that in an atmosphere of sexual and social liberation romantic love too would have to be treated differently. Unlike nineteenth-century romances like Jane Eyre or Villette or even perhaps The Mill on the Floss, Drabble's The Waterfall begins with child-birth and her heroine is neither unmarried nor a virgin. For a late twentieth-century woman, childbirth is not a restriction, it does not call for a closure but opens "new courses" and furnishes the traditional romance plot with an unconventional perspective.

In the opening chapter an underwater world is reconstructed and here Jane Gray waits like a "victim". What we see emerging, then, is not merely a darkness into light, not just a birth of a child but a landscape of desire, of birth and of love. The warmth ensuing from childbirth is in sharp contrast to the snow outside. Inside she could "feel the blood flowing from her into the white moist sheets" (W 9). From a state of absolute nothingness which is probably marked with a desire for salvation, the birth of her baby brings with it a prospect of equanimity:

The colours of the scene affected Jane profoundly: they were the violent colours of birth, but they were resolved into silence, into a kind of harmony (W 10).

Outside is the external landscape, from which Jane is excluded by her confinement. She can only see it through "the uncurtained window" (W 9). The falling of the snow is not just an externally visible phenomenon but is symptomatic of the change in Jane Gray's life. It is the blank surface on which her new future will be written. It corresponds with the landscape of birth. The woman's body which had waited in "suspension" (W 9) is surprisingly calm after delivery. The "cold and empty house" (W 8) wherein she lies "empty, solitary, neglected, cold" (W 8) is in effect, an explicit mirror of her inward self. The bloodied sheets and the "warm and sodden" newspaper create another visible landscape within the confines of the room. The blue walls, the red glowing fire, the white towels, a yellow pudding bowl, and the sight of the dozing black mid-wife, seemingly create an interior landscape of colour, life and maternity, which subsequently brings the "victim" out of her self-imposed exile. And in it the figure of Jane Gray becomes both a participant and an observer. We shall see that the red and white and blue colours of birth are adequately colours of passion and reprieve in The Waterfall and it is in this atmosphere that Jane Gray commits herself to "waiting" (W 37). And it is these female colours of birth that seduce James, invoke in him a desire for Jane. From a loveless state of being she is transposed into a world of harmony and happiness. In other words, the drowning protagonist however "unwilling" to save herself, realizes after delivery that she is intact and whole and desired. "This close heat would surely generate its own salvation" (W 10). What had earlier been a state of indifference is now marked with a state of expectation. The change in her physical circumstances herald a change in her mental attitude. There follows a close connection between the release of the baby and that of the emotions.

The opening of Jane Eyre reveals some striking similarities to The Waterfall. The "cold winter wind" and the "penetrating" rain outside is in

sharp correlation to the world inside where "the chidings of Bessie" and the sharp penetrating glances of her three cousins make Jane as much a loner as Jane Gray in labour. In one of her stormy encounters with aunt Reed she is accused of being "passionate". Unloved and isolated, the orphan Jane Eyre receives warmth as an adult in Rochester's house. She waits for affection, for love and is rewarded with it only at the end of the novel.

In the nineteenth-century portrayal of romantic love in George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, one reads landscape as a major connecting device between the heroine's outer and inner worlds. It is for them an expression of moods and anxieties, of pleasures lost and repressed. Drabble asserts how after having been "exiled from the landscapes of her youth" (LL 83), Eliot attempted to enact and exorcize her relationship with her estranged brother Isaac: "... the tragic drama of The Mill on the Floss, gathers around remembered places" (LL 83). The Red Deeps and Maggie's "kinship with the grand scotch firs" represents the woman's desire to connect herself with what is prohibited. Ellen Moers points out that:

Guilty pleasure and renunciation are two of the themes with which female writers set off the landscape of female self-indulgence; others are ecstasy, even of a mystical nature; and freedom, and independent assertion, and fear (Moers, 1986: 254).

Maggie's fascination for the Red Deeps and her self-consuming guilt over pleasure forms the very texture of the novel. She is so filled with ideas of renunciation that she fails to respond to her own desires and needs. Instead of saying "yes" to temptations, she prefers to die. Maggie has wanted to retain her fascination for the world of innocent childhood and thus she aspires towards the company and love of her family. In order to be accepted by them she forces herself into self-denial. Maggie's story highlights a woman's failure to adjust in a world of mature passions. The Mill on the Floss uses landscape

as a trope for feminine desire. Neither love nor friendship can save Maggie Tulliver. What saves her from becoming an anti-heroine is her death. She is redeemed by her death. It is this situation that is viewed rather mockingly by Jane Gray in The Waterfall:

She drifted off down the river with him, abandoning herself to the water, but in the end she lost him. She let him go... It gets us in the end: sticks, twigs, dry leaves, paper cartons, cigarette ends, orange peel, flower petals, silver fishes. 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 (W 153).

To Jane Gray, Maggie's "no" is least satisfying. Jane Gray, the twentieth-century woman, believes there is less gained and much lost if one refrains from one's most urgent passions and desires. In writing her own story she is conscious that:

We drown in the first chapter. I worry about the sexual doom of womanhood, its sad inheritance (W 153-154).

Drabble parallels the Victorian situation with that of the twentieth century. Maggie suffers actual death by drowning. In an age of moral prudery Eliot's heroine has no choice but to die. Death alone can save her from further humiliation. Drabble's Jane Gray suggests that the twentieth-century woman has no such compunctions; although she does not suffer physical death, being a woman she is unable to avoid "the sexual doom" which is perhaps manifested in her desire for sexual salvation. The modern woman gives way to Eros and drowns in the first chapter. Desire carries a legacy of "sad inheritance" (W 154). It is exacting. Being a woman one ends up inheriting "thrombosis or neurosis" (W 239). But she is able to comfort herself with the little she has gained by loving, by experiencing sexual gratification (which was unacknowledged by the Victorian heroine). And then she acknowledges her concern:

How can love preserve itself in death?... What do the dead care for fidelity? It is the living who need to keep it, for their own sake, for the dignity of their passion, for the lost value of what they risked for it (W 201).

Conscious of the temporality of romantic passion Drabble's Jane feels that she is no longer compelled to follow the fate of her literary sisters. Guilt does not force her to renounce her passion like Maggie Tulliver. Unlike Charlotte Brontë, who uses the external landscape imagery to accommodate her violent and intrusive emotions, we see the body itself becoming a landscape of desire in The Waterfall. Desire for love is symptomatic of a desire for selfhood in this case. It is passion that changes her "beyond recognition" (W 228). Sexual fulfilment requires an object to be desired and it is James' love that can fill this void in Jane. He is an object with multiple functions. In him, Jane sees not only her protector but also her lover, mother, child and her saviour.

The depiction of the body as landscape corroborates the cycle of change, and cannot be comprehended in isolation. As a landscape of desire, the body is subject to upheavals, convulsions, guilt and passions. In Jane Gray, it wrenches and tears, splits and wears and at the close of the novel subsides into a desire to set "her own house in order" (W 225). Once the body, as a parched landscape, desiring love and fulfilment, ceases to preoccupy the central protagonist, she directs her focus outwards. She takes charge of the social world.

Like Jane Eyre, the protagonist Jane Gray uses her creative energy. One expresses herself in painting, the other in poetry and fiction. The drawings of Jane Eyre are the most intense expression of her repressed self. The "spiritual eye" (JE 126) is aware of the split between her inner and outer world. Faced with rejection at the hands of the outside world, she can derive an inner strength and "one of the keenest pleasures" (JE 127) in drawing. The natural imagery of "the swollen sea", the "strange sea birds"

and hair like "a beamless cloud torn by storm or by electric travail" (JE 126) are all significant signs of her longing for autonomy. Her inner restlessness and agony, her desire for love and friendship can find no outlet but in her "elfish", "peculiar" and "solemn" (JE 127) drawings. Tormented by fear of loneliness and unrequited love she restructures "the spiritual eye" (JE 126) and is able to maintain her outward calm and sanity. Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre refuses to enter into bigamy . . . and accepts . . . Rochester only after he is widowed. Before making her fall into a confirmed social order Charlotte Brontë reverses the balance of that order. Power, both physical and economic, is transferred into the hands of its female protagonist. Rochester both blind and maimed, however, is the one who pays the price for love while Jane without losing her femininity becomes his caretaker. If romantic love is about transcendence, then Jane Eyre is certainly about transcendence both at a spiritual and socio-economic level.

The Jane Eyre story does not, however, end with Charlotte Brontë. Its versions are being repeated and restructured in twentieth-century fiction. Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca is one such rewriting. Unlike the hero Maxim, its heroine is inconspicuous and single. She is without a name. And the rival woman is portrayed as vicious and mad like Rochester's Bertha. Without going into detail I simply wish to point out that the twentieth-century romance story retains the "classic" romance structure, and at the same time outweighs the "classic" structure by repeatedly readjusting power relations.

The Waterfall does not have a "neat" or "a feminine ending" like Jane Eyre. It does not end in the marriage of the two lovers. Conscious of the fate of Jane Eyre, Jane Gray deliberately chooses a different ending. She sees a possibility of death, or that of a permanent handicap, but is neither attracted

nor compelled to live it. She chooses transcendence not at the cost of physical well-being but on her own terms. She dwells on the possibility:

Or I could have maimed James so badly, in this narrative, that I would have been allowed to have him, as Jane Eyre had her blinded Rochester. But I hadn't the heart to do it, I loved him too much (W 231).

Her fate was different and "Nothing like what Jane Eyre had to put up with" (W 231). James recovers from his accident and in the ambiguous interplay of narrative Jane Gray admits that her love would not let him be "maimed" or "blinded". She would have him whole. Unlike the classic romance story Jane Eyre, the lover is saved from being handicapped in The Waterfall. But a price is to be paid and in the words of Jane Gray: "The price of his restoration was his loss" (W 223). As we read the story of Jane's love we are led to believe that love despite its not so "neat" ending does follow a "text book pattern of relationship" (W 232), that is, it derives strength from its predecessor romance plots.

As suggested earlier, the female body, as in a text, maps out a landscape of desire and establishes on its own terms a unique "pattern of relationship" (W 232) in The Waterfall. Conscious that it is impossible to write a conventional romance in the present times where love itself has become a commodity, Drabble chooses to defy it with comic deception. Conscious of living in an age where romantic love has disseminated into popular fiction Drabble has no intention of treating it as tragic. She is playing with the idea of liebestod. Unlike the classic romance Jane Gray's story does not end in tragic disrepute. Perhaps she is aware that the dull, monotonous reality of her everyday existence can be made bearable in writing. Writing the romance gives life a flavour and a meaning, and it not only saves her from receding into unimaginable despair, but the imagination of her mind, nourishes and nurtures her back to normal life.

By being able to write her fantasy Jane Gray is able to absolve herself from silence and suffering, from isolation and emptiness. It is the fantastic that enables her to restore her physical and mental health. It provides her with a new lease of life and through it she is able to recognize herself. It is the fantastic that appeals to Jane the story-teller. Further, Jane Gray not only justifies her plunge into adultery but sees it as a "necessity".

E.C. Rose reads it not as a passionate love story but as "a novel about how to 'tell' that affair". She sees Jane Gray as "a woman struggling... to find a voice with which to speak her own experience" (Rose, 1988: 88). From

being the figure in a landscape she writes and creates a landscape of her dreams, she becomes a writer of landscape. And in doing so Drabble has managed to subvert the dominant "classic" discourse:

She assaults patriarchal thinking on the most fundamental terms, in the domain of discourse, by suggesting that the word does not have power - over, that language is powerless to control or meaningfully to structure reality (Rose, 1988: 88).

The Waterfall is not only about love but also about being in love. It is not only about having an affair but is also a "writing" of that passion. Using Angela Leighton's expression, Jane Gray, the novelist and the poet, prefers "not waiting but writing" (Leighton: 1989: 1). She not only imagines but creates. She lives her affair in writing. "But instead, I wrote about love" (W 227). And in doing so she becomes a woman who "write(s) herself" (Cixous, 1976: 875). It could be argued that romantic love is not without its object in The Waterfall. But it is increasingly difficult to assess the desired goal, for it is certainly not marriage, it could however be "writing". It further explores the dilemma of a modern writer. Drabble's Jane Gray joins the debate on romantic love. Does one give in completely to the obsessive passion or stay away from it and live with it as a construct of the mind? As in Villette where the ambiguous ending of the text is inexplicit about Lucy's

position, Jane Gray too fluctuates between the various ^{possible} endings. She finally decides to let things move in a positive direction. For her love is not an end in itself, she makes it permanent by shifting it to the world of poems in print. Written word takes precedence over felt emotion. Drabble's pragmatic approach to life leaves The Waterfall with its unorthodox ending, that is, without a closing. She, in the words of Lorna Irvine, is "for affirmation rather than denial, for continuance rather than ending" (Irvine, in E.C.Rose, 1985: 74).

The Waterfall is suggestive of a change in feminine subject position. Lost in a land of childhood, Jane analyses her past and her unsatisfying relationship to her parents. It was:

a land of ha-has and the fake one dimensional uncrossable bridges and artificial unseasonal blooms: a landscape civilized out of its natural shape (W 57).

Unable to accept and identify with the false landscape of her childhood Jane becomes an embodiment of self-deception. She is adept at masking her real self:

... I felt all the time afraid that any word of mine, any movement, my mere existence, might shatter them all into fragments (W 50-51).

As a child Jane had succumbed to silence while her heart craved to speak. Unable to release her aggressive eroticism in early years, Jane continues to hold on to her repressed desires. Marriage to Malcolm forces her into deep closure and pushes her to the world of "waiting". What is ironical is that Jane reviews her own situation and concludes that her need for James was borne out of "necessity". She was offered a loan which she accepted without shame or regret:

I accepted it, being more interested in possession than in the terms of possession (W 219).

She simply accepted the loan without counting, weighing, judging or questioning the terms involved in such a transaction. Seemingly the tenancy of love is without a bargain. It is by mutual consent.

The feminization of its ^{protagonist} male _{his} is perceived as one of the chief features of the novel. The male lover becomes feminized and seeks to fulfil the infantile longing for nurturance in Jane Gray. The birth of the baby and the falling of the snow prepare the ground for the woman's deliverance. While James' entry into the maternal realm ensures that no such censorship is required for romance to flourish in modern times, in fact it flourishes in the most unlikely landscapes. It chooses to be different. In this case it is promoted in the "most dangerous of places" (W 44), it is the bed where the woman is lying all covered in blood, in sweat and milk after the birth of the baby. Cut off from the outside world by snow and her situation, Jane Gray experiences multiple orgasm through the sexual juices (blood and milk), the amniotic fluid flowing through her body. One of the most striking aspect of their relationship is that James not only becomes her saviour but claims to be saved by her:

"I'd have died," he said, "I'd have died if you'd told me I had to go and sleep in that child's bed, by myself. I wanted to be here so much" (W 35).

He has entered the predominantly female enclave and under his care she becomes more herself. The self itself becomes a landscape prone to changes both personal and historical. By looking after her, the mother in childbirth, James not only becomes her protector but also defies the male order by mothering her. He becomes her mother. As a critique of motherhood The Waterfall explores a different terrain. In her account of Object Relations theory Chodorow claims that much of one's sexuality is structured in the

formative years of childhood. In a child "Internalization is mediated by fantasy and by conflict" (Chodorow, 1978: 50).

Living in a "multiple object world" (Chodorow, 1978: 51) where the world of psyche is deeply under the influence of forces outside oneself, the person develops and begins to recreate new meanings:

All people are partly preoccupied with internal experience and mental life, partly live their past in the present (Chodorow, 1978: 51).

Preoccupation with one's past can both be a hindrance or a source of enrichment in interpersonal relations. In Jane Gray, the process of growth is surprisingly delayed. Possibly, she had failed to experience a lasting symbiosis in infancy and this desire remained latent in her even though she had become a mother. Without surprise, she continues to be a child of the imaginary. Romantic love alone can save her from lasting infancy. Being in love is a return to the womb. Before she can become a fully mature and integrated mother she needs to be reborn herself. Jane needs to go back into the maternal element and paradoxically James provides her with such a recovery. Romantic love moves her to the world of personal and social obligations, where as an adult she learns to accept division, fragmentation, responsibility and is reconciled to childhood. The sinking, drowning, dying drive gives way to the living instinct in her. Peculiarly so, romantic love in Jane Gray's case does not precede death. Like a newborn infant who is "totally dependent on parental care until it can develop adaptive capacities" (Chodorow, 1978: 58), Jane Gray too becomes James' child. In childbirth "she committed herself to waiting" (W 37).

"You're my prisoner, here, in *this bed*," he said, "but if you're good and wait quietly, I'll look after you, I'll bring you meals, and books to read, and cups of tea" (W 37). (emphasis mine)

"This bed" alone can fulfil James' desire for sexual love. It is "this bed" where he hopes to imprison her and then have her. The bed becomes an interesting mediator between the two characters. It serves to bring them together. And one recognizes in James' assertion not only a desire to serve but be rewarded in love. He is struck by the beauty of the maternal body:

"It's so lovely here, it's like heaven in this room... I couldn't stay away, all the time I wasn't here I was thinking of you and of how warm it must be in that bed, and of how near I could be if you would let me, of how you might even let me touch you ... when I sat there in that chair, the first time, and watched you fall asleep, I felt - I don't know, I felt as though you were mine" (W 36).

In James' announcement is a note of urgency marked with a desire to possess, to make her his. He provides her with maternal care and in the process wishes to bridge all distances between him and her. He too is the infant who wishes to be reborn. There is, however, a reversal of roles here. It is James and not Jane who decides to be at the beck and call of the other. He is her caretaker. Once in bed with him Jane is astonished to see a thawing of her emotions. James has succeeded in relieving her from a state of indifference, salvaged her destiny. He has inspired in her a desire for sexual gratification: "That a desire so primitive could flow through her, unobstructed, like milk, astonished her" (W 45).

Using the female body as a metaphor of fruition and fulfilment Drabble charts out a landscape which is essentially feminine:

Who would have thought he would ever take such pains to make good in me the new courses, the new ways, the new landscapes? I spoke of violence and convulsions, but he made the new earth grow, he made it blossom (W 229).

One must not miss the emphasis on "new" and "made". These are the words of a woman whose discovery of love leaves her spell-bound. Romantic love not only enlivens the cold arid zones of her virgin mind but also opens up

"new courses" and makes "the new earth" blossom. It is the nature of desire itself that undergoes a rapid change and like a mother's milk flows "unobstructed". Struck with the force of her tumultuous desire the female body itself becomes a retinue of changes both physical and emotional.

Love becomes what de Rougement calls an experience of a lifetime that not only alters but also enriches "it with the unexpected... with enjoyment ever more violent and gratifying" (de Rougement, 1983: 282). For we also see Jane developing certain "adaptive capacities" (Chodorow, 1978: 58). At the end of the narrative one does not read her situation as that of a helpless infant. Having tasted love she is more relaxed, self-assured, and decides to settle herself amidst "shining paint work and well swept floors" (W 232). The desire for the romantic sublime and the return to the imaginary has been fulfilled, giving way to "new-found desires to see my poems in print" (W 232).

Romantic love - pre-social, pre-interpersonal, bisexual, narcissistic, a struggle between Eros and death - is, for a man, a return to his earliest self, a search for the self-completion that, on entering the world of being only a man, was taken from him. Male romantic love looks backwards, or if it looks forward, it looks only to death - which is itself a return to the inert from which we came... The romantic love of women looks forward, forward to marriage (Mitchell, 1984: 113-114).

James and Jane's story explodes this myth of romantic love. Like Jane Eyre, the female protagonist does not look forward to marriage nor does passion exist merely as an idea. Physical and emotional boundaries have been traversed in modern love. And it elicits a desire to look forward to life. She does look backward and writes about this romantic fallacy allowing her the comfort that by doing so she can purge herself from guilt and self-pity.

The visit to Goredale Scar and the sight of the waterfall establishes the terms of the narrative. The sexual imagery of the waterfall is

highly suggestive "a lovely organic balance of shapes and curves, a wildness contained within a bodily limit" (W 236),^{and} is juxtaposed with Jane's bodily experiences. The waterfall becomes a metaphor for continuity. It leads from somewhere to somewhere and is not an end in itself. And like it, romantic love pursues a similar course, refusing to remain still. Her desire is a wildness "within bodily limit" and the waterfall in flow is both Jane and her congress with James and her need to write. The natural waterfall with its "wildness" refuses to accept closure. Just as the waterfall leaping down from the rocks flows unrestricted and formulates its own "curves and shapes", romantic love desires to be free and looks forward to self-abandonment. Jane Gray having once traversed the enforced enclosure seeks "deliverance" like the waterfall. It could however be argued that she can do so only within bounds. She chooses to become "the object of the tale" (Mitchell, 1984: 114) and writes her own romance. The fact that she can write her affair intensifies the case that writing is a choice that enables her to understand the erotic nature of her subjectivity. She seems to understand that there is no point wallowing in self-pity or self-justification. It is interesting to hear her say "He changed me forever and I am now what he made" (W 229). We see next, that there is a price to be paid for Eros. However, the modern woman does not pay it in physical death as did Maggie of The Mill on the Floss. Jane develops a thrombotic clot and has to stop taking contraceptive pills.

Accident is the necessary impediment in the text. It strikes us as inevitable denouement and reveals "the futility of human effort against the power that holds us" (W 185). It is James' accident that saves Jane. Drabble finds fate and character irreconcilable and her novels attempt to draw "a balance between the two":

I also believe in the possibility of accident because anyone with any common sense must believe in accident. I suppose I'm trying to do what one has to do in life, to reconcile the

importance of fate, the destiny, the character, and the accidents that hit you on the way (Preussner, 1980: 567).

The sense of "possibility" is a significant feature in Drabble's fiction. Though confined within her women explore the nature of possibilities. Jane Gray has often been accused of being a failure, of not being able to save herself:

Drabble fails, however to make Jane's salvation through sexual passion compelling or convincing, let alone attractive. Jane remains almost pathologically helpless and cloyingly dependent on James (Korenman, 1980: 63).

This recalls Hardin's interview and Drabble's account of Jane as "feeble" - "the dottiest, the nearest to madness, of all the characters" (Hardin, 1973: 294,290). Joan Korenman sees Drabble as reaching an "impasse". What is intriguing to the reader is the fact that Jane understands the split in her personality. The imagery of the plant on her window-sill echoes the state of Jane's being, "leafless, withered, unwatered twig" with "faint green horseshoe scars on its brown stem that proved some hidden life" (W 41). The plant on the window-sill survives despite neglect. She resembles the neglected twig, and is disposed to live, to fight. Inertia is a temporary phase, for we are led to believe that Jane has not only overcome her impasse but having discovered "some hidden life" she strives to maintain it. It could also be argued that inertia is a necessary phase for her to be reborn.

As a poet, a novelist, a wife, a mother and also a lover she carries within her the divided core of feminine subjectivity. She lives in more than one world. She receives nurturance from more than one source. That is what makes her story so complex and poly-vocal. Her fate is as undecided as some of her Victorian sisters. Yet, she is unquestionably different from them. The Waterfall as a modern love story can also be read as an exercise in literary self-consciousness. It displays an overwhelming force of literary history. There is a constant underplaying of the plot, situations and names. Drabble is

paying tribute to the mother of the story, Charlotte Brontë. But love does not remain a wicked, inaccessible passion. Like Lucy Snowe, she has lived for long with the idea of romantic love in her mind; unlike Jane Eyre who seeks consummation in marriage Jane Gray cared not what she "lost in the future, so long as the present could be mine" (W 154). If death by drowning was Maggie Tulliver's fate then love in drowning (perhaps living in drowning) is Jane Gray's.

In The Waterfall, Drabble explores the landscape of desire through the recurring image of the water. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist and the writer Jane Gray seems to be confounded with the thought of death by drowning. As she listens to James she is:

hopelessly moved by his willing blind suicidal dive into such deep waters: the waters closed over their heads, and they lay there, submerged, the cold dry land of non-loving abandoned, out of sight, so suddenly and so completely out of sight (W 36-37).

James' proposal takes her by surprise. She knows that she would respond to his appeal for love, for she herself is much in need of it. The process of healing has started:

Ah, perfect love. For these reasons, was it, that I lay there, drowned was it, drowned or stranded, waiting for him, waiting to die and drown there, in the oceans of our flowing bodies, in the white sea of that strange familiar bed (W 67).

Once again, the natural imagery of the "sea" structures the nature of sexual passion. It emphasises the link between life and death. We notice further, that the protagonist and writer is equally conscious of the symbol of body as landscape prone to disaster and how it differs from a natural disaster. Passion is equated with violence, with destruction. But unlike the destruction of the world which can be ascribed to outside forces

and influences, to a universe which is "hostile, ill-ordered", human bodies cannot choose forces outside themselves: "The violence is us: is me" (W 152).

The meaningless violence of the world - the Lisbon earthquake, the Titanic, Aberfan - ... but at least these disasters are external, and can be ascribed to a hostile, ill-ordered universe: not so the violence of our own bodies, as unwilled, as fore-ordained, as the sliding of mountains, the uprooting of trees, the tidal waves of the sea (W 152).

She takes the blame on herself. It is she and James who have willed such a disaster. They had waited. They had desired and longed for it. And yet, as we see her assessing her situation, her story, our own understanding of it gets more and more complex. For is it not Jane who claims that her entry into the landscape of desire alone could have saved her? She deemed it a necessity. Desperate as she was, she "had not cared who should drown, so long as I [she] should reach the land (W 152). The fluidity and the incommensurability of the sea is in contrast with the solid assurance and the safety of the land. One enriches the body, the other protects the mind. One provides sustenance, the other imagination. If one is foreign, the other is familiar. In addition, the return to the land is seen by the protagonist as a sign of resurrection. Only drowning woman can hope for resurrection. She has to undergo the overwhelming experience of death by drowning to be able to appreciate the moment of salvation:

... James and I, parched and starving: and we saw love 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. Like deluded travellers we had carefully approached, hardly able to trust the image's persistence, afraid that it would fade into yet more dry acres as we drew nearer: believing ourselves blinded by our own desires: but when we got there - when I got there... the image, remained, it sustained my possession of it, and the water that I drank, the so much longed for water, was sweet, not sour and brackish to the taste. Nor were the leaves green merely through the glamour of distance, through the contrast with the preceding waste: they remained green to the touch, dense, endless foresting boughs,

an undiscovered country, no shallow quickly-exhausted, quickly-drained sour well, but miles of verdure, rivers, fishes, coloured birds, miles with no sign of ending, and, perhaps, beyond them all, no ending but the illimitable, circular, inexhaustible sea (W 208-209).

This is a language steeped in desire. This is, after all, a landscape dealing with desire. The metaphor of the land becomes central to the metaphor of desire. It speaks of the figures in search of a landscape which would satisfy their "parched and starving" bodies. They have been offered a landscape of love and the interaction between love and desire is holistic and real. It is not a mirage. It exists. The water is, Jane Gray asserts, sweet and the sea inexhaustible. Beyond it lie patches of green, of life and living. In short, love that was seen as a "miraged oasis" is real as an experience. Love alone can save body from further disintegration.

Unlike the actual "sea" the literary-ness of passion can be explored. Its unboundedness and sublimity is both a face-saving device and an act of deliverance. "... I wrote about love" (W 227), says Jane Gray further complicating the task of the reader. Is it the love that she had experienced as a woman or endeavoured to create as a writer? Is she attempting to live her desire for love in writing? Is it simply "some Brussels of the mind"? The "dusty Victorian house, the fast car, the race tracks, the garages, the wide bed" suggest simultaneously the desired life, that is James, and the life which she can never have, for "it was some foreign country to me" (W 84), it was a life beyond her reach, since he is already married to her cousin and has children, and it can only be reached through writing. The "creation of the woman in love" is viewed as "an enterprise of heroinism" by Moers (Moers, 1986: 165). She argues that the "modern adultery novel has simply been a compelling vehicle for heroinism" (Moers, 1986: 155). Whatever Drabble's objective might be the writing of love is certainly more convincing than waiting. "Merely

waiting" would not have been a suitable recourse to salvation in Jane Gray's case. She looks at Charlotte Brontë:

Which was Charlottë Bronte's man, the one she created and wept for and longed for, or the poor curate that had her and killed her, her sexual measure, her sexual match (W 84)?

Drawing the personal from the fictional or vice-versa Jane Gray seeks to question and create "some Brussels of the mind" (W 84). Supposedly, in recreating the love of her life in Villette, Charlotte Brontë had managed to voice the experience of her mind. Brussels continues to reflect a yearning for love and fulfilment. Although Jane Gray tries to make her position clear (she asserts the success of her passion and possession of James) one is as unsure of her position as that of Charlotte Brontë. In reading The Waterfall, the tale of modern love, one is unable to pin-point which is Jane's man, the James she wept and longed to have an affair with, a perfect man and a perfect romance, or the ordinary James she met in the vicinity of her room? Is it the real James, her cousin Lucy's husband that she desired and had for herself, or is it the hero of her mind that she wished to fall for and created in fiction to salvage her mind, fulfil her desire of him? Is he as foreign and distant and unavailable to her as was Charlotte Brontë's hero of the mind, or the man she fell in love with in the city of Brussels? Or is he a mediation between the two, that is a literary go-between? It could be argued that The Waterfall is a mediation between real love and the consciousness of writing about love. Drabble problematizes the situation of being romantically caught up in love. The near death of James is suggestive of the image that is killed in the car crash. It brings with it a destruction of the fantasy.

In this landscape of desire, which is of her making, Jane Gray functions as a body and a mind, a woman and a writer. She is both the receiver and the received. And this is achieved through romantic love outside

marriage, outside convention. A dangerous yet a tempting proposition available to the modern woman in love. Like the game of cards whence:

the cards fell, in an amazing careful rhythm, interleaving, dovetailing, one by one, joining and melting as they fell into one pack (W 149).

The game of the cards is also known as the game of the waterfall. Its unpredictability is its charm and the success its reward. Modern romantic love is equated with the game and carries a similar sense of risk and challenge. It can either be a coup de grâce or a coup d'État. Explaining the intricate nature of this delicate game, James says to Jane "One can't take these risks too early in a relationship, you know" (W 149). But Jane and James take the plunge and surprisingly "It worked". The game of cards playfully suggests the erotic undertones of love. And with Jane one is left wondering whether love is love or simply a game? Using de Rougement's words does it consist of silence or speech? Is it that having once become a desire it becomes "the dialogue of bodies":

There are only two philosophies: that of the desire and that of the act... Desire makes us divine; the act makes us human (de Rougement, 1976: 41-42).

Desire and act are simultaneously represented as human and preserved as divine in "writing" in The Waterfall. If one is to look at it as a "Brussels of the mind where I trembled and sighed for my desires" (W 84), the story reveals an attempt by Jane Gray to recapitulate the experience of gratification in love through the narrative.

Repudiating de Rougement's concept of romantic love as purely mystical, Mitchell sees "narcissism and bisexuality" as erotic states. Drawing on Freud's ideas who later saw Eros and the death drive as contradictory to each other she sees Eros and death drive "intertwined" in romantic love:

Romantic love is about the self, it is erotic, but does not have a sexual object that it is ultimately different from itself (Mitchell, 1984: 111).

Romantic love accordingly is a desire for wholeness, completion. In the character of Jane Gray, Drabble perceives and articulates such a desire. Both Jane and James suffer from "internal incompleteness" (Mitchell, 1984: 112) and seek their lost halves in each other. "She was his offspring, as he, lying there between her legs, had been hers" (W 151).

Equally significant is the recovery once the "search for self" (Mitchell, 1984: 114) is over; Jane's discovery of love ends neither in bondage nor in conflict. Its apotheosis is neither death nor marriage. The state of sexual bliss has, in consequence, given way to "new-found desires to see my poems in print" (W 232). Apparently such a love has encouraged woman to recognize and accept her writerly position without creating a loss of individuality. It has enriched and inspired her.

If "to love is to live" then Jane Gray's passionate affair has certainly pulled her out of her enforced confinement and enabled her to welcome both poetry and children, cleanliness and a circle of literary friends into her orbit.

The shifting of the I/She voice creates a diffusion of tone in the course of the narrative. The "broken and fragmented piece" (W 46) is how Jane sees the entire event. "Lies, lies, it's all lies. A pack of lies" (W 84) says the first person. Jane Gray sees the telling of the story as an act of misrepresentation where the truth fails to appear on paper, it is beyond it. There are constant fluctuating tones: "And yet I haven't lied. I've merely omitted: merely, professionally, edited" (W 46).

We all know that we cannot take Jane at her word. The unreliable narrative voices have been deliberately used in the text to highlight the chasm between fiction and reality. Being a writer puts Jane at liberty to

add^{to} or subtract^{from} her own story. She edits, cuts down unnecessary details, and in the process subsumes the tragic bit of her story into the comic. Like "Scotch and dust" (W 238) that get mixed up in the dark of the hotel leaving an unpleasant taste in the mouth, Drabble's Jane (despite her denial of it) is aware that once the initial sexual euphoria is gone she will be haunted "by the grotesquely false position" (W 220), she is in:

Perhaps love can't survive a context: perhaps it dies if it admits the outside world, or crumbles to dust at the breath of coarser air. But that air is the real air... And yet love has a reality, a quotidian reality (W 84-85).

In her appraisal of love Jane Gray reaches an understanding of the emotion. The struggle between her desire for love and her acceptance of it has left her with an awareness that it is fragile. Love cannot last. And yet, she admits the experience of it is infused with something real. It might suffer at the hands of the outside world, but the creative imagination keeps it alive. The "Scotch and dust" (W 238) affair stresses the protagonist's "adaptive capacity" to laugh at her stupidities however painful and damaging they might be. Clever though she may be in masking her true feelings, Jane Gray reveals herself in slips and digressions. While the third-person narrative explains the course of romantic love that was hampered by rejection in childhood and physical violence in adulthood, the first person narrative appraises the entire situation with a detached propensity: "the feeling that nothing at all is expected of me: I am merely a woman, merely an attendant woman" (W 75).

Prominent among it is her frustration in marriage. In choosing to love and write about love Jane Gray makes it clear that she desires not to be an attendant. In love she is attended and does not attend. A contrast is visible in Jane Eyre. The use of the multiple narrative shows a

constant shift from "lyrical romanticism to caustic cynicism" (Creighton, 1985: 56).

Drabble's use of multiple voices triggers off a series of responses. On one hand Jane's affair can be read as a satiric comment on the whole of the sixties where sexual promiscuity stands for liberation. And on the other, it can be read as a "textbook pattern" (W 232) where love itself is a metaphor and a ploy in the hands of Jane Gray, a product of "middle class boredom" (W 114). To alleviate this condition it becomes necessary for Jane not only to cling to the idea of romantic love but also to give it a voice and a name, a plot and a story. It becomes a principal tour de force. Besides, is not "writing" in the words of Jane Gray "less destructible than the company of love" (W 217)? Having once established the literary-ness of the text The Waterfall appears to be an attempt to study romantic love in times of moral and sexual emancipation.

The literary-ness of the text is established through several textual and intertextual associations drawn by the two authors - Jane Gray and Margaret Drabble. In Villette Lucy Snowe's unsettling withdrawal into self is conditioned socio-historically. As suggested by Silver:

her subsequent presentation of herself as a shadow, as well as other characters' misreading of her nature and needs, mirrors her social reality (Silver, in Abel, 1983: 93-94).

Unlike Charlotte Brontë, Drabble is more keen on exposing "middle class boredom" (W 114). But she does not talk about the oppressive material conditions of middle-class women in love, in this case Jane Gray.

One might add, that what she says of Wordsworth could well be applied to Drabble's Jane Gray: "For him, the landscape is the message, and he himself is the landscape" (LL 148). The "leafless twig" had managed to survive amidst all odds. In its refusal to die it conveys the message of renewal and return and so does The Waterfall.

Looking at the use of first and third person narrative in The Waterfall, E. Fox-Genovese remarks:

The split between artistic self-consciousness and female self-consciousness mars the work as a whole... its pretentiousness makes it the least successful of Drabble's novels. Abstracting from its texture a description of its structure and purpose distorts the experience of reading it, but nonetheless affords a revealing perspective on Drabble's technique (Fox-Genovese, 1979: 244).

As an "artist in concealment and evasion [Jane Gray] had always believed that her passions, if revealed, would in some way scorch and blister and damage their object" (W 39). In this case James. She decides to protect her artistic image by talking about love in writing. As for the female image, Jane Gray struggles with it and reconciles herself to child-care. If one enables her to exploit her creative imagination at its best, the other leads her into the social world.

What seems striking is the way the landscape of the body which constitutes the female self-consciousness gets intertwined with "some Brussels of the mind" (W 84), where artistic self-consciousness prevails. The woman and the artist in her is aware of the complexity of the task and seeks to establish a relative code of action. The body becomes the reservoir of intense experiences, as in a natural disaster, it feeds on its own "accoutrements". The mind of the artist with its penetrating gaze sees beyond the eye and strives to create romantic sublime. While the woman experiences, the writer feels, the female waits and the writer writes - a duality is established through the multiple narrative. It not only exposes the split consciousness but also confronts it with an irony based on the knowledge of literary history.

Comparing literature to other discourses Spivak argues:

Whereas in other kinds of discourses there is a move towards the final truth of a situation, literature, even within this argument, displays that the truth of a human situation is the

itinerary of not being able to find it. In the general discourse of the humanities, there is a sort of search for solutions, whereas in literary discourse there is a playing out of the problem as the solution, if you like (Spivak, 1988: 77).

It is in this context that one reads The Waterfall as "the playing out of the problem". Following Spivak, I agree that Drabble writes within a "class bound" situation but does manage to fill "the void of the female consciousness with meticulous and helpful articulation" (Spivak, 1988: 89). She makes up for this absence by taking into account other aspects of the problem:

She engages in the microstructural dystopia, the sexual situation in extremis, that begins to seem more and more a part of women's fiction (Spivak, 1988: 89).

The "micro-macro opposition" is understood with its varied limitations and Drabble's narrative is plotted within this category.

Chapter Four

The Needle's Eye: A landscape of convictions

All this you see, I created it for myself. Stone by stone and step by step. I carved it out, I created it by faith, I believed in it, and then very slowly, it began to exist. And now it exists. It's like God. It requires faith (NE 44).

Margaret Drabble wrote The Needle's Eye in a period of great moral and social change. Published in 1972, the novel explores some of the major concerns of the nineteen sixties. In The Waterfall the desire for sexual fulfilment is set against the background of enclosed landscapes, that is within the intimate contours of the bed-room, hotel room, hospital ward and the confines of a Maserati saloon. The Needle's Eye serves to explore the heroine's bid to situate herself in a landscape of moral convictions. This chapter will also argue that The Needle's Eye expresses Drabble's interest in locating a wider series of metaphors with an emphasis on more broadly-based themes. The novel explores a developing pattern in relation to women and their approach to landscape and establishes itself as a centre of mediation between the early Drabble who was keen on the domestic interior and her growing interest in the objective and so called social landscape. It is also a novel devoted to the question of faith in modern times. It is set against the background of the swinging sixties when various music groups had not only become the representative of the suppressed and the disenfranchised but voiced their revulsion against consumerism. In their protest songs various bands:

... continually and creatively describe evils without suggesting solutions. The stress is on the recognition rather than the eradication of social injustice (Rodnitzky, 1971: 16).

A brief reading of the cultural and the social history of the sixties and its impact on youth shows that artists like Bob Dylan had become the messiah of the youth:

... young people all over the world knew that what he was saying was right and that he was... a leader in the fight. The Beatles knew it and their songs changed from boy-girl situations to such things as their anti-bureaucratic "Nowhere Man" and their "Eleanor Rigby" - a desperate plea on behalf of the lonely... During this period, ideas were pouring thick and fast into the vat of pop music. Musicians were experimenting with music, with concepts, with life styles. The listeners, who were experimenting also, followed their leaders through these changes and felt closer to them as a result (Peel, 1970: 804-806).

In this age of experimentation ideas poured into the cultural mainstream. Cultural innovation was taking place at least among the university campus population. Students had seemingly become more conscious of racial and colour prejudices, of a third world seeped in poverty, of the threat of nuclear annihilation and of the war raging against Vietnam. Technology had brought news to the door step. In this age of pamphlets and demonstrations students became involved in political and social battles. Singers like Phil Ochs and ^{Woodie} Guthrie had joined the struggle with a true revivalist's faith:

... the protest-song movement is a heartening phenomenon, symptomatic of a dramatic change in the social awareness of the younger generation (Rodnitzky, 1971: 21).

Though no answers were provided Ochs insisted "that the reward of struggle is not what you win, but the struggle itself" (Rodnitzky, 1971: 21). Hence, one can argue that the struggle against old and obsolete values had become one of the many concerns of the likes of Rose, as in The Needle's Eye. Drabble's landscape focuses on the heroine's bid to fight against the consumerist values of her elitist society. It is also an attempt to recreate a landscape of faith and personal convictions in an age of religious and spiritual bankruptcy.

The Sixties made Britain conscious of its loss of status as an Empire. It also signified dramatic change in the lives of women. Widespread socio-economic changes created a deeper need for self-recognition, especially in women. At home, with the rise in technology the levels of consumption increased rapidly. The age of affluence brought greater freedom both at home and at work.

The introduction of the contraceptive pill was a remarkable watershed in the history of women's emancipation. Drabble too is increasingly aware of the changes in the women's lives. The use of washing machines and refrigerators made women's double lives more possible than hitherto. A woman could now pursue a career and run a household. Linked with this change in the social scene is the argument that household gadgets had on one hand made house work easier for women and on the other it suggested that the woman's burden had doubled in the consumer conscious society. Expectations increased, for not only was she the chief carer at home but she now shared the living expenses (See Appendix A).

Amidst all this call for change and social equality, the housing provided for the working-class people remained cloistered, unattractive and shabby, the nouveau riche were now moving towards the spacious countryside and the prosperous interiors of London. In this age of great social concern and cultural enthusiasm the disparities between the haves and the have-nots were no less significant. Moreover, disillusioned with religion the youth continued to search for alternatives. The Beatles with their popular "money can't buy me love" voiced the desire for something beyond and above the material:

That young people erupted into hostility to existing forms of government in 1968 was no accident. The years from 1963 had been above all, years when new styles, new trends and new faces occupied the public consciousness... There was a decisive

shift to a more secular, permissive, plural society (Ryder and Silver, 1970: 262).

Additionally, not only the nature of society but also that of the family was under question. There was a steep rise in single-parent families.

R.D. Laing is explicit about the "experience of negation" in The Politics of Experience:

The element of negation is in every relationship and every experience of relationship. The distinction between the absence of relationships, and the experience of every relationship as an absence, is the division between loneliness and a perpetual solitude, between provisional hope or hopelessness and a permanent despair... (Laing, 1967: 32).

Amidst all this despair there was also a revival of the nineteenth-century hymn "we shall overcome". Perhaps, the youth were hopeful that the struggle would be of some avail "some day". Despite the loss of faith in Christianity the youth continued to search for an ideal. A few turned to drugs and a few to the East for spiritual transcendence.

I shall argue that the landscape in Drabble's fiction is increasingly inspired by a movement from the inner to the outer urban and public worlds inhabited by women. She is continually progressing towards the wider issues of life. The Needle's Eye is one of her first novels to tackle the issue of community. In her previous novel The Waterfall, the heroine's interior landscape, that is, the landscape of desire, is predicated on very intimate, limited connections. As a contrast in The Needle's Eye Rose ascends from the realm of the private to a wider nexus of social and moral and economic particulars. This is not to say that Rose is essentially a non-private person, rather, we see in her, an interesting oscillation between the private and the public self. Above all, she is a woman of convictions, and unlike Jane Gray, her struggle against the inner convictions receives a more explicit public attention in the novel. Drabble chooses to focus on a moment of

transition - a particularly decisive situation in the life of Rose by linking her desire for moral good with the landscape of her past. While the novel strikes one as an experiment with life-styles, it also brings into light some of the major issues of its time. It is about moral and social good, the need for equal rights among men and women. The character of Rose is Drabble's specific response to some of the interesting issues of its time. As a young woman and a rich heiress, Rose is striving for a life of intrinsic worth and pure simplicity. She is reacting against some of the values of the consumption-oriented society. Explaining her own position while she was writing The Needle's Eye, Drabble admits:

... I was very keen that I shouldn't buy any new clothes until I had finished the book: that Rose wouldn't have done it. I was incredibly shabby by the end of the book. I've slightly rejected that now. I mean, I'm still shabby but that's because I can't be bothered to go and buy the clothes. It ceased to be a strong principle. But in a way I was testing out the principle by writing the book. That really is one of the reasons for writing: that you test out a certain life style (Milton, 1978: 56).

As an experiment and as a testing out of life-styles, certain principles and convictions, The Needle's Eye is organized at multiple levels. I will argue that the moral perspective is linked to the contrasting landscape of childhood.

As a child Rose had been an outsider in her family, her father and mother had shown no interest in her and, left to her own devices, she sought the company of landscape. From the discomfiting aloneness of her nursery, the little Rose moves to the garden surrounding the house. A look at her collection of "pressed flowers", and Emily could read Rose's "true history", which to her seemed a "pathetic little catalogue of her empty life" (NE 238). The pressed flower collection qualifies the statement: "I suppose because I didn't have much else to do" (NE 241). It is an emphatic recall, a reminder to Rose that her childhood was one isolated period, devoid of parental care. It is

more than a statement, it is a residue of her childhood, deprived and disregarded. Here is Rose - a product of that society where neither comfort nor warmth is available. Rose's mother is a "compellingly negative" (NE 338) woman, with whom no conversation was possible. Rejected by her natural mother, Rose begins to identify with the landscape. And the herbarium file is the proof that barred from the world of communication, of language, of words, Rose has to seek a new voice, a different form of expression, of acceptance and of confirmation.

Having seen the order and boredom of her family life she strives to establish a new universe of order and simplicity. It is there in her herbarium file. The child's failure to create a symbiosis in her personal life leads to a deepening of the desire to seek nurturance from the world outside. For her the collection of the flowers and leaves becomes a substitute activity, a distraction and a reflection:

Whereas among plants and animals she is a human being; she is freed at once from her family and from the males - a subject, a free being. She finds in the secret places of the forest a reflection of the solitude of her soul and in the wide horizons of the plains a tangible image of her transcendence (de Beauvoir, 1975: 386).

As a child Rose's interest in natural landscape reflects the necessity to overcome the boredom of her life inside the house, with an image of transcendence which can come to her through her encounter with the garden.

Drabble draws on Rose's childhood to highlight the nature of her adult defiance. Perhaps it is her desire for recognition that moves her to defiance. It is important to note that Noreen had instilled a sense of Christian guilt in Rose for all the wealth around her. She is repeatedly told that it was horrible to be rich and no salvation was possible for the rich. Not only that, there were hardly any signs of tenderness in Noreen. Rose's rejection of parental authority and of family wealth, cannot be dismissed as a whim nor

as sheer eccentricity. It begins in her childhood with the collection of "pressed flowers" and leads on to the giving away of wealth for the building of a school in Africa. One of the significant features of her personality is the link between her childhood defiance and her adult convictions.

Rose, an independent woman and a single mother of three children, is on the margins of patriarchy. Having rejected her father and later her husband's beliefs she strives to create her own feminine landscape. Dinnerstein describes the relationship between the "I" and "It":

Every "I" first emerges in relation to an "It"... The mother is first experienced by everyone of us as "It", while the father, who is a much more peripheral presence at the beginning, becomes a significant figure only after the concept of an independent outside "I" has begun to be established (Dinnerstein, 1987: 106).

The mother is an undesirable "It" in the eyes of Rose. She fails to accept this image of an "It", which is completely passive and idle. And the father's domineering presence seems stifling. She neither desires nor accepts such a presence. It could also be argued that in Rose the emergence of "I" from an "It" is seemingly blocked and the unsatisfying relationship with her parents creates a new-found symbiosis with landscape. Rose, the child, is convinced that she must look elsewhere for knowledge and insight, for love and assurance. She is led to the world of flowers and leaves. Her relationship to her mother is unavoidably non-existent. This incomplete childhood results in efforts to seek recognition elsewhere. She blames both her parents for this "lack" and not only refuses to be what her mother has been but desires to be someone totally different. She marries Christopher, because she loves him but also because she knows that, by marrying him, she would succeed in making a "declaration" against her father. Thus by marrying against her father's wishes she seems to be denying his authority. Yet the marriage fails

to provide a satisfying alternative, and she leaves her husband in the hope that she will be able to establish herself in a landscape of her own convictions.

In The Needle's Eye Drabble focuses on the social and ethical dilemma confronting such a woman, who decides to break free of the values imposed in a predominantly masculine society. Her desire to break free is motivated by the discovery that she has an independent self and she must not only strive to nourish it but also serve to preserve it ~~against~~ all odds.

It is in the house that Rose finds a landscape of ordinariness in which she can recover her lost self. The house becomes the part of landscape which has enabled her to define her faith, her convictions:

All this, you see, I created it for myself. Stone by stone and step by step. I carved it out, I created it by faith, I believed in it, and then very slowly, it began to exist. And now it exists. It's like God. It requires faith (NE 44).

Having experienced the undesirable "non-self" (NE 197) stage, Rose opts for self-assertion. Once she realizes the "I" - the self as independent she seeks "It" in landscape. More so, having become conscious of the "I", Rose strives to build "it", "Stone by stone and step by step" (NE 44). Rose escapes from her mother - she does not desire to be an "It" like her. It is the house which fulfils her longing for maternal embrace. The house provides her with maternal comfort and through it she is able to consummate the desired symbiosis with an "It". The house becomes an "It". Following Dinnerstein, who sees the emergence of an "I" from an "It" as a significant feature of infant development it becomes clear that Rose's natural mother has remained passive and it is the house which takes on a "quasi-personal quality" (Dinnerstein,1987: 108). Having failed to establish some degree of continuity with the mother figure Rose strives to carve that independent "I".

The metaphor of the house functions at a multiple level. Drabble sees to it that the house remains a central metaphor in the novel as

much as in The Waterfall, although it serves a different function in this particular novel. First, the building up of a house is an attempt to break the patriarchal order. Any moment of division between her and the house takes place not by force but by invitation. She chooses to separate from the house voluntarily. She inhabits this house and makes it her own. It is in the house that she manages to assess the anxieties and demands of the outside world. The house allows her to nourish dreams of independent existence, of a blessed harmony with the cosmos: "Her alliance with the objects around had irradiated her, transformed her" (NE 63).

We see Simon entering her house only by invitation, and, she is convinced that the simple and dull activities within the precincts of the house are more fulfilling than those at her rich father's country-house. For Rose, her mother's idleness becomes anathema and at no cost is she willing to fall into such a state. Having failed to initiate herself into the world of her parents Rose follows the path of a loner. She becomes a rebel by not accepting the values of her class-bound society. Hence, she is marginalized in her attempts towards self-authentication:

... when I set out, it took me a long time to learn what it was about this that I so valued - it's hard to explain, people are so unsympathetic, and when I describe it it sounds so - so absurd, and dull. I like it here precisely because it is dull, and because I can - oh, I don't know, clean my own shoes and worry about the electricity bill and look after my own children and collect them from school and take an interest in Cheap Offers in the shops. Oh, I know, people think it's not real... I respond to such ordinary signals in the world. Cut prices and sunshine and babies in prams and talking in the shops (NE 111).

Such a response is in direct contrast to her childhood upbringing, with maids and servants. Through the "ordinary signals" (NE 111), and significantly, the house at the centre of them, she makes it clear that for her to be in a state of social obscurity is, after all, a necessity. She is aware that others would find

her landscape unappealing and unreal, but for Rose it is least in conflict with her desired self:

"... being here, being myself, is something quite different. It's taken me so long to learn it and now I can't lose it. I'm happy in it. It seems to me right. People are so nervous about believing anything to be right. But what else in life should one ever seek for but a sense of being right?... and she buried her face in her hands, as though embarrassed by her own declaration, "what I feel is that the things I do now, they're part of me, they're monotonous, yes I know, but they're not boring. I like them..." (NE 112).

The house, which is both a refuge and a solace, is in keeping with her faith and enables her to realize herself. It is the locus of her convictions. It protects her from the conspiracy of the rich and the décor becomes a reflection of her desire for simplicity. Here the landscape enables Rose to define her creed in relation to the house and the surrounding community. It acquires an intrinsic value for her. Simplicity is its outstanding feature and she is proud to be a part of it. Throughout, Rose is convinced that this is where she wants to be:

There was something more than the daily pleasures of streets well trodden, faces well known, small moments of architectural madness and felicity amidst acres of monotony. There was some inexplicable grace, in living so (NE 164).

Having opted out of the landscape scripted for her during childhood, Rose reinforces her desire for a separate self by identifying with a landscape which is contrary to her past. In doing so, she has managed to create a pattern, which is consistent with her secret love of pressed flowers.

Rose is aware that: "She had no eye for such things, and what was around her she could not see" (NE 62). She is also aware that it has taken her a while to appreciate and understand that the dilapidated house stands for effort:

... it took her years to realise that it was not neglect that had patched up the sash cords and filled the cracks in the walls with putty and stuck pieces of varnished paper over major structural faults, but on the contrary a yearning, anxious, impoverished solicitude, the solicitude without money that can never rebuild or reconstruct, but merely patch and cover and stop up each breach as it occurs. The house, far from speaking of despair, spoke of the unflagging efforts of nearly a century (NE 61).

Once the truth dawns she is full of admiration for such efforts. She realizes it is unfair to judge and criticize the house in terms of her elitist upbringing. Slowly she begins to respond to such efforts and regardless of her unhappy marriage, she learns to regard the house for what it represents, that is, a spirit of survival and effort.

Reflecting on Jessica Benjamin's argument - wherein she proposes that a child longs for "contingent responsiveness" and seeks pleasure and recognition from "both the effect on the object and the reaction of the other subject who applauds" (Benjamin, 1990: 22) - I wish to correlate this position to Rose's. Whatever little pleasure Rose could derive from collecting flowers or other childhood antics is essentially of her own making. The family gardener, who is as much an outsider and a dependant, can do little to foster her. She fails to draw her parents into her world. She could not share her achievements with her parents with an ecstatic "I did it". "As life evolves, assertion and recognition become the vital moves in the dialogue between self and other" (Benjamin, 1990: 22). We are led to believe that in Rose's case there is no possibility of such a dialogue. "The recognition a child seeks is something the mother is able to give only by virtue of her independent identity" (Benjamin, 1990: 24). The situation explains itself, for we see that not only is the mother without an inspiring identity but fails to acknowledge her daughter's subjectivity. It is amazing to see how the mother's non-subject position creates a lack which cannot be classified. We are led to believe that interaction is difficult in an atmosphere of parental

indifference and Rose attempts to fill the centre of her being by defiance and denunciation of the landscape of her childhood.

As a child she is happy to identify with the forces outside. It is an attempt to ensure her "return to a state of nature" when culture (that is, the family) itself is so negligent of her presence. Her pressed flowers suggest how the formative years of her childhood will be "preserved", will continue to shape her quest for love and recognition. Her early friendship with Joyce, the daughter of the village cobbler, Joyce with a "hand without fingers" (NE 120), is remembered by Rose as one happy association of her past:

Their favourite word was *yonder*. Neither of them knew what it meant, but they used to say to each other things like,

"Where are you going, sister?" and the other one would reply, "Yonder", and the word would evoke a place of such mystic and visionary loveliness, a thin aspiring castle on the brow of a green hill, a tower above the raging sea, a heavenly city (NE 120).

It is this "heavenly city", the city of "primal simplicity" (NE 121) and "visionary loveliness", that constitutes primarily the imagined landscape, that is, the landscape of her dreams and is emblematic of her future quests. Furthermore, it evokes in her a vision of an egalitarian society, where goods would be shared by all and money distributed evenly. This brings me to another significant theme^{that} of money which is of importance in the novel and to which I shall come later. The woman in Rose responds to the "yonder", promise of a faith in Christopher. But like all dreams, "yonder" is not what it seems. Rose who had risked and waited for "spontaneous joy" (NE 125), once reunited with Christopher is confronted with the loss, not only of her self but also of spirit:

It was through no betrayal, no treachery, the crime had not been theirs, so they could share, a little, the misery, they could reach for one another in the end and fall asleep in a communion of loss. But loss it was, and they could do nothing to revoke the

death of the spirit. The spirit bloweth whither it listeth (NE 125).

The word "spirit" reverberates with multiple meanings. The "Holy Spirit", the spirit descending" (Hardin, 1973: 286), has retired, has withdrawn itself from their midst, hence, the inward spirit in the couple fails to respond to each other. As for the flowing of "spontaneous joy" (NE 125) in love and marriage, Drabble finds herself asking time and again: "I don't know why one gets married" (Hardin, 1973: 277). This is unmistakably one of the most important puzzles haunting her married women. As for the conclusion of The Needle's Eye she speculates:

I wrote the whole of The Needle's Eye while we were still together (she and her first husband). And I might not have made it end like I did if we had separated first. I might have allowed her her freedom. I wonder (Hardin, 1973: 277).

In the novel Drabble is all for spontaneity, for potentialities and responsiveness. That is why she leaves Rose and Christopher's relationship full of probabilities. At the end of the novel, the reader is as much in doubt, unable to blame either of the parties and finds it all the more discomfiting to accept Rose's decision to return to Christopher. However, this is not what Drabble is aiming at; as an experiment the novel is exploring lives confronted with a desire to defy and the desire to establish oneself in a landscape, primarily of one's convictions. It is in this light that the creation of the street and the house becomes significant. Her "I created it by faith", "I carved it", "It exists" (NE 44), confirm the presence of such a landscape. She believes in it, she has made it, she has carved it, and finally her assertion "It exists" receives recognition from Simon. First in her "pressed flowers" and then through the house Rose tries to construct an objective world in relation to her subjectivity. She seeks to overcome her feminine inferiority, of which she has been made aware in her mother's indifference and idleness.

Drabble points out that "faith" (NE 44) alone matters to Rose, and it is her faith that strikes Simon as a most appealing aspect of her personality.

In The Needle's Eye, for the first time, we see Drabble making use of a strong male perspective in Simon. Simon is an understanding "other", who when he is outside, represents "the law" of the father. He is a lawyer by profession. However, as he enters Rose's house he becomes subject to the law of the feminine. He becomes feminized.

Simon is at Diana's party thinking "I am embittered" (NE 18). He is uncomfortable in his surroundings, he dislikes everything yet, "was familiar with the journey" (NE 19). He is bored by inane conversation that follows such parties, such futile gatherings to which he cannot refuse an invitation. At such a party he meets Rose and offers her a lift home. He is struck by "her words" and accepts her confidences as "gifts" (NE 44). She invites him into the house and this is a turning point in their relationship. Simon cannot but respond to the landscape of Rose's conviction, which unlike his world, is built on faith. As he enters her house he is struck by the familiarity of the decor. He is taken aback by the "known landscape", it stirs his severed past. The objects inside Rose's house are known objects, well worn, lived with, therefore well recognised and it is in her house that he encounters a subtle chiaroscuro of his own past:

... he recognised it, it was a known landscape, its very dimensions - for it was small, low, overcrowded with furniture - were reminiscent of somewhere intensely remembered (NE 44-45).

And that place is his grandmother's house. At this point it becomes important to mark a similarity between the two. Like Rose, Simon had "fallen in love with a way of life" (NE 65) that is presumably in contrast with his "guilt-ridden childhood" (NE 65). In his case the mother has been equally

significant but via her very presence. Seemingly Simon is reduced to a life of ambitions and a desire to be upwardly mobile, and for this he holds his mother responsible. It could be argued that the boy Simon, is subject to the law of the 'feminine', in that she is the patriarchal mother who acts as "agent" for the father, initiating Simon into the world of the law. And it is for her, and because of her, that he is what he is today. He moves to the world of "non touching, into larger rooms and spaces" (NE 54), only to discover that geographical space which is also a "clear, empty space" (NE 54) is unable to cure the impoverished spirit, ill at ease. He is "dissatisfied, uncontained" (NE 47).

In one of his moments of revelation he opens himself to Rose and confesses that all his life was based on a "sense of obligation" (NE 113). He wishes to arrive at a similar "state of grace" to Rose. For Rose immense pleasure lies in: "Getting up, drawing the curtains, shopping, going to bed" (NE 112). She affirms that she does it all with love and for love, something which Simon has never been able to understand, let alone reach. "How could I know what you mean... when nothing that I do is done with any love at all" (NE 112)? We find, then, in Simon, a guilt of having yoked life to obligation, instead of love. One must not forget that this is Simon's perception of himself - to his readers he is the character least devoid of love and understanding. It is true however, that Rose is what he has always dreaded to be, cannot be. She is what he has run away from yet most desires. The house that she lives in confirms his fears, his guilt and his longing. It is possible then, that in Rose, he sees an alterego. He hears the voice he has been running from. Her choice, her faith, is his desired creed. Simon's mother, like Noreen had looked down on wealth but at the same time nurtured ambitions for her son. She wanted him to rise, to succeed, to win. Simon, having done all that she wished him to do, realized - felt it from the core of his heart - that "the house

he lived in - was an act of misrepresentation" (NE 138). At the same time he is aware that this is what he had worked for and aspired to.

What draws Simon to Rose is her distinctness which he finds so compelling, so beautiful, so fresh and unassuming. He acknowledges, "I want what she is" (NE 193). She has "entrusted him with this vision of felicity" (NE 192) and his "I want her" (NE 193) is a tacit affirmation of his desire to become like Rose. It is possible then that in Rose he sees what he cannot be, but would certainly like to be. It is possible that in Rose he sees a spirit lacking in himself. More than the lack of courage that he sees in himself, his desire to "want what she is" (NE 193) is symptomatic of his admiration for Rose's convictions. Such a desire, would imply not only a longing for the "other", but also a deepening of the crisis within. He is attracted to:

... the simple risings and gatherings from the soft, full lake of her nature: they were not beckonings or clamourings, they were herself (NE 192).

It is the natural simplicity that she conveys through her "risings" and "gatherings" that Simon is attracted to. It is her natural simplicity that appeals to him. Simon is struck by the fullness in her and above all, she represents a life of defiance to him. He feels that Rose lives a life which unlike his, is brimming with joy and spontaneity. And not only that, she is a sharp contrast to his wife Julie whose "acquisitiveness" is mortifying. For Julie is tied to a culture of buying and spending:

Fundamentally it shocked him, this acquisitiveness, this relentless pursuit of unnecessary garments, this desire to buy in order to placate nice, friendly, profiteering, obsequious boutique owners (NE 195).

Despite the fact that their marriage is far from satisfactory, Julie and Simon continue to live together. Unlike Simon and Rose, Julie is easier to understand and willing to please:

It made her happy to send flowers, to give drinks, to buy gifts for herself and others. What did it matter, after all? It was nice, it was innocent, to be placated so easily (NE 195).

With all her limitations Julie is genuinely sincere and friendly. As for her "ephemeral enthusiasms" (NE 195) she is aware that she can afford to spend and "What did it matter, after all?" (NE 195)

Whilst other characters in the novel seem to have accepted life on its own terms, Simon and Rose explore the non-accommodation in their minds. Even their conversation relies on the desire to philosophize the nature of goodness and constitutes the problematics of the novel. Intense philosophical disquisition neither alters nor stabilizes their lives, which remain unaltered by the choices they have already made. Simultaneous acceptance and refusal to identify with their society seem at once to declare and defy their convictions.

Simon and Rose continue to see themselves as victims of "social inadequacy" (NE 131). Simon does not leave Julie and Rose returns to Christopher, reinforcing the argument that such ties are hard to sever. It is more significant a decision in Rose's case, for she has won the legal battle. The decision reveals her commitment to children, rather than a promise of a better Christopher. Her choice does not imply any desire to identify with him. At this point Drabble confirms for the reader that power cannot be taken away from the father and with it she seems to be showing that its pull on our conditioning, that is our "psycho-social structuring", continues to influence our lives. And it could also be argued that Rose's childhood based on denial, has persuaded her that she cannot do the same to her children, who equally love both parents. She has also realized that to be able to appease her convictions she must not sacrifice those of her children - their conviction that they love and need their father.

In the "chickens and the armchair" (NE 235) episode, Drabble reveals to us the mingling of the pure and the imperfect, the permanent and the evanescent. The discovery and appreciation of landscape in the city is one of the well-established tenets in Drabble. She has repeatedly asserted in her novels that urban people are as much in contact with landscape as the people from the country side. It is a myth that urban dwellers are bereft of an eye for landscape. The accessibility to landscape is on more intimate terms than ever, and reveals an emerging set of relationships. The significance of a specific landscape is socially constructed in Drabble and is flexible and free-floating. It is in the company of her loved ones that we see Rose taking a significant step forwards. It is a step towards fulfilment, this "configuration of the landscape" (NE 236) which is close to a comic version of the Wordsworthian landscape. Amidst the dirt and the squalor, the chickens and the armchair of the city, Drabble seeks to concretize and urbanize the idea of the romantic sublime. It is not necessarily to be found in isolation nor in countryside. It is here in our midst, in the glib surroundings and the impoverished streets. Seemingly the romantic notion of beauty and tranquillity has received a face-lift in the twentieth century. The city that was anathema (perhaps still is), is to be admired with a different pair of seeing, of judging and appreciating eyes. It is here that Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy" (Ruskin, 1904: 205) takes a concrete shape and is modified. Even in a "waste lot" where "the armchair was rotting and mouldy" (NE 236), Rose and others find some inexplicable joy. It is these "spots of time" that acquire a meaning and a signification in the life of Rose, Emily and later Simon. "I don't know why it's so nice here" said Rose (NE 236). For Rose it is in such a landscape that one possibly conceives a reunion of contraries, of neglect and effort, of peace and struggle, of beauty and ugliness. It is like the house that she had moved on to after her marriage. And again it is not something based merely on "evidence" but on "faith" (NE

122). The appreciation of the dirty, ragged landscape is in itself interspersed with some of her convictions. And to these convictions Rose owes what she is today. Strange though it might seem Rose takes her children to such dirt and squalor, and wishes to impart an understanding of this particular landscape to them. She does not want them to live in isolated holes, remote from life, but is keen on sharing the joy of living and being, first and foremost, with her children. In the "chickens and the armchair" (NE 235) episode Drabble stresses the value of collective participation and enjoyment of an urban spectacle, which inculcates a spirit of sharing, of contact, with the ugly and the squalid. As for Simon:

So great and innocent a peace possessed him that it seemed like a new contract, like the rainbow after the flood. He could feel it, on his bare hands and face. It lay upon him. It was like happiness (NE 237).

And neither wealth nor prosperity can assure his Spirit nor explain the source of this inexplicable joy, which is somewhat "like happiness" (NE 237). This quality of receiving and offering joy (which is perhaps like happiness, like grace), adds another dimension to the landscape of convictions. It is similar to that "apocalyptic vision", of Simon:

of the day when the world shall turn to grass once more, and the tender flowers will break and buckle the great paving stones" (NE 137).

Like Rose, Simon too has had a vision of paradise, of "unsolicited" happiness and like her he may not live in a landscape of convictions, but he certainly has had a glimpse of it. Through Rose, he has been led into the domain of "visionary peace". Through Rose he can envisage a return of that inward spirit, which had departed from him.

The novel further conveys this landscape of convictions in gestures, visits and encounters with ordinary folks. Miss Lindley leaves a similar impression on Rose and the reader:

... adored by her infants basking radiantly in the warmth of their adoration and her own virtue, reaping each day what she sowed, a whole harvest of smiles and confidences and hands tugging at her rather high hem, and voices saying Miss, Miss, (or Mum when they forget it was Miss)... Lovely Miss Lindley, striding across the asphalt playground to that building which looked like a prison but thanks to her and people like her was not one (NE 160).

Such a description embodies Drabble's main idea of a landscape. What makes a particular landscape appropriate is the people in and outside it. The verbs "basking" and "reaping" and "sowed" and the noun "harvest" convey an image of the pastoral. The school with its walled enclosure, asphalt playground, is like a "prison", but the unconditional, everflowing love of Miss Lindley transforms it into a wide open landscape. It is the figure of Miss Lindley that appears to endow the school with an expansiveness, an attribute that the bricks and mortar of the building have failed to affix.

Conscious of a tradition of literature concerned with social justice Drabble is prepared to explore the notion of social goodness. Some nineteenth-century novels like The Mill on the Floss, Wuthering Heights, North and South, Middlemarch and later Bennett's Anna of the Five Towns had previously focussed on the question of money. Drabble's Rose is shaped amidst similar anxiety. Like The Needle's Eye George Eliot's novels, particularly Middlemarch, explore the problem of goodness in relation to affluence. In her prelude to Middlemarch, Eliot compares the struggle of modern Theresas to the Spanish Theresa:

... with dim lights and tangled circumstances they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later born Theresas were helped by no

coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and a common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse (MM 25).

Indeed, Dorothea's struggle to be good can be equated with Rose's sense of entrapment that goes with money. Though the two novels have different themes they are linked in their treatment of money as a subject. Dorothea too yearns for "some lofty conception of the world" (MM 30). Both are "rash in embracing" aspects of intensity and goodness. Dorothea hopes to have "some command of money for generous schemes" (MM 31). Her mind is full of plans and ideas for the upliftment of the lowly and the deprived. Her "love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions..."(MM 31), is unacceptable in a patrilinear society. Rose does not have to face some of Dorothea's fears - history has given her a slight edge over the Eliot heroine - yet like Dorothea, she is without a coherent "social faith." As soon as she gains the legal possession of her money Rose gives a vast sum of it for the building of a school in Africa. Dorothea and Rose are the two "blundering lives", whose "act[s] of disobedience" are mocked .. In Middlemarch, Dorothea is full of ideas of self-suffering and renunciation and though she is a "lady of some birth and fortune", she has the urge to pray "fervidly" for the sick and needy and is interested in "the state of the land and the labourers (MM 285). Furthermore, her quest for religion is as intense as Rose's quest for a faith of her own. And very much like Rose, she aspires for a landscape of her convictions, to which she had been attracted as a child. There is, as Ladislav is told, a "belief of my own", and it is on the basis of this belief that Dorothea had once hoped to change the world:

That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil (MM 287).

We can see that Dorothea is a woman in constant struggle with her desire to be good and the means offered to her in marriage. Ladislaw's "That is a beautiful mysticism - it is a -" is interrupted with an entreating "Please do not call it by any name" (MM 287), she is convinced that her faith is hard to define. It is a faith without a name. She possesses "a mind struggling towards an ideal life" (MM 32). In one of her moments of solidarity she :

... knelt suddenly down on a brick floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles - who had strange whims of fasting like a Papist, and of sitting up at night to read old theological books (MM 31).

These two women protagonists attempt to consolidate their private lives and public concerns only to discover that such a harmony is difficult to come by. Like Dorothea, Rose has struggled with an equal intensity for a coherent "social faith". They are linked in their desire to be good and to do good to others. Owing a debt to her literary predecessors, Drabble comments:

It was the nineteenth century that provided the crisis, that shattered the traditional attitudes of approval or disapproval and introduced issues which the imaginative writer found it hard to deal (Drabble, 1969: 792).

George Eliot focuses on the subject of money in Middlemarch. Its heroine Dorothea is full of an intense desire to do some moral and social good. For her marriage is an "enclosed basin" and impedes any chances of fulfilment of her "maiden dream". It reduces her to a state of anomie. "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves" (MM 156). This is notably, if not consciously, a confirmation of self-deception, both in Rose and Dorothea. It also signifies that they are victims of egoism; and to a considerable extent will learn to come to terms with it. Perhaps, the realization brings with it a desire for self-improvement, a need to redefine their convictions:

... making mistakes, believing them to be acts of truth and faith and righteousness, at the time having faith in them, and yet all the time knowing that in ten years one would look back and say, Christ, how could I have done that, that believed that, been that, with any conviction (NE 88)?

Rose and Dorothea have a genuine desire to be good and like ordinary souls will succumb to folly and then make heroic attempts to rise. What is remarkable in them is the development and expression of their convictions and faith. One cannot help but sympathize with their faith. They fail but one cannot imagine a life without a vision for them. It is a life of unaffected simplicity, of dignity, of spiritual calm and of visionary peace that they have worked for.

The process of growth in the two protagonists, is connected with the use of landscape in The Needle's Eye and Middlemarch. Rose loves sitting on the "front steps" of her house, walking down the streets, as much as Dorothea loves "English fields and elms and hedge-bordered highroads..." (MM 150). Without going into the details of this novel I wish to point out that like Eliot, Drabble explores failure in marriage, while concerning herself with the socio-economic milieu of the nineteen sixties. She further articulates the problem of goodness in relation to affluence. Drabble's: "... Money makes me uneasy. The fact that some people have more of it than others..." (Milton, 1978: 57) brings to light the problem of affluence which can lead to self-consuming doubts and uncertainties. Rose is living in times of religious uncertainty and perhaps, like Drabble herself, something of a Quaker attitude has influenced her:

Like Rose, I'm really not quite sure what my theological position is. On the other hand, I do have a sense of being in tune with the purpose of life... being in harmony with some other purpose is a state of grace (Hardin, 1973: 284).

Rose like Drabble, is sceptical of doctrinal faith. She is very much a child of her age. Her childhood education from Noreen is

incompatible with her present beliefs. This being so, she is still trapped in the past, the past taught by Noreen. She is unable to come to terms with the teachings in the Bible. She deduces only what is most threatening. It is hard to interpret the promptings of her heart. On one hand she is trying to live life according to the word of God and on the other . . . would very well agree that her life has been nothing but a mockery of the testament. Her obsession with some of its teachings is as deep as her confusion regarding it. Sometimes it can be interpreted as her desire to be genuinely good and at other times her concern seems born out of contempt. A childhood incident demonstrates the point. One day Rose heard her father discussing the nature of "over-insuring" (NE 86) with her mother, after the burglary in the neighbourhood. And it was at that time that the little Rose made a vow of dispossession. Something more than a desire to dispossess lurks behind such a vow, and that is her "fear to lose". It highlights the desire not to possess anything that could not be owned permanently:

And I remember vowing to myself, over the roast beef, I'll never possess anything, I said to myself, that I fear to lose. It was a very solemn vow (NE 86).

This vow of her childhood has a lasting impact on her adult years. Thus one sees a distinct connection between the desire to be good and the desire not to possess, that is, "never possess anything" (NE 86). The orientation of her convictions is therefore paralleled with the fear of loss. There is then a perpetual struggle between her position as a mother and an individual. Nagged by Noreen that it is the poor in spirit who enter the gates of heaven Rose strives towards self-protection. The "endless prevarication" that it was "easier for camels to get through needles' eyes than for rich people to get into the kingdom of heaven" (NE 85), does not make things any better; through the sermons in church and through Noreen, Rose sees herself as "destined" to be a

"freak" (NE 86). If Rose is haunted with a desire to dispossess she is equally afraid of losing her children to her husband in a legal wrangle. The desire to keep her children contradicts her desire not to possess. Goodness preached by Christ: "give all your possessions and follow me", is one of the propelling motifs guiding the landscape of her convictions. Jesus said: "Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened".

As a child she is lonely and enters the world of landscape. As an adult she puts that faith in Christopher and the ultimate discovery is that whatever her convictions, she has to live, give and find on her own. As with Dorothea, she sees the notion of self-suffering in a positive light: "To those that suffer is given the strength to endure suffering, she said to herself" (NE 360). And it is true "It was on faith, not on evidence that she operated, after all" (NE 122).

Her failure to mediate between her inner convictions and the external world compels her to abandon one set of values and convictions for another. Her decision to return to Christopher is dictated by a desire to be "good" to her children, a final act of suffering, of selflessness, of grace, which takes precedence over her desire for self-fulfilment. In her own words:

...the price she had to pay was the price of her own living death, her own conscious dying, her own lapsing, surely, slowly, from grace, as heaven (where only those with souls may enter) was taken slowly from her, as its bright gleams faded (NE 395).

Having "sold" "her own soul" she had finally fulfilled her "duty"- "For him, for the children" (NE 395). Like Simon, she too has gone back to a life of "obligation", in this case liability towards her children. In a secular consumerist world Rose and Simon are trying to find out what constitutes grace. Their quasi-religious search for good (without God) ends in compromise. Like Jane Gray of The Waterfall, whose price for adultery is a clotting of the veins, a Thrombotic clot, like Nana whose price for adultery

was pox, these afflictions have grave psychological implications and are therefore images of "living death". For Rose who commits herself to "a fall from grace" by trading with her "soul", there is a price of "living death", a slow lapsing back into "non-self", which is what she had been fighting against all her life. And it is in this lapsing, sinking, that we see the landscape of her convictions tumble and fall. It becomes a "misrepresentation", a futile battering against life which is controlled by forces stronger than her convictions. Further, it is neither easy nor desirable to part from one's possessions. Rose is unable to relieve herself of possessions, unable to live the life of a dispossessed. The return to Christopher is also linked to the question of money, it reflects the complex binding of woman to her possessions and her relations, in this case one is as difficult as the other. Her return is one last step signifying her ambiguous undertaking of a journey towards suffering, one last bid to sacrifice herself for others.

Simon finds the accumulation of wealth unsatisfying. Rose consciously gives her wealth away only to discover that she cannot dispossess her children nor can she extricate herself from the past. It follows her. Her spirit had aspired for a "visionary peace" (NE 63) and had hoped to attain it in the landscape of her convictions.

It is to be followed by a recognition of change in the urban landscape which is somewhat linked to her own experiences of life. And like life, it cannot be avoided but has to be accepted on its own terms. For Rose, such a change, with the accoutrements of "sale notices", "property prices", "fashionable friends", "middle-class mothers", is a warning that she cannot freeze the landscape of her convictions.

It was not only Rose herself that was changing, it was the whole district she lived in. By some freak of fashion, it was coming up in the world. The process was at first so slow that it was imperceptible: but once noticed, the signs were clear, they multiplied, the change accelerated (NE 385).

I suppose the only alternative to chaos and revolution, is Grace; and if you object that we don't deserve Grace, take comfort in the proposition that nobody ever deserves it. But we could at least put ourselves in the way of receiving it. We could start, for example, by standing by our friends and agreeing to take the worst that can happen to us at the hands of our enemies. We could do that positively, deliberately - using as instruments our human minds and hearts, where miracles happen (Golding, 1974: 3).

We might read Golding's comment on the state of human civilization, as connected with Rose's predicament. She understands the chaotic state of her world, realizes that her attachments, her possessions are binding. And in order to prevent further chaos she chooses to accept Christopher - which at one level is an act of grace and at another is her defeat at the hands of the world. Seemingly, in attempting to be good Rose is trying to live her martyrdom. As a spokeswoman for her generation Drabble tries to see the effect of passive dispossession and positive dispossession. One is life-denying and self-defeating, the other is equally so but less selfish. As Drabble points out:

She's choosing between two different kinds of grace. I think she's choosing the harder way. She loses her peace of mind. Perhaps she does lose her sense of grace just slightly.

... I think 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 and become really martyred, an act which she is aware would produce a state of grace of another kind of selfishness,... all the choices are painful for her... She's a girl who hungers and thirsts after righteousness and how difficult it is to be righteous, particularly when you've got small children. 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 (Hardin, 1973: 285).

Rose stands for all mothers bound by a strong sense of duty and is unable to think of herself without putting the children first. Therefore the compromise with Christopher. This is one possible explanation. At a

deeper level, it seems to be questioning the nature of "knowing". As in The Waterfall, Rose is in search of salvation, a spiritual salvation. Hence, the struggle to create a landscape of convictions. This is by no means a simple task and it involves her private and public interests, her known and unknown fears and also her consciousness of her limitations and her strengths:

There was no knowing. I will leap off the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven come hell. Like a rat, swimming through the dirty lake to a distant unknown shore (NE 398).

It seems that "the holy city in the shape of that patched subsiding house" (NE 63), is in its very nature, intending to mislead. Rose is convinced that she has not been able to identify with the values of her parents and in future too will never be able to belong to her father's country house. Although she has failed to renounce it, she has also refused to call it her own. "The patched subsiding house" (NE 63) where she came to live after her marriage, as much as the narrow unattractive streets had appalled her in the beginning. Like Christ in his holy city of Jerusalem, Rose persevered to love and to accept, to build up her faith. A city of joy where "the ideal and the real merged and swam together" (NE 63). Like Rose, one is aware that this would be "an act [a genuine act] of misrepresentation" (NE 138). She cannot and will not be able to get rid of her possessions. Next, there is the choice to be made for the sake of children. Rose has to become "terrestrial" like Emma (GI 170). She makes a compromise with her principles and realizes that she cannot impose her moral code on her children and see them suffer. She could not follow Christ's teachings and walk the path of salvation empty-handed. In Rose a desire for spiritual simplicity is dependent on love. In her quest for spiritual liberation she seeks a recognition of the self. Like George Eliot in Middlemarch, Drabble explores "the problematic relation of idealism to pragmatism, of lofty aspirations to safe domesticity" (Torgovnick, 1981: 27).

She too is interested in examining the conflict between "domestic experience" and ^{the}"individual's epic yearnings" (Torgovnick, 1981: 27). The desire to be good is strikingly marked by a desire to be accepted:

But, as a nun attaches significance to arbitrary vows, so she had attached it to this place that she inhabited. Like a nun, she had recklessly committed herself, expecting perhaps little, expecting doubt and even despair to persist, but the rewards of faith had been hers, the sun whose existence she had merely supposed, through faith, (because if it were not there, why live?) had shone forcefully upon her, it had illumined her and the relations that she had, in theory, supposed to have existed. They were there: so bright, so lit, she could not suppose she had invented them (NE 164-165).

Vital to the landscape of her convictions is Rose's understanding of herself. She had put her ideas and beliefs into practice and by doing so, extended the visionary into the realm of her day-to-day existence. The intensity of her convictions is reshaped by the demands of her family and Rose succumbs to them. The key point is that she has refused ^{the}stasis of one landscape only to be pushed into another. Its final acknowledgement is in the epiphanic lion at the exhibition, "hollow inside", "mass produced", "comic, dreadful, grotesque" (NE 399), The epiphany of the lion puts into perspective the moral ambiguity of Rose: "There was no knowing" (NE 398). It is as indecisive as the times she is living in. If she has failed in some way, it is a failure of her times. And Rose is not alone in her defeat, in her ambiguity. Her paradox is paralleled with that of the metaphor of the lion, so brave and aristocratic a beast amidst natural surroundings, yet, it has "weathered into identity" (NE 399), is toothless and still likeable for what it represents. This much for the landscape of her convictions.

In the course of Middlemarch, Dorothea makes several mistakes and learns from them. It could be argued that she fails to rise to the stature of some great Saint Theresa. Her life falls into a nameless pattern. And Rose is seemingly a similar failure of sorts: a British Council job, a Christopher, was

not what her quest was about. With her spirit for suffering, she opts for accommodation and any non-accommodation is confined to her mind. Although Rose and Dorothea fail to achieve heroic grandeur they remain figures of grace:

Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness, tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed (MM 26).

Despite their ethical immaturity, with all their dreams and hopes, vanities and sufferings they are still creatures of grace.

Chapter Five

The Realms of Gold: A map of her past

Like The Romantics who "understood the effects of landscape on the soul" (RG 98) Margaret Drabble repeatedly explores the impact of landscape on her women. In creating the lives of her characters Drabble seems in particular to be writing with the previous Romantics like Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth in mind ¹. Linked with her interest in landscape is the question of heredity. Drabble is equally interested in finding out the extraordinary bond between the individual, heredity and environment. These concerns emerge clearly in her interview with Nancy Hardin, in which Drabble says she is contemplating a novel which would chiefly be concerned with "hereditary depression":

... Then I'm going to start this new book in which I think I'll try and tackle hereditary depressions that run through three generations of a family. It would fit in very nicely with my interest in pre-destination and fate and whether you can escape your destiny - whether it's right to escape it by taking drugs or just being happy in other ways; whether it will get you in the end anyway (Hardin, 1973: 289).

The novel in question became The Realms of Gold. Before going to it, however, we must examine more closely the broader intellectual debate with regard to the Romantic tradition which has been a fundamental and recurrent aspect of Drabble's work. The Realms of Gold negotiates between the position adopted by the two giants of the Romantic era, Wordsworth and Coleridge, in relation to landscape. Drabble is working with several ideas at a time; she proposes that human nature is shaped by different forces and can therefore be studied from various angles. What needs to be explored is whether human nature is completely under the sway of the environment or is

there some other force working behind it. Is human nature a product of the environment or is it equally guided by the imagination? In this regard she is much closer to Wordsworth who gives equal importance to the human mind as to the environment. He sees a constant interchange between the two. For Wordsworth everything is in the natural landscape and one only has to have the understanding and imagination to recognize the wealth landscape can and does bestow. Drabble writes of him:

What he has to tell us of the workings of his mind is neither simple nor easy to understand; his attitude towards nature and its influences on man are extremely complicated, and have been long and laboriously discussed... about whether he is a Pantheist or a Platonist, a Christian nature mystic or an atheist or a follower of Hartley or a follower of Godwin or a follower of Rousseau. The truth is that he is a little bit of all these things, and he certainly does not hold and stick to any one rigid code or system of belief; his many beliefs cannot possibly be reduced to any one simple message, or even to any one complicated message (WW 73).

Drabble argues that Wordsworth's views altered with his moods and experiences. Along with Wordsworth whom she admires for his "combination of the profound and the everyday" (WW 137), Drabble shows great regard for Coleridge's "refined imagination" (WW 144). Unlike Wordsworth, he feels that the objects in nature receive recognition from man. Without human intervention they lie unappreciated, uncreated. He believed in the powers of the human mind to give life and form to the landscape. Laying stress on the faculty of imagination he sees the human mind as being capable of transforming the ordinary into extraordinary. "Coleridge's mind was more philosophical and abstract than Wordsworth's, and... is far more subtle and argumentative than Wordsworth" (WW 142). On the contrary:

Wordsworth was no philosopher, though he felt he ought to be one. His mind never dealt as easily in abstract ideas as it did with some massive single physical symbol like the leech gatherer (WW 126).

As suggested earlier, Drabble's own interest in the romantics appears in her book on Wordsworth published in 1966 and A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature. For Wordsworth, the child is the father of the man:

For him, everything that happens to a child happens to him with a purpose, and helps to form and teach him, and to make him grow (WW 94).

Wordsworth was "fortunate in his birth" (LL 147). It was the beauty of the Lake District that made him conscious of the formative powers of nature. In his poetry he charts out "a literary map of England" (LL 147). "He painted place as it had never been painted before, and connected it in new ways with man's thought processes and well being" (LL 151). Having lost his parents at an early age Wordsworth became particularly attached to nature. Drabble sees his dual attitude to nature as a significant pointer of his differing needs. Besides seeking love and comfort in nature, he sees it both as:

stern mentor and consoling nurse... the grand, dark landscapes are associated with the admonishing father, the homely images of the sunny river and the beloved vale of Esthwaite and the green valley of the Wye with his mother and his sister (LL 152).

Wordsworth has a democratic approach to life, he gives every living object the right to live and flourish, to enjoy and relish. He is firm in his belief that every living object has a pulse of its own and: "every flower / Enjoys the air it breathes". His commonest living objects are full of passionate intensity, he revels in their simplicity. He admires the ordinary and sympathizes with the marginal. He speaks in favour of the simple and the unaffected and "the Wordsworthian imagination, at its most powerful, is peculiarly of this world (WW 61). Unlike Wordsworth:

... Coleridge's fame as a poet does not rest on his landscapes, though it is perhaps significant that his finest descriptive work is of his native West Country (LL 167)...

In their early years the two were influenced by Hartley's philosophy. They laid a strong stress on experiences of childhood and youth, on "early background and environment" (WW 83). Coleridge was not as lucky in his birth and according to Drabble:

... in several of his poems he expresses his wish that his own child (named Hartley, incidentally, after the philosopher) should be brought up in close contact with the beautiful sights of nature, not with the ugliness of city life (WW 83).

Chiefly a wanderer at heart Coleridge suffered a deep "sense of rootlessness" lived in unfortunate circumstances, amidst unhappy relations. In "Frost at Midnight" he mourns his upbringing: "... reared / In the great city, pent'mid cloisters dim".

His major landscapes are infused with the supernatural. They are not out of the ordinary. They have a distinct colour and tone which lifts them above the ordinary:

Coleridge's most impressive landscapes are not English at all: they are the lurid imaginary seascapes of *The Ancient Mariner*, the deep romantic chasms and cedarn covers of an ambiguously Oriental Xanadu (LL 168).

Although not as great a landscape poet as Wordsworth, Coleridge shares his love of landscape and reveals its spell in his strange, stately, sublunar, landscape imagery. It is true that the vision that had appeared in *The Ancient Mariner* was lurid, that is, pale, wan and ghastly. The natural world itself is created by the imagination and becomes in Coleridge a by-product of one's emotions and spirits. He is a philosopher and a visionary. According to him, the poet is more fortunate in his vocation for he does have the potential to create an Eden for himself. He can realize it within himself without being dependent on the external world. In Wordsworth landscape has come to be associated with being more than an object. It is infused with life and a character of its own:

The important thing is to grasp that for him [Wordsworth] every object in the outside world was full of an inner life - the cliffs, the lakes, the mountains all spoke to him (WW 91).

Having lived amidst nature he can communicate more freely than Coleridge, he can link the "visionary" to the "ordinary". The views of the two poets are "similar without being identical" (WW 17). Of the two Coleridge has a more complex if not a difficult approach and Drabble sympathizes with him. He feels "substance is and must be in ourselves". Coleridge had a profound faith in the individual self, but in moments of extreme anguish self-reflection lapses into solipsism. In Dejection: An Ode he suggests: "And in our life alone does nature live:/ Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud"! Devoid of hope and deprived of (healthy and happy) imagination, his eye cannot but reject the landscape.

By the time he wrote Dejection, Coleridge was an embittered man moaning the loss of his imaginative and intellectual energies. No longer struck by the primacy of imagination, his mind has become indifferent to the external landscape. The inner eye seems to have become infected with the poet's loss of vision "I see, not feel", and is unable to crystallise the encounter with the outside world into a more substantial part of his inner vision. In his unhappy state he responds to the external world with how "blank an eye!" He fails to join, to celebrate with nature. And the loss of communion with nature reflects his inner, unstable being. Unlike him, Wordsworth focused his attention on the subjects of everyday life. He lays his emphasis on "the object seen, and eye that sees" (1978, xiii: 378). For the two poets the eye is the metaphor of the mind and subsequently creates an affinity with the external world. Coleridge confirms it with "we receive but what we give"; increasing despair and a sense of loneliness, addiction to opium and unhappy family life leave him with very little to look forward to. Coleridge "struggles to idealize and to unify". On the contrary, Wordsworth's "settled quiet" (LL 168) takes

him much further and he comes to a better understanding of human nature.

Wordsworth is conscious of the healing power of nature and sees it as:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being (Wordsworth, 1859: 161).

Drabble is interested in the interchange between women and landscape and much of her fiction follows a mid-course between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Both the human mind and the eye are responsible recipients of landscape. Although she too firmly believes in the formative powers of one's region, the place of one's childhood, she also believes in the individual's capacity to fight and resist and (if luck wills) to win against all odds. She sees the human eye as capable of responding to and creating one's own Eden even amidst the bleak and dull landscapes. With Wordsworth she shares "the livingness of the world itself" (WW 89), and with Coleridge she reveres the primacy of imagination. She plays with their beliefs in her novels and like them does not make her own position very fixed or clear; she is in fact refusing to come down on one side or the other. Perhaps she is not in search of the absolutes or perhaps she is equally sympathetic to both their views and therefore leaves the argument unresolved. It can be argued that Drabble deliberately refuses to come down on either side, she refuses a straight course and follows an exploratory approach. She too is "a little bit of all these things" and it would be unfair to reduce her view to that of either. She explores and suggests without being dogmatic. Furthermore, Drabble complicates the theory by bringing in the notion of "hereditary depression", which neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge pursued.

The Realms of Gold is situated in the heart of the Midlands, and Drabble is looking at the Midland terrain in order to explain the affinity between heredity and environment. The heroine France Wingate argues that the relationship between heredity and landscape is of added significance as it

helps us to rethink human nature. At times, place reveals why certain people behave in such and such a way. This being the case, it also reflects to what extent one can fight against one's "nature". And it is indeed significant to trace the bonding and the dialectics between human nature and the natural environment. In the novel Drabble looks at the debate between heredity and environment from different positions; Frances Wingate suggests:

I've often thought that there must be something in the *soil* there, in the very earth and water, that sours the nature. I often think that in our family - we've got some hereditary deficiency. Or excess. I wouldn't know which. Like fluoride. And that, combined with the flatness of the landscape, was what did it (RG 99).

Herein lies much of the plot of The Realms of Gold, for we see Frances getting involved with her family's past which is in concordance with a certain pattern. It is a pattern depicting life-styles and moods and despite the change in circumstances the characters seem to be sharing an affinity with their predecessors. Seemingly the sour nature that runs in some of the characters of the family over three generations is specifically determined by their instinctive allegiance to the physical and filial landscape.

The title of the novel The Realms of Gold is a quote from Keats' "On first looking into Chapman's Homer". It is highly suggestive for it not only invokes a rich imagery in terms of the contemporary landscape but establishes an immediately "corresponding pattern" with the theme of the past in relation to the present. The discovery of Homer through Chapman was an enthusiastic enterprise revealing new vistas of learning to Keats. Comparing himself to the "watcher of the skies", as he discovers "a new planet", he describes a miraculous thrill, a joy mingled with serenity.

The central figure in The Realms of Gold has also, literally as well as imaginatively, travelled extensively and been to many unusual lands. For Keats the discovery of Chapman's Homer leads to an intensely

imaginative tour de force. The book in itself is an invaluable text, offering access to a cultural past which he had never visited before. It is this continuity of experience that Drabble wishes to explore in her novel. The novel is centred around such a discovery. She has undergone the Keatsian experience in her discovery of Tizouk. Frances Wingate's chief accomplishment, however, is to be able to explore not only "a map of her past", but also that of the people of Tizouk. And for this purpose an appropriate literary parallel is that of Chapman's Homer - waiting to be traced and appreciated until Keats came along.

As in Keats' sonnet where imagination is crucial in reconstructing a reality, Frances Wingate imagines a city and it comes into existence. The novel carefully sustains the romantic belief in the powers of imagination. Its power to unify and to vivify the mind is as potent as its power to create. In the words of Margaret Rowe:

Both the novel and the sonnet are concerned with preserving links to the past: explicitly in the novel through archaeology, implicitly in the sonnet through translation (Rowe, in Schmidt, 1982: 158).

The novel explores the relevance of the past in the life of Frances Wingate. It is a past synthesizing her interest in literature, archaeology, ancestry and history. It is a past modified by her imagination. Like the Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats who believed in and were conscious of the strength of imagination, the female protagonist in The Realms of Gold is chiefly a Romantic at heart. She is an explorer and a dreamer. Discovering new landscapes, physical and imaginative, personal and symbolic, is her main forte. Her passion is archaeology and through it she is able to establish her interest in the past. Archaeology serves as a link to a cultural and also to a family past, the history of the Ollerenshaws. Keats' narrator had discovered the realms of gold during one of his literary sojourns.

He is confounded with the beauty and grandeur of the landscape in translation. Like the narrator in Keats, revelling in his discovery of Homer, Frances Wingate has achieved a sense of purpose as an archaeologist in her discovery of Tizouk. One is thrilled with literary journeying, the other derives satisfaction from archaeological enterprise. And both are grateful for being endowed with that special gift which has led them on to this particular road. With "one flash of knowledge" (RG 34) Frances had unearthed this entire landscape. Conscious of this power, she asks herself:

What next should she imagine? What terrifying enormity should she next conjure forth? Should she dig again in the desert and uncover gold? Should she plant down her foot and let water spring from the dry land? Should she wave her arm and let the rocks blossom? She had been as arid as a rock, but she had learned to flow. Or should she conceive of desolation? Defoliate forests (RG 35)?

The imagery of this passage links it with the following passage in The Waterfall:

I have always believed that a passion as adequately strong could wrench a whole nature from its course, and that all the romantic accoutrements of torn skies, uprooted trees, gaping earth and white torrential water, would follow meekly such a disaster...

Had I not expected such events they would not have occurred: the force of the current admits them, and a shifting of the landscape effects them. They could not occur, surely, in a flat and empty plain (W 228-229).

In The Waterfall desire shapes the imagination and creates a landscape of love and fulfilment. Desire is a principal motivating force, and baffles Jane Gray with its powers. The impact of passion can be equivalent to that of a natural disaster, which brings with it avalanches and storms. It disturbs the natural order of existence. In the same spirit Frances' desire to conceive new horizons continues to shape reality. Unlike Keats' narrator whose quest is in the past - he has already "travell'd", "seen", "been", "told", "heard", "felt", "star'd" and

"look'd", Frances envisages the future with her Romantic vocabulary. In this passage she uses a sequence of active verbs: "imagine", "conjure", "dig", "uncover", "plant", "spring", "wave", "blossom", "conceive" and "defoliate". She is looking forward to the future and is not trapped by the past. The world of the Romantics, more so the Keatsian landscape, is drawn from art, culture and Greek mythology. It is a synthesis of effort and imagination. His vision is enriched with books, and he draws sustenance from the ancient world. Frances Wingate literalizes the Romantic quest through her discovery of Tizouk. Her profession demands an actual delving into the past. Keats' landscapes are distant and foreign, accessible through books, whereas Frances succeeds in digging and unearthing the distant landscapes and is bound to the immediate landscape of her family and country. There is a fusion of the distant and the close, the imaginative and the real in her life.

Chiefly concerned with Frances Wingate, The Realms of Gold is also a family saga in which Drabble traces the lives of the Ollerenshaws. Frances Wingate's father was born in the North and is according to her: "A bad case of the Midlands" (RG 100), her mother is a tiresome zealot, her grandparents are eccentric, her brother an alcoholic, her sister Alice has committed suicide, her nephew Stephen goes a step further by committing suicidal infanticide. The dead and dotty aunt Constance is a presence in herself. Cousin Janet is passively living on the brink of disaster. David and Frances alone have survived the malaise by being away. This in a nutshell is a history of the Ollerenshaw family. Here not everybody is as lucky as Frances Wingate. Unlike some of her family members, she is a fighter and a survivor. She is an exception. However such exceptions are not rare in Drabble's world, a world of determined and persevering women, where success and luck come together. Unlike her predecessors, Frances Wingate has everything. A successful career woman, a mother of four children, an

excellent lover, she could be classified as an enviable role-model for the aspiring modern woman. She is what we all would like to be: confident and daring, creative and loving, independent and zestful, ambitious and famous and fortunate. Unlike Emma in The Garrick Year or Jane Gray in The Waterfall, she is a woman of action. She regards the "energy, the movement", as "a phenomenon of our generation" (RG 76). And with a certain degree of optimism, the "prospect of action always cheered her up" (RG 103). She manages to escape from permanent despair by getting tied up in action.

She is also besotted by the Romantics, particularly Wordsworth, for she not only recites him while making love but also in childbirth; the strength which she draws from her interest in poetry sustains her in pain. Wordsworth is one such comforter to her and his attitude to nature is not only a source of joy but also enlightenment. She has read and memorised him. His images strike her as poignant. She not only identifies with some of them but also draws support from them. Poetry heals and consoles. Literature accompanies her when everyone else leaves, when nothing else seems to work:

She repeated "On His Blindness" and "Westminster Bridge" several times to herself; they had always been a good charm against pain, and she had gone through them many a time while trying to comply with her husband's desire for sexual intercourse, for instance, and had shouted them aloud very wildly in childbirth, till the nurses told her to shut up (RG 57).

The central argument of the novel is linked to a query Frances asks herself:

What for, what for, said Frances to herself. What is it for, the past, one's own or the world's. To what end question it so closely (RG 124).

Through its various characters and situations the novel seems to be asking this question repeatedly. Frances Wingate is very uncertain of her objective as she makes a visit to Tockley, the home of her grandparents, after a span of

ten years. Undoubtedly, there is a desire to evoke the long, lost childhood; implicit in such a move is also a strong wish to establish a "corresponding pattern" (RG 116) between her past and the present. The present cannot fulfil all her emotional and psychological needs and in order to seek some solace, some comfort and assurance Frances finds herself compelled to trace "a map of her past" (RG 116). This moment of doubt and self-questioning is however just an interlude in her life. Although she is getting depressed in hotel rooms, weeping over trivial issues, pondering over the loneliness and uselessness of her approaching old years, still we see her getting on with work, with children, with life in her own indefatigable way. Frances Wingate is a fighter and a survivor unlike some of her family members:

She wasn't sure what she wanted, or why she had come, but her heart was quick, the shape of the roof and the windows and the big tree, so long unseen, so often imagined in her inward eye was calling up some corresponding pattern in her mind, its lines were the lines of memory, a shorthand carving, like the graph of her heart or brain, like the points of its movements. There, that shape, imperfectly remembered, and yet perfectly there: an electrocardiogram of her childhood, a map of her past (RG 116).

She makes two distinct journeys, one to the land of Tizouk and the other to Tockley. While Tizouk becomes a discovery of other people, Tockley signifies a discovery of the self, more precisely a journey unto the self. Once the "map of her past" (RG 116) is unfolded it provides her with new insights into her family's history and her own needs. The world of Tizouk is remote, distanced and impersonal; in contrast the world of Tockley is personal, private and closed. Unlike Keats' discoverer who sees himself as an explorer of heaven, Frances Wingate remains rooted to the earth. Conscious of her position as an archaeologist she is aware of the limitations both of the past and of the people:

The pursuit of archaeology, she said to herself, like the pursuit of history, is for such as myself and Karel 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 (RG 124).

In the course of her discovery of Tizouk and later that of Tockley it becomes clear to Frances that much of the past is inexplicable. It is a mystery and much of it beyond resolution. Conscious of the inadequacies of her discovery she is aware that Tizouk was also inhabited by people who had toiled and subsisted amidst "cruelty and dullness":

We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede infinitely, for there never was a golden world (RG 124).

Frances qualifies her non-Christian faith with an assertion "there never was" such a golden world. Frances is involved in a quest wherein professionals like her:

... unearth horrors, and justify them. Child sacrifice we label benevolent birth control, a dull and endless struggle against nature we label communion with the earth (RG 124).

Comparing the past of her family with her present Frances realizes that there too had been "toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness" (RG 124.). Her grandfather was a gardener who grew and sold tomatoes and potatoes, while her father studied newts and became a professor of Zoology. "And for herself, as a result of their labours, the world lay open" (RG 124). Not without gratitude Frances, the modern romantic, settles down to brandy and "a choice of two beds" (RG 124). Drabble seeks to establish a balance between the two, the modern and the romantic. Frances lives in an age of material comforts. She is prone to despair over life and living. She is of a generation that has received neither strong religious beliefs nor accepted them. Frances is a modern woman with an interest in the literary landscape. Deeply influenced by the romantic ethos she seems to be mediating a tradition upheld by the romantics. She is exploring the different notions held

by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats of the relationship between landscape and the individual. In this age of industrial expansion landscape not only gives a renewed sense of identity but affirms a need for integration with one's past. In this age of religious confusion Frances seeks her faith in landscape. In this regard she is very much like other Drabble protagonists for whom God is not a monolithic entity but is to be felt and experienced in those moments and essences which are a part of day-to-day living. Hence the ideal landscape is the one that brings her women closer to family, friends and the world. Frances maintains that the landscape provides a clue to human nature. It distinguishes the English from the Americans. And even within England small pieces of land have a characteristic of their own, distinguishing people of one region from another.

Frances has a literary vision. What she sees in the landscape is significantly drawn from her understanding of literature. She subsequently expresses her sympathy and admiration for Clare. Before he could be victimized by the "Midlands sickness" he was able to record his compassion and feeling for it:

John Clare had gone mad, another case of the Midlands sickness, but before his madness he had deplored the loss of the commons and the death of moles, in his great tenderness for the creation (RG 124).

Perhaps like Clare, Frances Wingate hopes to restore her love of the Midlands. Hence, the retreat. Like Clare whose attachment to Northamptonshire led him to recognize the moles and the weeds, the land and the brook, Frances Wingate's childhood at Tockley leaves her nostalgic for ditches and frogs. Like Clare, she revels in the common, in the ugly and the banal. She has learned to admire the creation. But unlike Clare, she has managed to move, to turn and has thus retained her sanity. She does not feel displaced nor does

she regret leaving her childhood behind. She has neither been possessed nor trapped by her environment. She can feel it only temporarily.

The twentieth-century question posed by Frances "What for, what for,... What is it for, the past, one's own or the world's. To what end question it so closely" (RG 124), exists as a compendium. The question is unobtrusively linked to the romantic yearning for a deepening sense of selfhood through nature. Frances Wingate, is not without depression, fears of disillusionment or death. Through her Drabble seems to pose one of the primary questions of the novel. Is this sense of rootlessness that Frances occasionally suffers from simply hereditary or an inevitable human condition?

Drabble like Frances is perhaps without a clear-cut answer. Even the omniscient narrator admits "Omniscience has its limits" (RG 341). Therefore she uses the "cross section" aspect to highlight the multiplicity of her plot, the multiple response to landscape. Spread along the continuum are the ones who survive and those who don't, those who accept and those who fight.

Frances, the modern woman who both survives and fights, inherits not merely the depression of the Ollerenshaws but also the spirit of the Romantics. She is, like Wordsworth, conscious of those "spots of time" that are a prerequisite for human survival and happiness. Frances' visit to Tockley is reminiscent of Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey". What Drabble says elsewhere of the poem fits in well with the novel:

... he gives us highly emotional descriptions of the effects of the outer world upon his own inner self (WW 72);

Frances is not interested in mere objects for objects' sake but is tracing "a map of her past" (RG 116). It is from her past that she is hoping to locate some

nourishing fruit for the future. She wants to understand herself better. It is a complex motive. In her account of Wordsworth Drabble suggests:

In short, it is the value and the meaning of the scene that he is trying to describe, not its outward appearance, not how many trees there were in the woods, or the colour of the sky, or the noise of the river. He is painting a picture not of a landscape with river and trees, but of something much more complicated; he is trying to describe the inner workings of his own mind (WW 73).

As in Wordsworth, Drabble describes the scene not for itself but sees parallels between the outer landscape and that of the mind. Frances is seeking familiar aspects like "the tomatoes and the new potatoes and the waist-high grasses by the ditch" (RG 116), and the "white deal table and cats" (RG 117) that lived in her grandmother's time; but her "inward eye", complex and exceedingly curious, strives for "some corresponding pattern in her mind" (RG 116). There is more to it than what is suggested; the experience is perhaps aimed at a recovery of her lost self.

The arrangement of the outer objects is symptomatic of a meaningful correspondence which the outer eye seems to strike with the "inward eye". The landscape of Tockley becomes a site of increasing satisfaction and meaning. And unlike the landscape in Wordsworth (which is sometimes) lush and green, Drabble's landscape is once again urbanized, overcrowded, replete with signs of dirt and decay. But she seeks the "dreaded and desired" (RG 102) world of her childhood in the dirt and grime of Hussy, the hamlet that had overflowed.

The "ditch", her favourite childhood spot, is now full of "scum". What might have seemed "Unnatural and threatening elsewhere" (RG 106) was "a source of delight" (RG 106) in her childhood. The ditch that had once symbolized a certain affinity with Frances' environment becomes ten years

later a living symbol of the social and economic changes in the life of the Midlands. The "thick oily scum", "bits of paper, fag ends, Coca Cola bottles, an old tyre, a chunk of polystyrene and a car seat" (RG 118) signify an urban intrusion. She can see that the "untouched, undisturbed" (RG 107) water has now been polluted and cannot be used for consumption (which is what she did as a child and found the water delicious). However, she is equally surprised to see "a little greenery: a patch of slimy duck weed, a slippery moss" (RG 118). Having retained some of the colour of the past, the ditch is now one of the rare surviving emblems of her childhood evoking in her some faint nostalgia for the days gone by. At the root of this nostalgia is the desire to call upon some "Utopia in the past" (RG 124) and to seek a link between her present life and the life that she spent with her grandparents. The journey backwards follows her memory and sheds light on her childhood. It is well worth pointing out that as a child Frances had neither shirked work nor responsibility. It is from her memories that we gather how her sister Alice (who later committed suicide), would hate "serving" the customers and her brother too (who later becomes an alcoholic) did not like "answering the bell" (RG 106). Frances alone loves her job, although in her adolescent years she too begins to hate it. Seemingly for Frances the childhood years at Tockley, the "dreaded and desired" paradise of the past is recalled with a lingering uncertainty. In her Granny's life-time the garden had gone to seed, turning from a blossom of vegetables and fruits into a neglected patch of land. Ten years later Frances sees the cottage with both a mixture of relief and regret. She is relieved and reassured to see the place is as tidy as it was in her grandfather's time. Relieved that she is not tied to it with nowhere to go, peering through the kitchen-window into the room which had been a source of "misery and ancestral joy" (RG 117), Frances notices the change in the interior landscape and is overwhelmed with memories. A hint of regret seeps

in when she visits the ditch. Later the vision of the leech gatherer heightens her scepticism for the past. The trip to the Museum is a significant voyage out. At the Museum her "unprepared eye" (RG 121) is struck by the sight of the eel stang- a black pronged fork. She misreads the letter to begin with then realizes it is used for "trapping" not "turning" eels (RG 122). But not before:

She had had a vision, she had to admit it to herself, of old men pointlessly turning over eels in ditches in meaningless labour, just as those women and children in the field had appeared to her at first sight as an allegory of pointless rural toil. We dig, we plant, we reap, we dig again, and barely we survive. The thought made her feel ill. A man with an eel stang, like Wordsworth's leech gatherer stood around portentously in her mind, aimlessly searching the 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 (RG 122-123)?

Perhaps the futility of her own profession is reflected in the "man with an eel stang" or the leech gatherer. Or is the thought of the leech gatherer preparing the ground for unmediated truths that the future might hold for Frances Wingate? She is grateful for having escaped the dreaded future as a small-scale gardener (like her grandparents, who sold fruits and vegetables to passers by). Serving the customers has lost its appeal and Frances is relieved that she has not been trapped in this activity for ever. She has turned away to being a customer, she is well off and has the power not only to purchase but also to explore and excavate. She is now an admired archaeologist. At one level the act of digging, planting, reaping and the attempt to preserve the remains of the past seems to signify pointless toil, at another it conveys how the past itself is never dead, it is not a fabrication. It exists and survives in the present. The landscape of the past interacts with that of the present and the novel seems to reinforce its compelling influence. There can be little doubt that Frances' vision itself has certainly not been conjured from nothing. Wordsworth's leech gatherer in relentless pursuit of the leeches conveys a

meaningful message to the poet. "He is a warning, a portent, an admonition,... not without meaning" (WW 119). With his firm resolution he continues to pursue the leeches:

But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.
(Wordsworth, 1859: 145).

The poet is brooding over his fears, both known and unknown:

Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
And mighty poets in their misery dead
(Wordsworth, 1859: 144).

The image of the men engaged in aimless "turning" is perhaps suggestive of Frances' futile attempts to look for the past. Frances cannot explain the nature of the image and yet for a moment she was struck by the emotion it conveyed. It is full of ambiguity. Unlike the rest of the characters, she is perplexed only momentarily. She has accommodated herself and with her capacity to turn away from hereditary depression has escaped the fate of Stephen and her sister Alice. She has not been trapped in the past nor has she turned away from it like her father. Although she prefers "trapping" to "turning", Frances reads this misreading as a portentous sign. These haunting visions are drawn partly from her memory and partly from her imagination. Yet in "trapping" it, it becomes meaningful. It does not seem as futile. A strange correlation becomes clear at the end of the novel. From the primitive past that constituted the literary and cultural history of Tizouk, she moved to "the dreaded and desired" past of her own family. She has the choice to turn back to "modernity and her bedroom's efficient plumbing" (RG 123).

Her turning becomes a matter of choice. It is unlike the trapping of the eel-stang and the leech gatherer's searching for the leeches. Like the poet in "Resolution and Independence" Frances is wrought with fears of Midlands sickness. During her bouts of depression, she begins to dread her

children's future. However, it does not take long for the modern woman to receive the portentous message that life is what one makes of it:

She felt extraordinarily happy, standing there, in all the rightness of her decision. She would make no more cities, she would make love... She liked train journeys, she slept well on trains (RG 48).

Although modern comforts and medical help have made life easy, the desire to live and fight must come from within. The eel stang that is used for trapping becomes symbolic of human life. The same individual digs and plants and reaps and digs again. Drabble sees a straightforward message to mankind in "Resolution and Independence". "The moral of 'count your blessings' appears to be straightforward enough" (WW 122). And this is precisely what Frances keeps telling herself. She has been lucky enough to escape the drudgery of her grandparents' life and she does not live in a primitive world of closure. She is born in the mid-twentieth century and with her education and good fortune she has escaped their fate. Unlike her predecessors (and even some of her contemporaries) she has more in life to be grateful for. Linked to her success is the idea of toil and perseverance, of luck and fortune. Frances has worked for her survival and success. She has worked and succeeded. She has hoped and realized. She has asked and received.

In The Realms of Gold we find a cross-section of characters, previously unknown to each other but brought together by a dead member of the family:

What I usually do is take characters who are reassessing how they've got to be what they are, rather than showing... how they become it... I tend to look back rather than carry them through the course of the book. I find it more interesting for some reason (Cooper-Clark, 1980: 75).

It is enlightenment not passive regression that Frances seeks in the course of her journeys, both to Tizouk and to Tockley. For the archaeologist Frances it is the second and not the first trip to Tockley that proves of significance. The discovery of the death of aunt Constance has forced her to return. The discovery of Mays Cottage and the dead aunt Constance lends a certain immediacy to the previous signs of "turning" and "trapping". She finds herself trapped in the scandal unearthed by the Sunday Examiner. She has to turn back to Tockley and in a sense gets trapped in the past of her family. But this time Mays Cottage becomes a site of investigation. Once again her "unprepared eye" is confronted with objects inducing fear, terror and surprise. In the kitchen:

The sink was a deep stone sink, silted up now with leaves: Frances prodded at the leaves with a spoon, and beetles ran. There were spiders, too: an insect's paradise. On the stone slab by the sink stood some pans: curious, Frances peered in them, finding snail shells (she had heard that Constance ate snails, and why not?), a little mould, and in one lid-covered pan a sheep's head... the huge stupid eye sockets staring, the rather too healthy teeth still fixed in the jaw, and some of the bone pitted and worn and frilled into a tiny, holey pattern, an intricate membranous delicate web. It was a curious colour too, green and red and blotchy, not white as bone should be (RG 304).

Frances, the archaeologist and woman, is used to such sites while excavating the primitive artefacts and can also comprehend and sympathize with the pain and suffering of her aunt's past. After having been offered the past of her dead aunt through relics and letters, Frances decides to buy Mays Cottage. She chooses to return. Like the wanderer in "The Ruined Cottage", Frances visits Mays cottage and returns to it:

At length towards the Cottage I return'd
Fondly, - and traced, with interest more mild,
That secret spirit of humanity
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of Nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings, still survived

(Wordsworth, 1859: 292).

In a similar vein the spirit of Constance survives in the Mays Cottage. Frances has not met her aunt but she can feel the bond. Something very intimate flows in through the sights and smells, which is difficult to identify but easy to feel. Through the cottage she can imagine the life, the misery of Constance's isolation and her acceptance by nature:

And the cottage felt all right. It even had a feeling of home. It was contained, it was secret. It had none of the rural bleakness of Eel Cottage, none of that open struggle. Nature had gently enfolded it, had embraced it and taken it and thicketed it in, with many thorns and briars; nature had wanted it, and had not rejected it (RG 305).

In this very Wordsworthian image of the cottage with its "thorns and briars" Drabble is following her predecessor. She is writing about the tatty, neglected cottage and in it she sees the blessed spirit of nature, which had neither rejected nor refused the unfortunate Constance. Frances sees that nature had in fact "contained", "enfolded", "embraced", "taken", "thicketed" and "wanted" the cottage and in return the cottage had held its owner away from the "open struggle" and respected her secrets. The wild enclosure leads Frances to the conclusion that Constance's life had not been without love. She received the love of the landscape. She made it her own. The return to Mays Cottage interested her both as an archaeologist and as a history of her own family. So far she had come across old and primitive icons and now she is confronted with the real sights and smells. The return to Tockley and the discovery of her aunt's past symbolize a Romantic affinity with personal history and the history of mankind. It is more than a private satisfaction to know that her father's was not "a freak escape" (RG 306) but there had been "other Ollerenshaws who had climbed too" (RG 306). The cottage has a sanctity for Frances. She, like her aunt Constance, is able to relate to the "purity" of the

place. It is the cottage "overgrown with thorns and brambles, crumbling and falling, but crumbling to nature only, not to man" (RG 303), that she finds appealing. Unlike Margaret of The Ruined Cottage who remained "Last human tenant of these ruined walls...!" (Wordsworth, 1859: 292). Frances makes the ruined cottage her holiday home. She accepts her aunt's cottage with its wild contours and in doing so embraces the past of her family too. And with this retreat Drabble seems to domesticate the Romantic vision. It is a vision of reintegration. It is a changing vision. In Wordsworth the cottage is symbolic of a dead past only; in The Realms of Gold the cottage is not allowed to die but is reclaimed. The cottage is living and is singled out by Frances as a holiday home. Frances prevents it from further erosion.

The Realms of Gold is a study of a woman's world. It is a female book where the active questers are women. Just as the women in Wordsworth become images of the poet's own quest, Drabble seems to be saying to her readers "let's take Wordsworth at face value and recreate his world in prose". It is a feminization of the Wordsworthian image. The novel digs, probes, reaps and survives a plethora of queries. It is the world inhabited not only by Frances but also by Janet and Aunt Constance. The character of Janet Bird provides a contrast with Frances. Even though the feminist movement was strong during this period (the book was published in 1975) the position of most women was Janet-like. Here Drabble is not only exploring the idea of hereditary depression and the effects of landscape on the soul but viewing it in relation to the socio-economic position of women. There is a movement away from the subjective to the multiple issues of life. The entire argument is further linked up with Drabble's determinism. She is emphatic: "Well, we certainly do live in a world of chance, there's no disputing that..." and explains it with a greater sense of affirmation: "That's

what we're put on this earth to do: to endeavour in the face of the impossible" (Cooper-Clark, 1980: 73).

As a foil to Frances, Janet Bird has continued to live in the flat Midlands. Her life is in sharp contrast to Frances'. Whether or not her imagination is productive, she certainly conjures images of destruction in her mind:

... she wished for a volcano or an earthquake, neither of them very likely in this flat terrain. A flood would be more likely; what if the great river Done were to overflow and wash them all away out to the cold North Sea? Sometimes she wished that she could really catch some disabling disease... No, what she wanted was some universal disaster that would involve her in its fate, or else some personal release...(RG 175).

Her world view is unsettling. Married to a man she does not love Janet Bird belongs to the other extreme of the world of choices in The Realms of Gold. Nothing seems right for Janet. It is through her that Drabble questions the validity of marriage:

... there was some conspiracy afoot, to make people believe that marriage was necessary and desirable, and nobody seemed at all concerned to justify it, as though it needed no justification (RG 129).

The streets of Tockley can give her no explanation. Out on the street she is pondering over her marriage to Mark. Neither the evening notices nor the women's magazine seem to offer an answer to her boredom. She reflects it is the society that "offers pyrex dishes and silver tea spoons as bribes, as bargains, as anaesthesia against self-sacrifice" (RG 130). And she admits how she too was drawn to it despite the fact that she did not love Mark. It could well be argued that through Janet Bird Drabble seems to be describing the large numbers of women who are dissatisfied in marriage and are yet unable to break out of it because of the practical and social impediments (like children). For Janet life outside is as insipid and pointless as the chores

indoors. Beyond doubt it is the unsatisfactory relationship with her husband that undermines her desire for any self-fulfilment. In her everyday chores of looking after the baby, cleaning the floor, peeling carrots, boiling soup, setting tables, avoiding neighbours, she seeks social and moral justification. Convinced that marriage is neither "necessary nor desirable" (RG 129), she gets neither sexual nor spiritual gratification out of marriage. Tockley is too small and conventional a place; "other ways" would not have been approved by society. Unlike Frances she is incapable of movement, of change. Unlike Frances she fails to cling "to activity and movement as an escape" (RG 101). In her we see a woman whose landscape fails to sustain her, to nourish her: "Stony ground, stony ground, tolled the bells, for Janet Bird" (RG 134). She is bound to her situation. She is a woman without a vocation. However, we do see a revival of her enthusiastic spirits in the company of David and Frances.

Drabble questions if it is the "the flat terrain" of Tockley that has made Janet a woman in limbo. In her book The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir analyses the institution of marriage and sees how it differs for both man and woman:

The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness - there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness - but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine (de Beauvoir, 1975: 496).

For Janet life at home is incomplete and she is aware that the "evening classes" too cannot alleviate her boredom. She attempts to escape "conjugal slavery" by staying up late:

Certain avenues of escape are open to women; but in practice they are not available at all. In the country, especially, the chains of marriage are heavy, and the wife must somehow accommodate herself to a situation from which she cannot escape (de Beauvoir, 1975: 494).

Janet Bird is one such woman. The child becomes "her happiness and her justification" (de Beauvoir, 1975: 501). She sees him as "her small powerlessly" (RG 131). She is aware that something "had gone very wrong somewhere" (RG 175) and is without hope: "Things could be better, but not for her" (RG 176). We see her trying to avoid a sexual encounter with her husband by delaying her departure from the living room to the bedroom. She sees herself trapped and for her there is no turning back. Her attempts to correlate the act of melting and tipping the wax to the rites of appropriation are symbolic of her inner turmoil. The image of her "... pouring wax on to an ancient symbol, *pointlessly*" (my italics) (RG 179) has much in common with the vision of Frances of "... old men *pointlessly* turning over eels in ditches in meaningless labour" (RG 122). The melting, tipping and pouring of the wax are sheer signs of evasion. As one focuses on the process of interiorization one notices that Janet is an "unlucky" figure in the novel. Unlike her cousins, she did not have a chance to move out, to build a life of her choice, to explore her potential. She is really trapped. It could well be argued that Janet sees herself engaged in pointless labour and is unable to turn away from it. Unlike Janet, Frances in Coleridgean terms has grasped the "shaping and modifying" powers of imagination. She is fortunate to have escaped through vocation and love. She is "the chosen one". She has managed to escape "hereditary depression" by being able to involve herself in intense human relationships. It is also true that mobility and conferences too become her escape. "I manage to accommodate myself quite well. I'm never there. I'm always abroad" (RG 100). As a self-reflecting subject she is conscious of the inevitable human condition. States of mind like states of being were always in a flux, and tend to "pass". She is aware of the nature of the human condition:

She did indeed know now, of her states of mind, that they would arrive, and pass, and that each time they'd seem to be there forever. It was largely a question of sticking it out (RG 12).

Through the characters of Frances Wingate and Janet Bird the novel ponders the balance between hereditary depression, the influence of landscape and the prevalent social conditions. Drabble emphasises the distinctive effects of the three without laying stress on anyone in particular. Perhaps, they are equally vital. In Frances one sees a positive way of coping with stress. The modern twentieth-century question "what for?" is primarily linked to the Wordsworthian quest and answer in "Tintern Abbey":

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things
(Wordsworth, 1859: 160).

Frances is conscious of the potential within her. There are in her life those "spots of time" which she is able to make her own. As with her Tizouk, which she sees as divine "revelation", Wordsworth is conscious of "revelation" in his encounter with the city of London. In "The Prelude" he first describes "the vulgar forms" and "Mean shapes on every side"(lines 545-547) and is later struck by something "divine". It is in retrospect that he is able to count those particular moments of revelation as a blessing. Drabble attaches great significance to such blessed moments. Frances shares a similar faith:

She had known that the city was there, she had gone out to dig for it, and she had found it. But all because of one flash of knowledge. Where had it come from, and why she had been allowed to have it, that revelation on which so much else depended (RG 34)?

Like Frances, Drabble has confidence and is hopeful that she will be able to "see", in this case, make sense of life:

But I have this deep faith that it will all be revealed to me one day. One day I shall just see into the heart of the whole thing
(Milton, 1978: 65).

The novel indicates that unlike Frances' Stephen's imagination is stultifying. He has lived with a set of codes that are life-denying:

It was better to be dead than alive: this was the knowledge that came to him. It seemed to descend upon him personally. Being alive was sordid, degrading, sickly, unimaginable (RG 349).

His knowledge drives him to despair and annihilation. Nothing positive sustains his spirits and in the text he is someone doomed to die so that others might live. Once again, it is Frances' imagination that survives his death. She sees it as "a sacrifice", "a healing". He leaps into the flame "whole, intact, undestroyed". He does not wish to wither like Beata nor rot like aunt Constance. Unlike his friend Sebastian, he can find neither happiness nor solace in drugs. He opts for the painless "refining fire" without heat. His refusal to suffer curbs his desire to live. He is like Oedipus who:

... through his extraordinary sufferings ultimately exerts a magical, healing effect on all around him, which continues even after his death (Nietzsche, 1927: 993-994).

It could well be argued that the society has failed to offer him a positive environment to live. Disease and death by war seem inevitable to Stephen.

Having witnessed:

... the terrible destructive processes of so called universal history... (he sees everywhere) the absurdity of existence (Nietzsche, 1927: 984).

To understand his predicament one might go back to the myth of tragedy:

An old legend has it that King Midas hunted a long time in the woods for the wise Silenus, companion of Dionysos, without being able to catch him. When he had finally caught him the king asked him what he considered man's greatest good. The daemon remained sullen and uncommunicative until finally, forced by the king, he broke into a shrill laugh and spoke: "Ephemeral wretch, begotten by accident and toil, why do you force me to tell you what it would be your greatest boon not to hear? What would be best for you is quite beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best is to die soon" (Nietzsche, 1956: 29).

This particular analogy is drawn to reveal the similarity in circumstances. Stephen, a product of the twentieth-century, has heard the voice of "revelation" and therefore decided to put an end to everything. He is a victim of morbid anxiety and despondency, that is, dysthymia. Unlike Frances, (or even Aunt Constance), he is reluctant to be a fighter and resigns himself to despair. He seeks transcendence in death, and embraces it. Stephen's character subtly reminds one of Septimus Warren Smith in Mrs Dalloway, who may be seen as his prototype. Septimus too like Stephen is unable to accept the gross indifference of the modern world. As a shell-shock victim he succumbs to despair and kills himself. Death seems to be the final attempt to communicate their disillusionment with life:

One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that (MD 80).

Stephen has killed himself because he sees death as the best possible option, the only alternative to incurable despair. He too is a Romantic who unlike Frances hopes to put an end to suffering by trying to conquer "flesh and death". Stephen is on the other extreme of imagination, teetering on the edge of madness. He is a disillusioned romantic who has failed to come to terms with the essential human condition. Frances sees his death as an act of salvation and a creative process. "Medieval contemplative" that he was, Stephen along with his baby chooses to die in "a very secret place" a death made easier by the sleeping tablets and the sleeping bag. Ten days later:

They were lying in a hollow in a wood, under tree roots, wrapped up in the sleeping bag together (RG 350).

Perhaps like Coleridge who had mourned and wept for the loss of his creative spirits Stephen fails to unburden his despair and bemoans the loss of faith in living. He is unable to respond to the world with joy. His

mind is getting increasingly worn out with despondent thoughts, hopelessness for the future as is visible in "Dejection: An Ode":

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
(lines 39-41).

"Rocky and seething" Rosa's painting is a portent in the novel. Like "Empedocles jumping into Etna" (RG 197) Stephen dies to prove himself. For Coleridge it is the mind that creates the necessary rapport with nature:

And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!
(lines 48-49).

Frances has chosen "the wedding garment" for herself and Stephen has chosen "the shroud". Frances chooses to find consolation in family and profession, in love-making and city-making. Her knowledge of the past enhances her understanding and quality of life. Unlike Stephen, Frances has discovered in the company of her lover Karel, moments of pure bliss and simplicity amidst nature and made them her own. The sight of the croaking frogs is a case in point:

Hundreds and hundreds of frogs were sitting down that pipe, and they were all honking, all of them... Down the pipe they sat, as happy as can be, croaking for joy. Karel and Frances stared, awestruck, amused: the sight was repulsive and at the same time profoundly comic... Oh, I love them, said Frances. They looked as though they had been bred from the clay, as in some medieval natural history. A natural product of the landscape, they were (RG 25).

Borrowing from Wordsworth, Drabble invokes a series of such "spots of time" in most of her novels. The sight of the frogs becomes a source of "pleasure and amusement deep within her" (RG 25). Drabble too is seeking significance in the ordinariness of life. What has saved Karel and Frances from disintegrating is the "gift for weeping" (RG 349) and perhaps it is the

lack of it that was responsible for the death and despair of Stephen. He could not go through a catharsis. Frances' attitude to life justifies the title of the novel. Unlike an octopus living in "a square perspex box" (RG 9) she has moved into the world. She does not shrink from contact; she enjoyed it and having had her fill she would move into Mays Cottage, a landscape that "combined elements" (RG 324-325). We are what we make of our lives is the grinding truth of Frances' life. And once again, through her and Stephen, Drabble seems to be eddying back and forth and trying to find out whether it is hereditary depression, the effect of landscape or the social environment that is of significance in shaping an individual. Occasionally, each fills in a certain gap, each leave its mark on the individual.

In the world of Ollerenshaws, aunt Constance is incognito. Yet it is in the life of Constance Ollerenshaw that we see the landscape acquiring unique dimensions. She is the one who draws the principal lines in the map of Frances' past. "Lost love, rejection, puerperal fever, guilt, interfering vicars, the death of a loved child, persecution by parents" (RG 308), all this and much more had perhaps been responsible for her madness. It is obvious to Frances that society had not done justice to Constance. As a consequence she moved to the cottage, hiding herself from the public glare. The move to the cottage and her renunciation of the outside world can be read as an attempt "to defy the patriarchal order and to reinstate the feminine" (Weedon, 1989: 72). Rejected by her family and society she is forced to create her small sphere. She allies herself to nature and embraces it. According to Chris Weedon:

Witches, for example, provide a particularly powerful symbol of women's resistance to the dominant order and their punishment for failure to conform... The feminine discourses of mysticism, magic, poetry and art, in which women have contested patriarchy, share a rejection of the rationalist norms of the symbolic order and cannot be contained within the realm of patriarchal meanings. It is for this reason,... that they have been

devalued, repressed or marginalized by being defined as evil or insane (Weedon, 1989: 72).

As an unmarried woman who gets pregnant and becomes an outcast, a figure of shame and dissent, the life of Constance is subject to isolation and madness. For Janet her aunt "certainly looked like a witch" and she also felt "It would be ill luck, surely, to let her set eyes on the baby, she might wish it evil, she might cast a spell" (RG 288). She is reminded of "Witches in the old days [that] sucked the blood of infants and pounded their bones in mortars, pounded them into paste" (RG 288). Janet takes a while to convince herself that Constance is a woman like herself "who liked to live alone" (RG 288). It is in this context that we see Weedon's argument gaining ground. One look at the history of her hidden past and it is made clear that Constance was condemned to a life of exclusion by the social order. Constance's refusal to conform has marginalized her and finally doomed her to a fate of complete withdrawal from and by the society. Her death is the culmination of the social malaise. She had suffered a death of her spirits at the hands of society much before her physical death. What Constance leaves behind is somehow inherited by Frances, her indomitable "spirit" and Harold Barnard sees in her a resemblance: "You could have been Constance herself, fifty years younger" (RG 310). By accepting Mays cottage as a holiday home she has assimilated the landscape of her past and decided to welcome it in future. The discovery of this world is unlike that of Tizouk:

Oh so different, so beautifully different from the parched red mud of Adra, from the glaring altitudes of rocky, weathered Tizouk. England (RG 303).

While Adra is "parched", dry and barren, Tizouk too was "rocky", "weathered" and "glaring". It was the land of Tockley in England that had conveyed "a terrible purity". The cottage is "the Real thing" (RG 303). In it she seeks "private satisfactions" both in the company of Karel and her children.

She is not isolated. She has her family and profession to fall back upon. Her essential query "what for" does not break her relation with the community. The tension between the self and the world, between the present and the future is only partially resolved and involvement (in the form of a career or a community) alone can save her from being a victim of "hereditary depression". She is equally conscious that she cannot strip herself from the past. Landscape is and has always been shaped by varied experiences. As for the question whether or not landscape determines human nature, perhaps one is as indeterminate as the other. The conclusion of the novel moves decisively towards a happier solution. Frances Wingate will continue her interest in archaeology and her personal life will progress happily with Karel, the historian and the husband.

Finally I wish to point that in tracing "a map of her past" Frances herself has become a romantic emblem. Drabble depicts in Frances Wingate age-old qualities of the picturesque. Reduced by Karel into "a series of images" she becomes wild and weathered as landscape:

She was brown and yellow. Her skin was golden, and it was an interesting mixture of coarseness and sensitivity: it had been weathered... by sun and sand, like an ancient monument. She was covered in blemishes: scars, rough patches, corns, permanently damaged nails, moles, and a large brown birth mark on her bottom... She certainly hadn't weathered right through: inside, there was plenty going on (RG 96).

The woman Frances who carries her lover's set of teeth as "guardians of my virtue" (RG 247) inside her bra, with her outer rough edges and irregular contours is more than an image of the picturesque in the eighteenth-century. Her woman's body with its wild contours and varied blemishes is suffused with feeling and imagination - the two Romantic prerequisites. She recognizes in her the need to be affiliated to landscape. The modern Romantic is without faith in God, but she acknowledges her faith

in love, children and above all, in landscape. She has lived and been through many voyages. Like the pedlar in "The Excursion" she too has a happy ending. She walks with her new "husband" and children contented and happy, and is - using Wordsworthian phrase "... along my road in happiness" (line 525).

Notes

1 In "Romantic Revisionism in Margaret Drabble's The Realms of Gold" in Schmidt, Pamela S. Bromberg discusses "Drabble's reconsideration of the Romantic tradition" (p.57). See also Judy Little on the theme of creative powers of imagination, in "Margaret Drabble and the Romantic Imagination: The Realms of Gold". (Cf Bibliography).

Chapter Six

The Middle Ground: As a landscape of transition

While The Realms of Gold is a study of the discovery of the buried worlds of Tizouk and Tockley, by Frances Wingate, The Ice Age, as its title suggests, is about the "freeze" of the seventies. Right from her first novel A Summer Bird-Cage to The Middle Ground, we notice that Drabble's women are not only growing with age and experiences but also developing a sense of identity for themselves, going through a trajectory of self-realization. In her later novels the women are not only older and more experienced but also more resigned to life's patterns. Having assessed the unreliable nature of these patterns they seem to be questioning the relevance of their quest.

As a development of her earlier novel The Middle Ground focuses on the "mid-life crisis" (MG 16) in the life of Kate Armstrong. Nearly forty, Kate sees herself at an impasse. Her children are growing up and will need her no more, her career as a journalist interested in women's issues does not appeal anymore for she is bored with women's subjects. Love and career, the two major preoccupations in the life of Frances Wingate, fail to offer a similar assurance to Kate Armstrong.

The Middle Ground portrays a "between" landscape, a transitional stasis, negotiating between past and present, between the "romance" plot and a new, future "plot" for the heroine. Drabble suggests that most of her characters find themselves haunted by a climate of uncertainty and hostility. Caught in a "draughty open space" they have reached a stage where neither the past nor the future can bring in any assurance. If the earlier novels succeeded in creating subjective landscapes this particular novel aims at a more objective, wide and external landscape of Britain. One might begin

by saying that the realm of subjective consciousness is distinctively sharpened by the character's interest in the objective world surrounding her. The landscape of the mind echoes the tensions faced by the individual in the outside world. Not only is Drabble attempting to relate the subjective states of her heroines but she is starting to survey the social and political scene using her women as an index and measure of the contemporary landscape. In her survey she also refers to the changes inherent in a cosmopolitan society, a society of mixed races and cultures, and voices fears and anxiety at the changing face of Britain. As an attempt to portray the ineffable mass of society living in London Drabble seems to be following some of her predecessors. Like Dickens and Woolf, Drabble is interested in living with the times. She seems to be moving rapidly towards community rather than individuals and is particularly keen on reflecting the inherent tensions in a multicultural modern Britain.

Kate Armstrong had plunged into "new-wave women's pieces some time before they became fashionable..." and "as everyone else got more interested in Women, she became less and less so" (MG 59). As a women's journalist she has run out of steam. The non-eventfulness of the novel is reflective of Kate's disaffection with the present. Her predicament is summarized by Drabble in the following paragraph:

Writing the blurb [for the novel] was a nightmare because nothing really happens in it at all. It's about a woman journalist who has written about women's matters. And she's reached a stage where she's rather fed up with the narrow little ditch that she's got herself stuck in, which could be an analogy for the novelist who is fed up with the feminist critics. She can't get out of this particular position because she's got absolutely nowhere to go (Cooper-Clark, 1980: 75).

Drabble argues that in the seventies it is no longer possible for her to focus primarily on women. Women's issues are not at odds but linked

with racial, cultural and global issues. In The Ice Age Drabble had focused on "the state of the nation" and she continues to do so in The Middle Ground.

The use of a multiple narrative structure in her later novels proposes that it is no longer possible to achieve the complexity of modern society through a single consciousness. Experience in The Middle Ground is viewed by many in this attempt to establish a multiple perspective. Its individuals are connected in their "mid-life crisis". They are seemingly:

... going through re-appraisals, dissatisfactions, the discontent of realizing one would never in this one and only life be anything else but what one was (MG 61).

Kate Armstrong inhabits a world without patterns and her landscape is one of transition. She has had a miraculous escape from the underground and in her mid-life she decides to make a brief retreat. The middle years of her life are only temporarily caught in the scrubby past and Drabble charts her escape from the underground as a fortuitous leap into a world of love and recognition. In her middle years Kate gets weary of the purpose of life and is repeatedly haunted by the aimlessness of the approaching years.

It is true that Drabble is broadening her public concerns and it is equally significant to note that she is doing it through women. The move from the subjective to the objective landscape is marked by associating the public terrain with women, by making them part and parcel of it. The point is that Drabble concentrates on women participating in the public sphere and does not treat subjects of childbirth and marriage in isolation. With the women's liberation movement, their entry into the public realm has made it all the more essential for them to be able to link their inner with their professional and public lives. The definition of what constitutes the private and the public spheres has increasingly modified in the course of the

twentieth century for some women. And Drabble is interested in such women.

As Kate makes a journey to the landscape of her childhood she, like Frances Wingate, gets immersed in the process of remembering: "A heritage of sewage, agoraphobia and women's magazine correspondence columns had planted a prudent impulse in her" (MG 29). She too seeks answers from the past and is equally a product of it. But she has refused to get carried away by the lure of love, success and beauty, a myth projected through the media to women. Kate sees a trap for women beyond the glamour and headlines. She also realizes that the world of headlines can offer her power and authority to assert, to prove herself. She enters this world and makes it her own. What saves Kate from the agoraphobic dump that her mother had drowned in is her determination to identify but not to sink in it. As an adolescent she becomes aware that the threat to autonomy comes from outside. And the only way to retain it is by not succumbing to those pressures both from the family and society. The sewage works had been an important site to her. Not only did it reveal the genuine character of the underground (a world which is accessible to a very few) but evoked a series of associations with her dark hidden self. Drabble's underground becomes a complex metaphor of that hidden self. It is a significant site of hidden strengths and powers. And like the underground it has been a recipient of many unpleasant events, unsought-for truths and harsh encounters. As we shall see later Kate is extremely sensitive to her hidden self and strives to preserve it at all costs. Her exploration of the past that is the psychic underground as well as the literal and historical underground is an attempt to ascertain the link between the present and the past.

For the archaeologist, Frances Wingate, the past is linked with the celebration and restoration of ancient artefacts. As she unearthed the

landscape of Tizouk she had been filled with pride and a sense of triumph. Even the discovery of Mays Cottage with its innocent purity becomes a site of "private satisfactions" to her. In The Middle Ground the past is important only so long as it confers a certain meaning on the present lives of its characters. The exploration of the past is a clarifying process and is therefore different from The Realms of Gold. It is an immediate past lived in and recognized by the protagonist:

The dirty tangled roots of childhood twisted back for ever, beyond all knowing. Impacted, interwoven, scrubby, interlocked, fibrous, cankerous, tuberous, ancient, matted (MG 131).

Over the years the past has become "tangled" and "twisted" and Kate Armstrong as we shall see later recognizes the "roots" as her very own. And tinged with this recognition is her fear "I should never have looked" (MG 132). For her the landscape of the underground carries disturbing implications and is interspersed with a series of past recollections. While Frances was waylaid with queries of a distinct nature: "What is it for? the past, one's own or the world's" (RG 124), Kate Armstrong is overpowered by the smell of the underground. She sees in it a threat to her present self, well protected in "precarious leather boots" and asks herself if the return is an attempt to "escape the prison of the present into the past" (MG 116). Her job as a journalist does not make it easier.

The women in Drabble have come to terms with the fact that there is no escape from life, from anxieties and fears. Kate is not completely on the other side of the underground, she is away but she is not distant. Unlike most women trapped in unhappy families, Drabble women are clever and fortunate enough to be able to escape. Of her parents Kate reminisces:

... she had loved these two terrible people, in the dawn of time, in the dark before dawn, in the underground she had loved

them. And nothing in her conscious self, in her daylight self, had been able to love (MG 117).

She initially fails to see anything common between her two selves, the previous "lonely, cast out, cut off self" and the older more mature self with its "smart views and expensive boots" (MG 117). As she re-evaluates and redefines her past, her relationship to her brother Pete and her parents, Kate admits that she was prompted by a desire to free herself from the forces of the underground. She becomes a woman on her own terms. What comes as a surprise is that as long as she remained confined to the underground (which can be both an innocent and unknown self) she had loved her family but once the conscious self emerges the chord is snapped. The young girl decides to break free from the dark, enclosed, feeble and ridiculous world of her childhood. She fights against the forces opposed to her background by learning to laugh at herself and her past and she makes it public by exposing it, writing it. Kate is conscious and "merciless in her pursuit of power" and seeks release from the landscape of the underground and becomes "determined never to decide upon a formula, to improvise each time, to take risks as they came"(MG 246).

At first the metaphorical escape from the underground takes place in the act of telling stories. She becomes adept at "turning shit into gold" (MG 26). Her capacity to avert ridicule becomes her asset. She learns to protect herself by betraying, exposing, ridiculing the world she came from. Likewise, she seeks recognition from the outside world by turning outward. There seems to be a constant interplay between the ideas of "turning" and "trapping". Many of Drabble's women find themselves engaged in either of the two, even more in their middle years. In her middle years, years past parenthood and pregnancies (which gave her a sense of adequacy and usefulness) Kate is unable to restore her self-confidence. She feels she has

nothing more to offer and is "sick of opinions, slogans, ideologies, factions, causes"(MG 107). Disillusioned with ideals Kate feels she cannot turn away for her own living "depended on peddling opinions" (MG 107). In her "mid-life crisis" she not only becomes aware of her declining interest in women's issues but develops a sense of being "trapped by her own good nature and all its defects, now as never before" (MG 86). And when she revisits Romley, the home of her past, to make a T.V. documentary she hopes that it will "restore a sense of perspective" (MG 109).

The return to Romley is a significant move towards restoration and reassurance. It brings to light an aspect of her personality which her present successful image cannot do without, that is, her sense of adequacy. She likes being useful. It is important for her to feel that she is wanted, loved and accepted both as a career woman and as a mother. She admits to Hugo, "saying yes is my special technique for preserving myself... It's my way of keeping the upper hand" (MG 14).

The central figure in The Middle Ground is once again involved in the interpretation of her childhood, conveying the message that the present is dependent on the past. In The Middle Ground Drabble offers to clarify rather than mystify the past and to interpret history. As suggested by Berger:

When we "see" a landscape, we situate ourselves in it. If we "saw" the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history. When we are prevented from seeing it, we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us (Berger, 1972: 11).

For Kate it is the landscape of the underground which constitutes her history and even though she is aware that she shares "an infantile connection with the sewage" (MG 131) she cannot help asking herself whether or not it is "bound to have some effect on the psyche?" Sitting on "the scrubby grass of London" Kate wonders at the reliability of her memories. On one hand she is forever trying to decode the impact of her childhood years on her adult life and on

the other she treats them with great scepticism. She is seemingly de-emphasizing the responsibility of the past over the present. As a point of departure from her earlier novels where the women laid a great deal of responsibility on their parents and childhood upbringing, Drabble's Kate Armstrong looks at her successes and failures with a detached attitude. Although she affirms the role of the family and environment in the life of an individual she also believes in human capacity to improve and to adapt, to learn and to flourish:

The Truth is, she thought, I no longer trust any of my memories. I've lost faith in them. I thought they all made sense, that there was a nice, bright pattern, a nice conscious clear pattern... Maybe there's some other darker pattern, something utterly different? And if so, why can't I *see it*? (MG 130)

It is not Kate alone who suffers from the loss of faith in her memories. The loss is preeminently a feature of the age and corresponds with what Hugo describes as "a state of paralysis" that the modern landscape has been subject to. In The Middle Ground, the principal characters are not only re-appraising their individual lives but are also concerned about the situation of Britain as a whole. They perceive the changes in the modern, urban landscape and feel uncomfortable in its midst. If the middle years are the years of stasis they are also the years constant with fears, with "worries about age and solitude and sex" and "the economic fear" and the fear of loneliness. "What if she found herself with nothing more to say?" (MG 108) At the bottom of it lies the fear of rejection, of being unloved:

Would her own children... reject her, as she grew old and sour and crabbed? Were they rejecting her already, in their secret hearts, despite their deceitful smiles and embraces (MG 120)?

In this landscape of transition not only Kate but her friends find themselves at an impasse. Kate is not alone in her disaffection with the present. In the times of material affluence and spiritual emptiness women

bemoan their inability to transfer their convictions to their children. They can feel a sense of disenchantment in their lives. The middle years of Drabble's women are therefore the years of re-appraisal and assessment:

Neither had brought their children up to be religious; Evelyn felt she could not impose her views on others (MG 140).

In representing the character-structure of modern Britain, The Middle Ground is following a movement from the inner to the outer landscape. The curiosity of the protagonist is marked with her awareness of the "tatty, low, obdurate" country, the Britain of her times. Evelyn also finds little that is redeeming in the contemporary landscape:

What could one expect but delinquency, of children reared amidst such prospects? What images could one expect them to create for themselves? No wonder they dressed in battledress, adorned with plate armour of badges on their bosoms and clinking chain mail of staples and safety pins and paper clips. Each day they went into battle, along their own streets (MG 135).

What I wish to argue is that The Middle Ground unlike the earlier novels is focusing on the general rather than the particular. The characters are bound in a similar crisis. The modern consciousness is ripe with anxiety, uncertainty and despair. It is more a moment of stock-taking than of any particular development in the life of the principal protagonist. Kate Armstrong cannot turn a blind eye to the problems which concern British society at large. She is unable to dissociate herself from the contemporary landscape. She does not have the solution to any of the problems, she can only convey and hope to connect.

In one's reading of The Middle Ground it would not be far-fetched to compare it to its "mother text" Mrs Dalloway, for certain components of the novel are essentially derived from Woolf. In her diary Woolf describes the writing of the novel as a "tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it" (Woolf, 1978: 66). Drabble

seems to have taken her cue from her predecessor. In The Middle Ground Kate Armstrong is involved in a tunnelling into her past, she too is focusing on the sewers of the mind, she can feel the weight of her childhood years and is hoping to check herself, her weaknesses and anxieties by being able to come to terms with it. We are made aware of her past "by instalments" and the "tunnelling process" provides a perspective not only to Kate but situates the narrative structure of the novel:

Like Mrs Dalloway, it is about human relationships at a particular time in a particular place (London), within the important frames of time and memory (Rubenstein, 1984: 1).

Clarissa Dalloway and Kate Armstrong are both middle-aged women. It is the landscape of the present that prevails in The Middle Ground and Mrs Dalloway. Like Clarissa, Kate Armstrong fears loneliness and wishes to replace inner emptiness by showing serious concern for others and "protecting others". They are fond of society and are yet overawed by its artificiality. Set in London the two novels examine the past and the characters are linked through their memories. As suggested by Creighton: "While Mrs Dalloway finds her identity in her marital status, Kate is content to be single" (Creighton, 1985: 106). They are both seen by their closest male friends as "alternately vain and shallow, beautiful and true" (Creighton, 1985: 106). Like Clarissa Dalloway, Kate Armstrong recapitulates her past and by doing so provides a perspective for her inner self. As she makes her retreat she feels more than guilt at her escape from the underground, it is more than relief. In her moment of "resurrection" she comes to an understanding that: "Henceforth she would represent nothing but herself" (MG 224-225).

Published in 1925, Mrs Dalloway deals with the aftermath of World War I, the period of the beginning of the decline of the Empire. Against this background is presented a critical scrutiny of the decadent ruling

class. Like Woolf, who was sensitive to her times and was strongly critical of the society, Drabble is concerned about the state of modern Britain:

Woolf gives us a picture of a class impervious to change in a society that desperately needs or demands it, a class that worships tradition and settled order but cannot accommodate the new and the disturbing (Zwerdling, 1986: 124).

The apathy in Mrs Dalloway is echoed in The Middle Ground. Certainly both Mrs Dalloway and Kate Armstrong are in reality far too enclosed in their past. They see not just the present as it is, but have many past memories and affiliations to reconcile it with. Kate is conscious that the "The dirty tangled roots of childhood twisted back for ever and ever, beyond all knowing" (MG 131). She is not only questioning the nature of her escape from the underground but is mortified with guilt for leaving her brother behind. Unlike her brother who chose to withdraw amidst books and aeroplane kits, Kate goes out into the world and competes with it. Her underground is in sharp contrast to the world inhabited by young Clarissa. Clarissa is more ambivalent in her attitude to the past. Hers is a golden past, Kate's is dark and dirty. In Mrs Dalloway the shift in Clarissa's memory begins with her adolescence. We do not read of her childhood. Her earliest memories are of Bourton and of Sally when she was eighteen. She dwells on the past as a lost paradise. The past is evoked through various consciousnesses woven together. In Mrs Dalloway the entire past is compressed and revived in one single day, the day of the party. She is out to buy flowers for the party and on her way is reassessing her decision to marry Richard and her rejection of Peter. In her mind's eye Clarissa is seeking some justification. She is attempting to clarify her choice in marriage:

And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish (MD 9).

After many years of absence she meets Peter on the day of the party and is struck with the intensity of the revelation "... all in a clap it came over her, if I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day" (MD 43)! Clarissa experiences her loss as irreclaimable and a sigh of regret accompanies this realization. She also begins to see the hopelessness of her coming years. Having opted for the comfort and security of "the tower", the enclosure of Westminster, which was much in contrast with Peter's love of the open and the distant, the adventurous and the exotic, Clarissa meditates on her aloneness. It is summarized in her mind as follows:

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, and there among the dust of fallen plaster and the litter of birds' nests how distant the view looked, and the sounds came thin and chill (MD 43).

Unlike Kate, Mrs Dalloway is swamped by the values of her class. The ones at the higher end of the scale in society are men like Dr. Bradshaw and Hugh Whitbread. They fail to understand the emotional and spiritual vacuum in the lives of Miss Kilman and even Septimus Smith because they themselves are emotionally and spiritually barren. Their misunderstanding is marked by an indifference towards others. Even Clarissa, Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, former rebels, are now firmly entrenched within their social system. They too are in their mid-lives and have chosen neither to be outcasts nor do they seem satisfied with their confirmed status in society. The central protagonist has lower middle-class origins in The Middle Ground and has made her way to the top of her profession single-handed.

The novel does not focus on class distinctions but reflects more on the impact of affluence on British society at large. As reflected by Evelyn:

... but affluence, nevertheless, had affected their lives; it had set up for them impossible dreams in television advertisements, in

hoardings like the ones that loomed over her, beyond the reach of spray cans, portraying happy families eating Danish Bacon, glamorous women on tiger skins eating Colman's mustard (MG 142).

In Mrs Dalloway the urban landscape does nothing to alleviate Septimus Smith's despair. It accentuates his loneliness and his lack of confidence in the future:

In the street, vans roared past him; brutality blared out on placards; men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive; and once a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud) ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe. And would he go mad (MD 81)?

Out in the streets of London Septimus Smith not only feels insecure but sees some kind of madness lurking in the corner, ready to engulf the likes of him. The indifference of the world crushes his will to live. The attack on Evelyn in The Middle Ground substantiates the fear lying in the minds of Kate and others. It bears a striking parallel to the threats Septimus had received in his life, both at war and in his mind. Passing through the streets of London Kate can sense the unsteady tremors, the very ground on which she is treading is heavy with tensions and distrust. She is also beginning to wonder if something far more sinister is emerging from the contemporary urban landscape:

... what if each act of personal violence were after all an expression, a cumulation 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 a kerb (MG 223)?

In this landscape of transition Kate has lived with her personal guilts, the guilt of having rejected her parents and brother and that of terminating the foetus, her unborn child. She feels she has failed herself and

the sense of failure within her is crystallized in the objective landscape which has nothing to offer but deeper fears and uncertainties.

The device of a party in The Middle Ground is an attempt toward integration in a vertical manner. While Septimus and Miss Kilman could never dream of being invited by Mrs Dalloway, the party in The Middle Ground will be remarkable for its strange assortment of people. The party is yet to come. It will not only have the "wicked princess" Marylou, but the invitations have been issued to Gabriel Denham and his first wife Jessica, to Hugo and Ted, "the sad and widowed" Mr Campbell, Hunt and Ruth's rastafarian; all irrespective of their class. At a closer look we find most of them are marginalized if not in the society at least in the novel. Kate Armstrong is very much a woman of the present who unlike Mrs Dalloway has had the tenacity to work single-handed and for her: "Marriage as defeat held no appeal" (MG 66). It is here that we see Drabble charting out a new, future plot for the women. Romance and marriage have somehow lost its appeal in middle years and the individual's desire to look for different means of recognition both within oneself and the society gains significance. Unlike Clarissa, Kate must turn, go further. She has more future. She can still think in terms of representing herself. Whereas, the future lies with the young in Mrs Dalloway.

Despite her temporary despair, the world that Kate lives in has a lot more to offer to women, irrespective of their marital status. Like Woolf, who is concerned without being judgemental, Drabble views the modern landscape without being censorious. Reflecting on The Middle Ground:

I think it was an echo of myself. It was an echo of having lived in London, in the same house, with the same people, for a long time, and feeling a kind of irritation of repetition that comes over one and yet knowing that one's responsibility was to stay there (Satz, 1985: 194).

It is the "irritation of repetition" that has perchance compelled Drabble to expand and explore the various dimensions of the urban landscape:

... as I have grown older my canvases have become broader but that nevertheless they are still very strongly rooted in the novels I wrote earlier (Satz, 1985: 189).

Drabble employs a tone of genuine concern and understanding. The Middle Ground becomes a step in progression. Its protagonist is conscious of her earlier faith in "freedom" and "progress". And in her middle years they seem to have failed her. On the surface Kate is a free woman who has matched her steps from the underground to the road of progress and freedom. At a manifest level her inner fears are well concealed:

The freedom she had glimpsed, as an ambitious girl of twenty, had turned into a narrow tunnel, and nobody would let her out. Nobody wanted her to get out. They wanted her to stay in. Am I getting sour, am I getting bitter, and if so, why? she asked herself (MG 59).

This reminds us of Clara of Jerusalem the Golden, one of Drabble's youngest heroines. Is Kate an older version of Clara? For like Clara she came from a lower middle-class background and escaped its confines, she too had hoped to enjoy herself in the world of power, of success, of freedom. And having gone through it all Kate is still dissatisfied. She finds herself "trapped", "turned into a narrow tunnel". Seemingly she has been led from one trap into another, from one tunnel into another. "I've come to a dead end, thought Kate, I don't care anymore, whatever has happened to me (MG 60)? Kate's voice of disaffection not only reveals her boredom but is "a phase", from which she will recover in no time. She too will make an "offering", a party like Clarissa Dalloway which will temporarily make her "happy, useful, busy..." (MG 58). She has her career and children to hold on to. And then there is the narrator's resolution which ends Kate's disaffection with an assurance "... for this is her house and there she sits, she has everything and nothing, I give her everything and nothing" (MG 268). Here as in The Realms

of Gold the author-narrator's consciousness becomes a presence and an intrusion and maybe a part of her developing aesthetic.

E.C. Rose argues that the narrator novelist has rejected the closed mode of "history" - where patterns are discerned and meaning is fixed" (Rose,E.C., 1982: 80-81). The mapping of patterns on life is viewed by Drabble as a complex venture:

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: the 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 (Whitehill, 1984: 72-73).

The open-ended structure of the novel does seek to explain the binary opposition between the private and the public world of Kate Armstrong. It is from the landscape that one gets a glimpse of both the worlds. The landscape has enabled one to establish a pattern and to draw links between the past, present and the future. And Drabble's conscious use of the literary heritage is to be read as a metaphoric configuration of the "word" which has been handed over from the past to the present, the underground to the surface.

In their critical study The Madwoman in the Attic Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out the multiple effects of the "anxiety of authorship" in women's literature. The influence of Woolf on Drabble can be viewed in this light. The sister-mother figure serves to enlighten and illuminate the sister-daughter text. Drabble is conscious of the "poetic misprision" (Bloom, 1973: 19) and very tacitly and deliberately chooses to swerve the conclusion of The Middle Ground. Here one would like to swerve Kierkegaard's maxim "He who is willing to work gives birth to his own father" (Bloom: 1973: 26) to "She who is willing to write gives birth to her own mother". It becomes a critique of Mrs Dalloway.

In Landscape in Literature Drabble sees the past as the "foreign country". And she views Virginia Woolf's desire to "re-enter" that land as a struggle, for "she needed to come to terms with the past, with the loss of her parents, with the loss of her brother. Woolf "tried to come to terms" with her "loss" and her "past" by recalling in fiction all that was denied to her in life. Perhaps she was conscious that "one of the magical powers of art is the power of resurrection" (LL 269).

As Kate re-enters the "foreign land" which is the landscape of her childhood she is welcomed by:

The worn grass, the trodden earth, the intermittent litter of twisted barbed wire, the round iron man-hole covers (MG 111).

What she is not prepared for is the further change it has undergone:

... and there, to her astonishment, was a large artificial lake, with, of all things, little sailing dinghies, in the middle of nowhere, on a midweek morning... How extraordinary!... How odd it all was, how unexpected! Twentieth century paradise, pleasure gardens of concrete, lakes where land had once been, civic landscape gardening (MG 112).

This is a changing face of the London suburbs. A dramatic and a restless change. The early twentieth century had a mixed reaction to the industrial landscape. It was a time when:

A strange new beauty was growing out of the muddle, new forms, new aesthetic concepts, a new man-made paradise (LL 229).

Drabble reminds us that:

A world of pure form, however, remains an unrealizable dream: the reality is still muddle, some of it so extreme that it has its own purity (LL 229).

Drabble's book on landscape was published in 1979, and The Middle Ground in 1980. It would not be wrong to assume then that the latter

is a progressive reworking of some of Drabble's current ideas on landscape. It is also an area that she is worried about.

When Kate returns to Romley, the land of her childhood, much is still the same:

The landscaped pleasure gardens dropped behind, replaced by a tangle of brambles and bushes and long grass. A few shabby horses grazed in an untidy field. Rabbit country, the working man's uncultivable terrain. Half a mile away, square open patches of yellow sand flatly glittered, and far on the horizon cranes and vast silver cylinders stood about, ghostly shining inhabitants of the marsh. Nearby, the bushes were laden with berries. The dark red of the haws scattered the deep green in a fine haze like drops of blood. A crab apple dazzling with pale orange glowing fruits like a tree decorated for a festival illuminated the undergrowth. Trails of old man's beard and traveller's joy silvered the scrub. This is my country, thought Kate. Tatty, low, obdurate. Was it wrong, perhaps, to move? (MG 113)

The extreme "purity" that fascinates Drabble is reminiscent of Clare's interest in the "common". For his is a voice lamenting the loss of the old and familiar in the "Remembrances":

- O it turns my bosom chill /
When I think of old 'sneap green' puddocks
nook and hilly snow /
Where bramble bushes grew and the daisey gemmed in
dew /
And the hills of silken grass like to cushions on
the view /
... By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left
its hill /
On cowper green I stray tis a desert /
strange and chill (LL 64-65).

The landscape employed by Clare directs the reader's vision towards the simple and the ordinary. His is a tone of nostalgia and deep loss. Like Clare, Drabble has a great sense of place. Like Clare, she appreciates the humble, democratic, everyday landscape. Unlike Clare, Drabble does not give in to loss and nostalgia; she works her way out. Her women strive to identify with

the ordinary, to find a middle ground which would lead them to a sense of common humanity. It is also in the common that Drabble sees the real heart of landscape. She is conscious of the changes we require to improve the quality of everyday life. Nor is she against the attempts to restructure some of the countryside. What Drabble seems to miss is the "purity" inherent in the wild and the natural. For her it is important that Britain retain some of its old and invaluable interest in the "common".

Furthermore, Drabble has an inclination to draw on the simpler aspects of life. She delights in the natural and the day-to-day. Her women are not alone and motherhood plays a significant role in restoring their faith in future, in life. Her women seek salvation in work and children. Like Emma in The Garrick Year, who admits her responsibility as a mother and sees herself as "terrestrial", and does not end at the bottom of the river like Julien, Kate Armstrong will also rise after the fall. She will not drown. For Kate her middle years are the years of transition, of awareness and of revelation. For, like the sister in the Russian tales, she feels herself being "resurrected, dug up, dragged from the river" (MG 238). The image of the river, like the sewers, is a threat to her adult years. One realizes that the stasis she is in is a temporary one. The heavy stone that she had been carrying like Alenoushka is the stone of guilt, it has dissolved and therefore she "rises up". The river here is emblematic of the fear ready to engulf her. Kate has refused to drown and dissolve. It is only the stone that needs to be dissolved. Kate feels resurrected and it is this feeling that purges her of guilt and makes her light and relieved. The inner, protected self has refused to drown, to sink. Once deprived of its "stone" she has become light and aery. It is here that we see a landscape of transition boldly crossing the frontiers and opening into a world more positive and loving. (One is reminded of Woolf's suicide, her death by drowning, her seeing to it that the stones did not let her live, rise.)

Woolf rescued Clarissa. She gives her a daughter. Drabble's Kate too does not follow Woolf. She too will live, she is not childless. Kate's return journey to Romley is significant in restoring her faith in life. Having gone through nostalgia and despair, guilt and anxiety, she prepares herself to face the world with a sturdy resilience. Her transition is from crisis to a state of love:

The aerial view of human love, where all connections are made known, where all roads connect (MG 238).

Kate has had a vision of love and it is this vision that has enabled her to rise, to hope for the future. Unlike an earlier heroine, Jane Gray in The Waterfall, who could be rescued by involving herself in love, a love blinded by sexual passion, the transition from a state of crisis to a state of love in The Middle Ground is to be found in a more generalized sense of love, a love for common humanity. She sees it as "human love". But one must admit that this comes after her own experiences with life. Kate is older and more experienced. Like Jane who had an affair with her cousin Lucy's husband, Kate has a long affair with Ted, her best friend Evelyn's husband. Her "mid-life crisis" is perhaps the heavy stone that had chained her for a while. Once dissolved, her soul has been set free. Unimpeded it floats on the surface of the earth. The river, as a metaphor for the underground, as representative of both the sewer and the inner world inhabited by Kate, could not hold it for long. By being on the surface, in the landscape of the present, she can see that all roads "connect" by means of love. The message that her vision conveys is that of "connect". To be able to bind, join, and establish a harmonious link between the past, present and future is a stimulating message of The Middle Ground. As Kate views the cityscape with:

its old intensity restored, shining with invitation, all its shaggy grime lost in perspective, imperceptible from this dizzy height, its connections clear, its pathways revealed. The city, the kingdom. The aerial view (MG 238).

She becomes conscious of the process of renewal that is essential to the landscape both inherited by the mind and visible to the eye. The vision of present-day London from the top of the hospital room establishes a continuum in the minds of Evelyn and Kate, suggesting the beauty and inevitability of human existence. It comes as a saving grace, a revelation, therefore, the decision to have a party. The hospital room, manifests itself as a denominator, both of suffering and compassion. And it is from the hospital that Kate sees "the aerial view". The sick and ailing soul receives the light of this "aerial view" as symptomatic of the current transition. She is restored and shining like the long, distant spectacle of London. Here it becomes important to stress that it is the same old, tatty and low London with its "conglomeration of textures and surfaces" (MG 133) that had always intrigued Evelyn and Kate acknowledges its presence with "it is my country" (MG 113).

Kate is the woman of our time and unlike her predecessor Mrs Dalloway sees beyond the frailty of flowers. She is infused with a desire to flourish and survive like the bay tree. Kate Armstrong goes to buy flowers and returns with a "green flourishing tree". And the decision to buy the tree which at first seemed "accidental" becomes more "purposeful" in the light of Hunt's remark. Unlike him, none remember The Book of Common Prayer with its "The wicked shall flourish like the green bay tree". Kate has been brought up as an atheist and her children "do things like abortion and euthanasia and capital punishment" as part of "modern learning" (MG 267). In The Book of Common Prayer, the bay tree stood for the wicked and the ungodly, whereas Kate sees it as a symbol of longevity and solidity. The decision to buy the tree is also symptomatic of her desire to live and survive, to rise and fight. It seems as if Kate's temporary dystopia has dissolved and she would not let herself become a victim of incurable nihilism. She too is like Frances Wingate, for whom states of mind: "would arrive and pass... It was

largely a question of sticking it out (RG 12). Kate also buys flowers for the party but unlike Clarissa, she assimilates the fleeting delicacy with the hardness of the bay tree. She knows the flowers will wither and lose their smell. However beautiful and colourful they might seem she is aware that they have been "nurtured for this one moment"(MG 264-265). And unlike Clarissa Dalloway, Kate is living not simply for the moment but for the future. She recognizes the need for something more lasting than the flowers. She is the modern woman who has well grasped the dangerous lure of the flowers. And is not willing to sacrifice her creativity at the cost of sexual and social conformity. Like the green bay tree she is willing to stand amidst odds and live. She has no intention of cutting herself off from the outer world. In contrast with the plant in The Waterfall, that "leafless withered unwatered twig" with "some hidden life" (W 41), the bay tree is green and flourishing. In both instances the tree reflects the inner state of mind of its women. One is old and strong, the other waiting for some nourishment, some joie de vivre in life.

This leads to the inner/outer development in Drabble's fiction. The subjectivism of earlier novels gives way to diffusion of self in later ones. Women in Drabble become anxiety-ridden at the prospect of decline in the modern landscape. Their fears are well-grounded and it seems that through her novels Drabble is repeatedly sharing her concern with her readers. The Middle Ground is a transitional novel and unlike Middlemarch, which is a successful novel of community as well as a marriage story, Drabble's novel fails to relate these two aspects with an equal intensity. Or is it true that with her understanding of modern consciousness she might become the turning point, the point of reference for future generations of readers? Phyllis Rose asks will she become a novelist of her times:

... the novelist people will turn to in a hundred years from now to find out what things were, the person who will have done for late twentieth century what Dickens did for Victorian London, what Balzac did for Paris (Rose P; 1980: 32-33).

Drabble's attempt to incorporate socio-economic, racial and personal issues makes the novel unwieldy. One agrees with Gail Effrig that: "Kate's emptiness is the emptiness of the good human secularist" (Effrig, in Schmidt, 1982: 181). E.C.Rose sees it as a "soap opera". The effect is viewed by Phyllis Rose not as "a case of artistic fatigue but of failed experiment" (Rose P, 1980: 32). What is voiced by one of the character's as a modern dilemma could possibly be read as the author's predicament:

When one was younger, one saw patterns everywhere, for the process of selection was so simple. One simply did not notice most things, having no means of noticing them. So they selected themselves (MG 182).

The act of noticing "things" has deprived Drabble of selection and simplicity. The movement to documentary, non-subjective fiction, her loss of interest in "old" plot mechanisms is now becoming a basis of her "boringness". And she is being justly criticized for it. In the process she has also lost some of her popular literary appeal. It is possible that her viewscape is a reflection of the complexity of her times which is why it seems to lack a centre. It is symptomatic of the modern transitional landscape. Out of context it might seem, but one cannot resist repeating Yeats' verse wherein he speaks about the loss of coherence in the modern world:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity
(Yeats, 1926: 346)¹.

In The Middle Ground Drabble is not without hope and subsequently chooses to create an interior landscape in the shape of a party.

The party comes as a fitting finale to this desire to "connect". In no other way could Kate have paid tribute to this revelation.

As in Mrs Dalloway, the party becomes a ground for meeting and mixing, of establishing new and asserting old relationships. It becomes an offering, an effort "to combine, to create" (MD 109); as suggested earlier its import is slightly different in The Middle Ground. The form of the novel reflects the "shapeless diversity" of its thematic resolution and differs from highly patterned Mrs Dalloway where the party is major structuring device. It is what Kate decides to give unpremeditatedly. It is where she hopes her past and the future would stand and meet (look and perceive) the landscape of the present. For here would not only be her first husband's parents but also Ruth's Rastafarian whom she has not met so far. Hunt, her friend from the underground would come uninvited and the foreigners, Mujid and Simone, would be one of those in whose honour she would give the party. The "party" would thus become the retrospective connecting device in the novel.

By making Kate's house a meeting point for different people and ideologies Drabble has tried to bridge the gap between what was first argued by Plato as a landscape of private speech and a public world:

... that the private speech of the household, the speech of women, lacked either the form of philosophic argumentation or the form of poetry (Elshtain, in Keohane, Rosaldo and Gelpi, 1982: 130).

Poetry and philosophy could only be wielded by men and the house had no place for them. It could only be worked out in the political sphere to which women did not belong. Elshtain argues through history that women have been denied a proper place. She considers Plato as the father of this complex tradition which was dismissive of women as subjects in the political arena. Women in Drabble are fortunate to have escaped such a fate. Their role is significant in the twentieth-century landscape. For Kate Armstrong no such

barriers exist. Or if they did she has crossed them. In this she is a development of Clarissa Dalloway. In their reading of Mrs Dalloway, Horner and Zlosnik argue that Clarissa pays a heavy price for her sexual and social conformity:

What we see in Clarissa Dalloway is the artistic process at work, an imaginative and creative sensibility which cannot translate itself into artefact in the world because of the choices she has made in her life (Horner and Zlosnik, 1990: 100).

A final point in connection with Woolf's influence on Drabble is seemingly significant, for it has brought about a remarkable change in her approach to women. It is the "principle of androgyny" that is at work in Drabble's novel. It is the principle:

... which I was introduced to by Virginia Woolf. And I do find it very interesting. In fact, the whole of Bloomsbury believed very much in androgyny and in casting off sexual stereotypes... I believe we shouldn't think too much in terms of stereotypes - either the newly forged ones or the old ones that we ought to question them all the time (Satz, 1985: 192).

What Drabble is interested in, like Woolf, is the "casting off" of sexual stereotypes. In her as much as Woolf, one observes a challenge to Plato's concept of separate spheres. Even her male figures, Simon Camish, Anthony Keating and George, transgress the realm of male stereotype. They are soft spoken, considerate, with maternal instincts for the children - "motherly", for as father figures both Simon and Anthony, Stephen and Christopher are more "motherly" than fatherly. In mothering their children they extend their love and caring and do not wield what would be called the father's authority. They appear as men whom women can talk to, relate to. Drabble's men cry and feel. Drabble does not disregard the concept of caring in men and is increasingly interested in their aspirations and beliefs and the values upheld

by them. Simon Camish of The Needle's Eye is an interesting study of the sort.

Drabble's Kate is living in a landscape of transition. And it is in a moment of transition that she is "determined never to decide upon a formula, to improvise each time, to take risks as they came" (MG 246). From a state of questioning there is a movement toward self understanding and affirmation. Neither her personal problems nor her fears for her career have subsided. Having suffered a "Freudian nervous breakdown through Ted and that baby business, and a Marxist nervous break down through Mujid" (MG 107), it becomes evident to Kate that these repositories of belief can no longer be the touchstones to human life. She sees them as incomplete and inchoate theories, theories that have failed to understand the whole range of human existence, with its varied possibilities. Her "tunnelling" into the underground in a way not only charts out the present but also explains it. The re-entering the "foreign land" is fruitful for the understanding of the self. What she does not see as productive is the constant desire to cling to it. Her vision does not remain static. It moves back and forth, covering the background, the middleground and the foreground. It restores her perspective.

The conclusion of Mrs Dalloway has already made Clarissa a ghost of the past, "For there she was" (MD 172). Whereas Kate Armstrong, with all her "excitement" and "joy" and "anticipation" and "apprehension" is free. The party is still to come. Her soul is no more trapped by the underground. Ready to meet her guests, her future, her fears and her present: "She hears her house living. She rises" (MG 270). Through a series of active verbs Drabble proposes to evoke Kate's response to life. "Calls", "rings", "hears", and "rises" suggest that Kate is not only wanted and asked for, but she responds to the world, she manages to triumph over her temporary despair. Her moment of stock-taking is over and she has her future, her

children, her guests to look forward to. She is not only relieved but is filled with "tenderness, delight, wonder, gratitude" (MG 263). In her moment of revelation she sees that love for the community alone can inspire and instill faith in life. She becomes conscious of her moral and social responsibility. The house becomes her "kingdom". It is a kingdom of love like her beloved city of London. The enclosure in this case is willed and not forced. The only alternative Drabble offers as a long-term perspective is that of love. One agrees with Elshtain who is equally persistent:

But to create a coherent psycho-social identity, speech of a particular kind is required: speech that simultaneously taps and touches our inner and outer worlds within a community of others with whom we share deeply felt, largely inarticulate, but daily renewed intersubjective reality (Elshtain, in Keohane, Rosaldo and Gelpi, 1982: 144).

Elshtain's views corroborate Drabble's central message of common concern (repeated very often in her novels) which is renewed through Kate's desire to "connect" and Evelyn's message of "caring". In The Middle Ground individuals reciprocate and share. Hugo's intense discussions with Kate, Evelyn and Kates' friendship, Kate's relationship with Ted, her understanding of Mujid, her fondness for Hunt, are all ways of establishing a speech symbiosis. But by and large, the true nature of speech is "unplanned, unpredicted... There is no way of knowing what it will be. It does not know itself" (MG 270). And like Kate one is led to believe "But it will come into being" (MG 270). Drabble's women possess a language of optimism, of caring, of responsibility and integration. Despite all, one is left wondering at Kate. Like Hugo who sees her as someone "sublime", "an angel in the house", "as an archetypal castrating woman", "a woman so set on proving that she could manage single handed", "light relief, of a high quality", "a freak escape" (MG 254-256, 15); a cluster of opposites is Kate Armstrong. And at the end of the novel one does not cease to question who is she ?

Kate Armstrong with her "shapeless diversity" is as elusive as Mrs Dalloway.

Notes

1. In her article on The Middle Ground Gail Effrig refers to Yeats' words "that come irresistibly to mind, as slogans, graffiti, headlines and appeals pour out this intensity over every surface of Kate's life (Effrig, in Schmidt, 1982: 182).

Chapter Seven

From The Radiant Way to The Gates of Ivory: A landscape of multitudes

He will march on, armed, blooded, bloodied, a rusty Chinese rifle at his back... He has not been told that he is living at the end of history. He does not care whether his mother lives or dies. He marches on. He is multitudes (GI 462).

In Drabble's depiction of landscape is visible a keen concern with and sharp analysis of contemporary British society. Her interest in landscape is accompanied by a growing concern for the relationship between characters and the role of community in their lives. The Ice Age and The Middle Ground illustrate the continuing of this development.

The Middle Ground ends with Kate looking forward to the party. She is ready to meet the future and the oncoming event fills her with anticipation. A party becomes the starting point of The Radiant Way. The novel opens on New Year's Eve - a time for celebrations, recollections, partings and farewells. Drabble draws our attention to the moment of uncertainty that heralds the 'eighties.

One of the major themes of The Radiant Way and A Natural Curiosity is the rise of a global consciousness and linked to this consciousness is the attitude to the changing landscape. The movement from the suburbs to the heart of Britain is of particular significance in locating this particular development in her novels.

Within the last year Drabble has come out with the third part of the trilogy and as suggested by the narrator, The Gates of Ivory is a novel "about Good Time and Bad Time" (GI 3). As a landscape of multitudes the trilogy not only marks a broadening of her interest in landscape but is equally

significantly drawn towards broader socio-political issues. In the trilogy which is more of a panorama, an extended portrayal of people and issues, of events and crises, Drabble avoids focusing on a single predicament. ^{She examines} a heap of predicaments, of queries and observations. Drabble is no longer interested in the single self nor is her focus solely on Britain. Drabble's move towards the other landscapes is of increasing interest both in terms of the multiple plot structure and multiplicity of themes. It signifies a deliberate departure from her earlier subjective themes and is suggestive of a crucial twist in the contemporary landscape. Technology and industrial development might have stripped landscape of naturalness but they have also brought mankind closer to one another. In the modern landscape global communication has enabled subjective consciousness to become interlinked with multiple consciousness. Drabble's writing has followed a similar pattern, in it she has moved from local to world-wide issues. She seems anxious to probe the complexities inherent in modern societies. In a world of socio-economic disparity, of terrorism and human warfare she is making a few queries related to human progress. In this skilfully documented trilogy Drabble's vision of the future landscape is of a society with far greater uncertainties. Drabble has tried to give us a vision of the multifarious world and is in effect precariously trapped in topics without any coherent message. We are made aware of the distortions in the contemporary socio-political landscape. As pointed out by Peter Kemp:

Where The Radiant Way panoramically surveyed Britain as the 1980's opened, and A Natural Curiosity exposed archetypal depths beneath contemporary disturbances, this last novel, again endowed with mythic resonances, widens out to a global purview (Kemp, 1991: 6).

It is indeed a landscape of multitudes and one cannot possibly single out a unifying theme within the trilogy. Lorna Sage recognizes the shift as follows:

This is a world where there is no such thing as society, only masses and numbers and uprooted individuals, where those who cling to the notion of community ("People who don't know how to mind their own business") look like the odd ones out (Sage, 1991).

The fragmented nature of modern societies is manifest in a variety of issues that she is interested in. But the writing is as muddled as the landscape of today. Furthermore, in this landscape of multitudes it is not the individual but the issues around which he/she lives that seem to grip the writer's interest. And Drabble does not seem to be evoking as deep an identification as she was in her earlier books, concerned with individual predicament.

The Gates of Ivory is a much researched document. At its centre is a novelist Stephen Cox, who is led by his insatiable curiosity to the unfamiliar and uncanny world of horror and grim uncertainty. The novel is a retelling of his experiences in South-East Asia. It charts his life's ultimate journey to a world distinct from his own. Drabble has consciously moved towards the other landscapes. She does this with the help of several voices in the novel. The particular move to the South-East Asian landscape, her attempt to widen the subject of her interest not only highlights her need to break out of the mould of "the woman novelist" but exposes the writer's growing ambition to portray the societies at large. However Drabble's obsessive need to ask questions, to provide answers to those questions has made her writing predictable. Her attempt to tie up the loose ends of the story is less convincing as it leaves very little for the reader to imagine. The novelist is arguing through cause and effect as if writing itself will solve the problems confronted by the characters. For instance, Drabble's inability to let things go, the reappearance of her previous characters (as far back as Rose of The Needle's Eye) in The Gates of Ivory provides no stimulating interest to the narrative. It slackens it. Her attempt to bring back the older characters reflects the inability of the writer to let them go. Or is she some kind of a

messiah wanting to convey to her readers, see what I can do to my characters? I can leave them and bring them back at my whim. As has rightly been pointed out by Sage:

(The Gates of Ivory is) a sort of exemplary mess which demonstrates how vertiginous and nauseating she finds the world these days, being one of those who cannot mind her own business, and yet cannot make it her own (Sage, 1991).

In a landscape of multitudes the interaction between the first and the third world inhabitants is one of the many concerns. She chooses to write about the displaced and the deprived, the deviant and the dissatisfied. A major section of this chapter focuses on A Natural Curiosity. As a bildungsroman it explores a diverse range of themes and is addressing the characteristic outwardly movement in Drabble's fiction. Not only does Drabble reveal her anxiety for the contemporary British landscape but^{she} is full of concern for those who live on the fringes of society, who through circumstances have failed to make much of their lives. It exemplifies a significant development in Drabble's changing vision of landscape. In her understanding of the landscape of the North Drabble seems to be able to reach a compromise, to be able to look at the North with a mature and understanding eye (to which I shall come later). A Natural Curiosity focuses on the marginalized members of the community, Shirley and Whitmore. As for the three women friends, Alix, Liz and Esther, the three successful women are an index, they see the extremes of life and are its chroniclers in the trilogy.

In The Radiant Way, which is described as "a chronicle of the eighties", the private landscape of women has opened out into a broad public landscape. It is no more a subjective journey of the mind, but is connected to the world of action and struggle. The modern woman encapsulates the private into her public world. And one recognizes this shift in Alix, Liz and

Esther through their choice of jobs which is linked to their dreams and the aspirations of their Cambridge years:

"I would like," said Liz Ablewhite, after midnight, staring into the white flaming chalky cracked pitted flaring columns of the gas fire, "to make sense of things. To understand." By things, she meant herself. Or she thought she meant herself. "I would like," said Alix, "to change things." By things, she did not mean herself. Or thought she did not mean herself. "You reach too high," said Esther. "I wish to acquire interesting information. That is all" (RW 85).

To Alix, Liz and Esther life outside is challenging and vital as life inside was for women in Jane Austen. While Alix and Liz attempt to combine marriage with career, Esther chooses to remain single and it is only in The Gates of Ivory that her marriage to Robert Oxenholme takes place. The representative nature of these women's jobs as psychologist, art-historian and social worker activates their entry as adults into the public landscape. Their commitment to the private world of the others (more so in the case of Alix and Liz) is in fact an encompassing of the private sphere into the public landscape. It does not marginalize others, but it involves those who belong to the fringes of society. Liz, a psychologist rather like an archaeologist, digs into the past of her suffering clients. The situation becomes ironical when she is forced to dig into her own past. It is through her that Drabble is questioning the limitations of human nature. Esther, the art-historian with her aesthetic vision, attempts to read "the secrets of the landscape" (RW 395). Described in Cambridge "as a cult figure of mysterious portent" (RW 87), she carries "the halo of mysterious privilege" (RW 106) in her adult years. However in de Beauvoir's words this "mystical fervour" has been successfully "integrated with a life of activity and independence" (de Beauvoir, 1975: 687) in Esther's case. In Alix is a good socialist, a good woman and a "grinding disaffection" at the slack in the economy. As a teacher in a prison school her major contacts are deviant. The three women therefore are joined in a

camaraderie that welcomes those on the periphery of society. And in order to understand this sense of fellowship it becomes relevant for us to look at the Cambridge nexus. In a series of images signifying enclosure and exclusion, the three women's friendship is discussed and seems originally to have been based on their position as outsiders:

They... were not to know for many years, were never fully to understand what it was that held them together - 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 main stream by a mad mother, by a deviant ideology, by refugee status and the warsickness of Middle Europe?... They thought they found one another interesting. And so they became friends (RW 90).

Such is Drabble's interest in the people living "on the margins" and such are the individuals who get involved in lives that are equally on the margins. It is the sense of being "removed", marginalized by circumstances that draws them to each other. The world that they came from was comparatively cold to the one they have moved into at Cambridge. However, as adults they gain access to the warmth and light of this world and make it their own.

It is the landscape of exclusion that had affirmed the bond of sisterhood. From this periphery they became "the crème de la crème of their generation", "they share characteristics, impressions, memories, even speech patterns" in their mid-forties (RW 88, 108). College friendship is further intensified with their interest in the countryside:

They share, perhaps surprisingly, a love of walking, of the English countryside... They have been on some good walks, in their time. Along the Dorset coast path, on the short nibbled turf, spotting ancient field patterns, rare yellow poppies, and hopefully identifying the Lulworth skipper... almost forgotten routes through neglected cow parsley, past the backs of allotments... They make an odd trio, to the eye of the observer (RW 109).

Reminiscent of Emily and Rose's love of the landscape in The Needle's Eye, these occasional walks to the countryside are suggestive of a deep and lasting fulfilment which women seek through landscape. Their social and professional success is of little satisfaction without a sense of harmony with landscape. It is the nature of Drabble's women to appreciate and acknowledge the simple ruggedness of landscape and share the delight in the external world with the common and yet precious bond of sisterhood. To express her concern Drabble makes use of a distinct moral perspective which lays emphasis on the necessity to communicate and care and appreciate.

The belief that the externals of people's lives are important as both determinants and revelators is frequently illustrated in The Radiant Way. Alix makes one such discovery in her son's house. Its beauty takes her by surprise. It is in sharp contrast to the unpromising exterior:

And the exterior of the house where they lived was not promising: it stood alone, at the end of a dingy little terrace cul-de-sac, with boarded windows, awaiting demolition, a detached house... in terminal decay (RW 238).

Alix's son and his girlfriend have prepared their fairy home with great care and ingenuity. From the dirt and squalor of the ground one is lifted to the paradise. The interior of the house with its dream-like quality contains the spirit of the Romantics. It captures, it enthrals, it speaks, it moves the heart of Alix:

And wonderful it was, like a fairy story, a Bohemian fairy story. The little room was illuminated by candles, by a paraffin lamp, by crackling packing-case twigs in a real fire in a real Victorian grate: its walls were painted a dark midnight blue, its floor was painted a deep red with a dark-blue and green patterned border, wooden painted chair stood at a table covered with a white embroidered cloth and painted bowls and plates, huge cushions lay in heaps in a corner, there were two comfortable chairs covered (Alix recognized the material) with the old velveteen curtains her own mother had brought down from

Leeds years ago, and which she'd never got round to hanging (RW 238-239).

This beautiful interior, however, carries with it a sense of the ephemeral: crafted and created from junk, the discarded and rejected, the old and obsolete, the unused, which has been transformed, revived and made extra-terrestrial. The Bohemian couple, the freaks, the golden pair "lived outside the system" and did not care if they had to leave it all behind and start afresh:

"ah," said Ilse, "we shall unhitch it one day, we shall weigh anchor, we shall sail off into the storm,"... Dark silver-edged clouds scudded and swirled in revelatory swags and swathes past the silver moon: a night of splendour, as the Beautiful People waved goodbye (RW 241-242).

At first reading, it is a world of beautiful people. The colours of this interior landscape are bright and inviting. Metaphorically speaking, Nicholas and Ilse are the heavenly angels, who have rewarded the good and humane Alix and Brian with a vision of the paradise. They also express an alternative to the world of drudgery and simple hardship. What we see, then, is a landscape born out of the imaginative and the temporary. It also reveals how an artistic vision can transform the derelict and the ordinary into a paradise.

Ilse's "we shall sail off into the storm" reinforces the temporality of the vision. Alix's brief sojourn, confirms that the golden people have attempted to rejuvenate the golden times with their artistic vision, with their desire to reinstate heaven on earth. The uncertainty of their times has neither violated the beauty of their souls nor has it succeeded in crushing their imaginative instincts. Alix comes to an understanding that they are of a new generation and will choose their own rhythm to relate to the life around them. But the fact that the house was to be demolished soon is Drabble's affirmation of the underlying urban reality. The journey back is a unique contrast to the cosmic paradise of the interior. And the sight of "the dumped car" in Alix's

parking space becomes a comic encounter with the contemporary situation which is in sharp contrast to the illuminating interior.

Drabble's interest in landscape is symptomatic of a still more general movement within her thoughts. This movement is marked by a continuing historical interest in her literary predecessors. Drabble's sense of social change rests on a perception of day-to-day happenings in the changing landscape of her characters. In this context Drabble's biography of Bennett is a revelation. A moving tribute to a man of the provinces, like herself, she describes his fiction not as pure documentary but "creative imagination at its most powerful" (B 279). Landscape, "a living link between what we were and what we have become" (LL 270), both in Bennett's novels and in Drabble's, traces the process of change, of growth and of reification.

By contrast, Woolf's comments on Bennett's eye for externals are deprecatory. She attacks him "for his dull materialism and endless descriptions of houses and furniture" (B 292). But it is precisely this drudgery that Drabble commends in Bennett:

To Bennett, as to Lawrence, houses expressed souls. People were not disembodied spirits, and the houses that they built were as much a part of them as their bodies (B 31).

Like him she looks at the houses and describes them with great interest for it is in the houses and streets that her people struggle to survive. Houses speak to her as they did to Bennett:

I'm not saying that some people aren't very indifferent to where they live, but that's very interesting. That's very revealing about them. The fact that some people don't really care what decor is like and what the house is like is very revealing; it says a lot about them (Creighton, in Schmidt, 1982: 28).

It is perhaps from Bennett that Drabble's characters have learnt "to achieve joy in a limited environment" (B 204), to flourish within restrictions. An interesting comparison can be drawn between the two.

Bennett's fascination for the domestic details of his characters lives is "brought out with an unindulgent clarity" (B 96) in Anna of the Five Towns:

Anna's kitchen was the only satisfactory apartment in the house. Its furniture included a dresser of the simple and dignified kind which is now assiduously collected by amateurs of old oak. It had four long narrow shelves holding plates and saucers; the cups were hung in a row on small brass hooks screwed into the fronts of the shelves... Everything in this kitchen was absolutely bright and spotless, as clean as a cat in pattens, except the ceiling, darkened by fumes of gas. Everything was in perfect order, and had the humanized air of use and occupation which nothing but use and occupation can impart to senseless objects. It was a kitchen where, in the housewife's phrase, you might eat off the floor, and to any Bursley matron it would have constituted the highest possible certificate of Anna's character, not only as housewife but as elder sister (Bennett, 1970: 99-101).

Much is revealed in Bennett's description of Anna's kitchen. Not only does Bennett stress minute details of everyday life but he is able to delineate the soul of his character through such descriptions. Furthermore, the kitchen does seem to make a point not only about the principal character, it also conveys the limitations within which a provincial housewife has managed to create a sense of place, of harmony and of beauty. The objects too convey a sense of "use and occupation". And this is further qualified by Maynor's statement:

"This is the nicest room, I know,"... Do you know when I came in here the other night, and you were sitting at the table there, I thought the place looked like a picture" (Bennett, 1970: 101).

The kitchen and Anna's firm figure not only evoke an image of dignified beauty, but the glimpse of a pure, inner world appeals to the male protagonist. He cannot remain indifferent to it. One is reminded of Simon in The Needle's Eye; his immediate empathy with Rose and her convictions is confirmed with his entry into her house. Drabble uses similar devices in her

novels in her own characteristic style and attempts to connect the externals of her women's lives with their internal world.

In The Radiant Way Drabble addresses the provincial housewife's limitations through Shirley's eyes:

She crosses to the sink, pours away half her unwanted cup of instant coffee, washes the cup, washes a foil milk bottle top, puts her foot on the pedal bin, opens it, drops in the foil top, gazes absently for a moment at an empty egg box, an empty tomato tin, the scrapings of last night's spaghetti, some apple peel, some kitchen roll, a browning lettuce leaf, a cigarette carton, a tonic bottle... For it is trivial, it is all trivial, coffee mornings, eating, drinking, the National Theatre, shopping outings, reading books, embroidery, evening classes, country walks, wiping surfaces, emptying waste-paper baskets, Bond Street... Sex and small children had provided a brief purpose, the energy they generated had made sense of the world for a while, had forged a pattern, a community: clinics, playgrounds, parks, nursery groups... An idle flutter of garbage over an empty pavement. Coldness, nothingness, grips Shirley as she stands in her kitchen. She knows herself to be biologically dead. Her spirit shudders: she has seen a vision, of waste matter, of meaningless after-life, of refuse, of decay. An egg box and a tin can in a blue and white plastic pedal bin. So might one stand for ever. She lifts her foot. The lid drops (RW 200).

Unlike Anna, (who is unmarried) Shirley does not enjoy her role as a housewife. She takes no pleasure in caring for her husband. She is bored with marriage, with her humdrum existence and is convinced that she is "biologically dead". Anna is young and full of possibility. She has faith in the future. What Drabble seems to be doing is evoking the boredom of the provinces through Shirley's eyes. The monotony of her provincial life is deeply felt. Neither the shopping expeditions nor the theatre can alleviate the sense of purposelessness and lack of enterprise that Shirley encounters in her everyday life. The world that she had opted for has failed to sustain her interest.

Drabble respects Bennett's interest in the contemporary life and unlike Woolf she defends his belief in the externals. Comparing the two,^{she says:}

... he writes magnificently of the little movements of the spirit in its daily routine, just as she does, of the soul within a drab housemaid's exterior (B 294).

Drabble, a great admirer of both, occupies a middle ground as a novelist.

Gillian Beer, comparing Bennett and Woolf, says:

... His naturalistic novels emphasise the details of daily life and delineate that which is internal through a record of the external. She wanted in contrast, "to stand further back from life" (Beer, in Jacobus, 1979: 94).

The narrator in Drabble, like Woolf, "stands further back" and observes "phases of life". And also very much like Bennett she chronicles the day-to-day events and links them to the private lives of her characters. Like him she is adept at describing shops and grocers. The enclosure experienced by women in their parental homes is represented by the bricks and mortar that acts as a cover for their enclosed selves. So the desire to escape the drudgery of the North begins with their sense of ennui at home. The disillusionment with the North is therefore an extension of the disillusionment with their homes. Drabble is preoccupied with the inner world of her women and chooses landscape as the major expression of this internal dialectic. She sees the outer landscape, the social world from the insider's position and attempts to correlate it with the state of well being of her characters.

The narrative extensively covers a wide range of stories but I have chosen Shirley's story as a focus because she represents key notions in Drabble's fictional world: the South versus the North, the notion of good and evil, and the polarity between desire and repression. The central argument is that the act of seeing, of viewing a landscape is a complex venture for it

functions not merely as an external, visible phenomenon but is dependent on the internal, invisible tracts of mind.

In The Radiant Way Shirley's story appears similar to Janet Birds's in The Realms of Gold:

It was by her own choice that she sat here. It was by her own choice that she had married Cliff, not Steve... She had thought to free herself, through nature, through the violence of nature. But nature was cunning and had kept her trapped. What did it want her for? She had obeyed sex, she had trusted sex, she had loved sex, and it had betrayed her, had deceived her, had left her sitting here... playing cards, with nothing before her but old age (RW 61).

Shirley, like Sophia, a character in Bennett's Old Wives' Tale, had yielded to the magic of her desires; the spell having broken, she realizes that "fatigue has overwhelmed anxiety and desire" (RW 65). A similar parallel is drawn by de Beauvoir:

... The home no longer saves her from empty liberty; she finds herself alone, forlorn, a subject; and she finds nothing to do with herself... Affectionate attachments and habitual ways may still be a great help, but not salvation (de Beauvoir, 1975: 496).

Shirley's story takes a dramatic swerve in A Natural Curiosity. Her husband, Cliff's suicide not only precipitates her escape from the monotony of the North but leaves no justification for her present state of existence.

Drabble's Shirley has a host of predecessors in Bennett. Leonara is a story of "the union between the two middle-aged lovers", set against the heroine's "reflections on her husband's death bed" (B 113). And here too the man "kills himself as a result of a financial crisis" (B 113). Shirley, a mother of three children, is middle-aged and provincial like Leonara.

Like Bennett who (sometimes) made attempts to see the Five Towns "through the eyes of an outsider" (B 144), Drabble observes the North with its nuances as an exile:

It cannot be done from within: the contrasts and the fine shades can be perceived only by a man who has lived elsewhere. Bennett himself was neither the expert from London nor the proud provincial; but he knew both (B 145).

Amongst the varied observations in A Natural Curiosity the contrast and similarity between the North and South as seen through the eyes of its characters remains a principle paradigm of the changing landscape. Shirley is conscious of the external landscape. Through the Dartford tunnel as she makes her way to the M2 and Dover:

... she glimpses a vast landscape of cement-green grey glittering water, quaking, ruffling, in a high invisible wind. Cooling towers, pit heads, industrial vistas, and then rural England, little stunted dwarfed orchards of apples and cherries, crabbed little trees, caravans, white soil, grey soil, polythene-glistening fields under plastic. The mini-garden of England. It looks poisoned, ashen, ruined by fertilizer, insecticide. The colours are glacial. The Ice Age, the last of England. A few flakes of snow fall from a clear sky (NC 127).

Shirley's eye deplores the industrial landscape. There is something cold and distant and artificial about it. It fails to generate warmth and feeling. Shirley, the viewer, despite her restlessness, has not failed to register the current of lassitude:

Glass compartments full of salads. Wilting lettuce leaves, dried-out mounds of cottage cheese, thin grey gelid ham, yellow-grey chicken. It is hard to tell which are the plaster models, which the Real Thing (NC 128).

Stating the mood of intrepid despair and gloom, yellow and grey stand in allegiance to the inner state of restlessness in Shirley. In fact the opening of the novel iterates a similar landscape but with a sinister ambiguity:

Friday, 2 January 1987

A low pale lemon grey sun hung over the winter moor. It swam, haloed, in the grey mist. The road climbed gently into obscurity. Dimly on either side appeared straw-grey tufts of long grasses, pale reeds, patches of dwindling, lingering snow. Grey shades, yellow shades, a soft damp white light (NC 1).

Shirley and Alix are on dissimilar tracks. While one is running away from the death of her husband, the other is:

... on her way to see her murderer. Her heart sang, in the cold landscape, as she drove towards the flat summit of the moor (NC 1).

It may be suggested, however, that the significance of landscape cannot be underestimated even in the most ordinary descriptions of it. And the response of characters to it dialectically constitutes a perspective. For by focusing on the external landscape, Shirley is able to strike a corresponding note to her inner, emotional flaccidity. It could very well be argued that the external landscape takes its colouring from the character's psychological state.

As suggested by Ruskin, "everything in the world depends upon his [the individual's] seeing or thinking of it, and... nothing, therefore, exists but what he sees or thinks of." He describes it further as the "pathetic fallacy" (Ruskin: 1904: 202, 205), wherein it is the individual's state of mind that creates a response to the landscape. But for Drabble, as for Ruskin, it is the "spirit of truth" (Ruskin, 1904: 208) that must be the touchstone to this response. Landscape in itself is indifferent to human response. To a large extent, it can be formed, modulated and effaced by human endeavour. Drabble firmly believes in its power to shape and govern human lives. But one would not like to look at landscape as an end in itself. Although it gives a meaning, it continues to be an object in the writer and character and reader's consciousness. In A Natural Curiosity it is through Shirley's eye that Drabble seeks to convey the geni loci.

In the telling description of the landscape Drabble views the North and South with an increasing sensitivity for which she acknowledges her debt to Bennett:

... perhaps I am merely falling into the trap of finding the North more "real" than the South. Either way, we owe our thanks to

Bennett and Wells, who saw and dared to say things that women hadn't got round to saying for themselves (B 183).

Her interest in representing the spirit of the place is not purely retrospective - a look back - but it delivers a contingent vision of the future. In her earlier novels the women had a rather low opinion of the North. It served as a direct contrast to the glitter and promise of the South. In the first two parts of her trilogy Drabble has decided to make a retreat to the depressive North. There is no doubt that the landscape of both the North and the South has suffered in the name of progress and industrialization. Appalled by the fusty landscape that smacks of boredom Shirley asks herself:

What has gone wrong ? Is this some outing for the disadvantaged, the disabled ? No, it is Britain, round about Budget Day, March 1987... An immensely obese woman spoons scarlet jelly from a cardboard dish. Two thin tall lanky youths devour a mountain of chips and swill from cans of Coca-cola. A young couple with a baby... glare into space as the baby wails and wails. An old man on crutches picks uneaten chips and crusts from the dirty plates on the passing conveyor belt... Is this the prosperous south, the land of the microchip? Every body looks half-dead, ill from the ill wind. Their faces are white, pink, grey, chapped, washed-out, ill nourished, unhealthy, sickly, sickening... Is this the human race, or are these shadows, ghosts, lingering afterthoughts? This cannot be what is meant (NC 128-129).

As for the North Drabble adopts a tone of concern:

Things are going badly wrong up there, and it seemed to me that this needed writing about (Clifford, 1987: 19).

Drabble shares Bennett's fascination for the ordinary. Like him, although she has moved away from her place of birth, the North is psychologically as important to her as were the potteries to him. She sees Woolf as different, as someone remote from this world: "The North was a foreign country to her, and she did not recognize its signals. The blindness is a common one" (B 292). Without letting oneself into the Woolf-Bennett dialogue what I wish to implicate is the attitude of Drabble towards the ordinary, "the principle of finding interest in dullness" (B 307).

Shirley, a modern woman living in an urban world of microchip and antibiotics responds to the pleasure inherent in shopping. And is at the same time asking - "Will the act of purchasing rescue her" (NC 139)? Shirley however understands the language of publicity and that of debauchery. As a spectator-buyer Shirley is seeking comfort and invisibility:

The purpose of publicity is to make the spectator marginally dissatisfied with his present way of life. Not with the way of life of society, but his own within it. It suggests that if he buys what it is offering, his life will become better. It offers him an improved alternative to what he is (Berger: 1972: 142).

Shirley no doubt is seeking a way-out, an alternative but is dissatisfied both with the society and herself. As suggested by Berger, she too wonders if the act of purchasing would rescue her, save her from the ignominy of being on the run.

Her Marks and Spencer carrier bag becomes not only the witness but also the temporary safeguard of her condition. It reassures her. It blends her with the surroundings. Carrying it she does not feel an escapist. Her inner restlessness is camouflaged by her outer decisiveness. As a character she is open-ended for she is capable of surprising the other characters in the novel. Not even Liz, her sister, can possibly speculate about her future actions.

Stuck in a provincial muck, "playing cards" and with nothing to do with herself, Shirley in her middle age had found herself trapped, unlike her sister Liz. The journey to Paris is Shirley's attempt to rediscover her self-identity. It is interesting to note however that Paris even in Bennett's days was looked on "as a den of fashion and vice" (B 105). And it is the same Paris that the narrative evokes in A Natural Curiosity. For it is Paris where Shirley "finds her sexual salvation, in true Lawrentian style" (B 107). This outward journey, a brief spell, is a momentous one for Shirley. She emerges permeated

with a reconciliation that is a sharp contrast to her previous sense of nothingness in life. Shirley, the "bad girl" with a strong "bacchanalian" streak, does not regret her succumbing to the demands of the flesh. "A spell would excuse all bad behaviour, condone all licence" (NC 182). Shirley had met Holland, liked him and had him and her relationship with him, although the turning point, is not the culminating point in her life. Hers is not a redemptive course but an exploratory one. In the world of Shirley there is no grand finale, only an interlude. Linked with this description is the argument that landscape serves not only as a mere backdrop in Drabble but is actively read as a synonym for woman's desire to be recognized - either in love or in friendship. Fortunately for Shirley one is fulfilled in Robert Holland and the other in her newly discovered sister Marcia.

Drabble ascribes a parallel open-endedness to landscape and her characters. The changing features of landscape are worked out from a multiple vantage point. It is more than the site on which the narrative is based. The outer, public landscape in Drabble embodies an additional socio-moral significance. It seeks to register and reflect the moral confusion that has benumbed the society. To express it Drabble has adopted a parodic mode in A Natural Curiosity. At every juncture the reader is made conscious of the multiple choices that can be made in the course of the novel. The conclusions too can be varied and diversified according to the need of the hour. As asked by the narrative voice in the text one wonders if it is a political novel or a psychological novel? Or is it to be classified as a "psychotic novel"? If psychosis is deviant then Drabble too is interested in deviant behaviour and the state of deviant culture in Britain. It is in Whitmore and his mother Angela that one encounters the world of deviance. A Natural Curiosity seeks to question the nature and cause of "bad" and "evil" in society. If social conformity means a denial and a suppression of sexual

impulses then Shirley and a few others are "bad". They refuse to stay within the place assigned to them via marriage and home. A Natural Curiosity has a world of illimitable stories and conclusions and a few alone can be traced.

It is the voice of the narrator in the text that uses parody as a device of expropriation. The narrator however does not use parody as a form of ridicule but seeks to represent the multiplicity in the choices made by her characters. And in the process it also concedes similar rights to its readers. However she achieves this without being condescending to her predecessors:

The contrasting fates of those two sisters in Arnold Bennett's Old Wives' Tale has long exercised me. You will recall that the spirited Sophia runs off... You will also remember that after her gay Paris period, Sophia in her old age returns home to the Five Towns... a glamorous Frenchified figure - but old, old... D.H. Lawrence had disliked Bennett's impassive narration, and wrote his own riposte in the form of The Lost Girl, a novel about a provincial draper's daughter who runs off to Italy... and discovers sex, intensity, passion, landscape, what you will, in the freedom of the Apennines (NC 252).

The objective of the parodic device becomes clear in Shirley's story, although its ending is not as definitive as Sophia's or Lawrence's. It refuses to include a definitive course and leaves it open for exciting permutations for "extraordinary things do happen in life..."(NC 254). As a parody it turns itself outwards - a strategic device which by directing its focus on the externals, involves a critique of the modern public landscape inhabited by Britons:

I wonder if those of you who object to the turn that Shirley's life has taken are the same as those who objected to its monotony in the first place. If you are, you might reflect that it might be your task, not mine or hers, to offer her a satisfactory resolution (NC 254).

Both the narrator and the reader become a "poly-audience, able to perceive action on different levels" (Chatman, 1978: 141). Shirley is conscious "of the reality of the suburban world to which she has returned"(NC 253). She is, the narrator claims, "waiting for", this "satisfactory resolution... as

her lips taste the sweetly acrid oil" (NC 254). (Although interest moves away from her story in The Gates of Ivory, Drabble does give her a "satisfactory resolution" in the last novel of her trilogy. Her Romance plot receives a neat ending. We are told that she has remarried and is now in Alberta with her new husband. In a sense Shirley has escaped the dull provinciality of the North of England.)

Like Bennett who is interested in causes, Drabble too does not forget to add a lecture on "mass dementia" and "maternal neglect":

... Paul Whitmore has clearly been unhinged by maternal neglect, by maternal hatred, by punitive discrimination in his early years (NC 302).

The loneliness of being an only child, his interest in Druids and Roman history and botany, the street that Whitmore lived in, his life in prison - everything is seen through Alix's eyes. Paul becomes her protégé :

... but it is almost as if she had invented him, as an illustration of whatever it is she wishes to discover about human nature... Is it perhaps *because* she is so "nice" that she is so intrigued?... Or maybe it is precisely... in a search for her own wholeness? Or in search of a refutation of the concept of original sin (NC 5)?

For Alix, Whitmore is not an ordinary murderer. He is "a theorem" that would "fit her queries geometrically" (NC 5). Curious about human nature it is through Whitmore that she wishes to find an answer to some of her abject notions of guilt and repression, and the banality of evil:

If one reads ancient texts - the Bible, the Koran, Sophocles, the Veda - is one not sometimes led to suspect that the whole of human history is nothing but a history of deepening psychosis? That something went wrong at the beginning of human nature, of human nurture, that humanity mistook itself fatally, for ever (NC 24)?

Alix and Liz are interested in the nature of evil and try to fathom its source. Beaver, the "ancient poet [who] was way beyond all moral judgement" (NC 7) is also interested in Whitmore. Alix's penchant for

assumptions has led her to invent his interests: "He likes Swinburne", she says to Beaver (NC 8). For Swinburne too has a passion for the ancients and writes about pain. Alix thinks he might like Swinburne. Alix's assumption is an attempt to set a concomitant through literature. Does it concede a sexual ambiguity to the murderer's motive? To quote an appeal from Phaedra to Hippolytus: "slay me for a spoil..." and is it a similar voice that appeals to Whitmore, propels him to kill: "... For I shall grow a poison if I live" (Swinburne, 1927: 28). It is possible then that Whitmore is true to his impulses and he feels he must kill in order to protect the world.

Alix's reading of Tacitus provides an extra dimension to her understanding of crime. As we compare the example of Tacitus with that of Alix, one interested in mass murders and the other in a mass murderer we find a complementarity between the two. The mass historic madness reported by him between the years A.D. 14-96 is an ancient parallel to the modern crimes committed by Whitmore. Tacitus was interested in the pathology of the plebeians, Alix in the aetiology of an individual. What appals her is the colossal nature of atrocities done in the name of country. People devoid of political responsibility, revelled in mass killings. The Penguin Tacitus conveys to her how:

... the Britons were led on to the amenities that make vice agreeable: arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. They called such novelties "civilization", when they were in reality only a feature of their enslavement (NC 3).

Whitmore is both the victim and the victimizer, for in the words of Kristeva "What he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness"(Kristeva, 1982: 6). It is interesting however that Whitmore is not just a murderer, he is vegetarian, has a great passion for reading, and is understanding. He is wise and watchful. He held the ancients in high esteem and is upset with the knowledge that they killed to feed themselves and turns

"to botany for comfort" (NC 296). The modern savage, that is how one sees him, but like the barbarians in ancient times he too has a strong ethical and moral code and a code of virtue. It is through him that Drabble seeks to question the sharp dividing line between reason and sanity on one hand and evil and sin on the other. Intrigued by the nature of Good and Evil, Drabble sees it as becoming an integral part of the modern landscape. Her women too share her morality which was deeply influenced by the Quakers:

The Quakers believe in the light of God in every man. At school we would discuss the light of God in Hitler and Ghenghis Khan, but decided that it hadn't had a chance to develop! I always return to the premise that everyone is good, and I continually think that to understand all is to forgive all. The only time we blame other people is when we don't understand why they are behaving in such an impossible way (Clifford, 1987: 19).

It is in the same spirit that we see Drabble's women confronting the issue of evil. Alix too refuses to believe in evil and therefore absolves even Angela, Paul's cruel mother, from guilt with an insertion that "Paul had a twin sister who died in infancy" (NC 302), implying that Angela could never get over this tragedy and this resulted in her neglect of Paul and his father.

Alix finds it comforting to learn that the golden age - the ancient past - had not been without bloodshed and violence. Tacitus is a proof of it. Living in an age of moral despair Alix tends to read human "nature" and "nurture" as correctives. But her friend Liz sees it as a "simplistic" conclusion. And deep within Alix too is conscious of not being able to solve the puzzle that is Whitmore. Drabble seeks to question and argues:

I do not accuse this government, this society of wickedness. I accuse it of lack of imagination, of poverty of imagination... Only a society which can imagine the plight of its weakest members, and legislate for their inclusion into society rather than their expulsion from it, can call itself a just or equal society (Drabble, 1988: 24).

Her keen interest in contemporary problems reinforces the paradoxical function of fiction. We may add that her movement from the private to the public world is not a dislodging of one for the other but is instrumental in our understanding of human nature at large. And this is, Drabble argues consistently in her fiction, an ongoing process. According to Creighton, Drabble:

... looks on life as a metaphoric search or journey and the function of the novel, in her opinion, is to show possibilities rather than creeds for living: "to explore new territory. To extend one's knowledge of the world. And to illuminate what one sees in it." Each book is "a little more territory gained" (Creighton, 1985: 110).

In these possibilities is visible a strong desire to demystify one's own past and future. Liz is one such example of an individual trying to grapple with the hidden, the unknown, the mysterious realm of the bygone days:

I think belief in evil has caused immense suffering. I don't see the point of suffering. I'd like to do away with it (RW 391).

Living in an age of moral and religious inquiry, Drabble in her disquieting manner continues to ask, to probe, to explore. Drabble writes a critique of concern. Her concern for the human race, for changing patterns, for basic moral values, is carried a step further in her concern for landscape:

Drabble aligns herself with the tradition of what John Alcorn has termed the "naturalist novel". The naturalists were a school of modern writers, fathered by Hardy and Lawrence, who viewed the human being as primarily part of an animal and geological continuum, believing that biology can be a source of psychic health and of moral authority... In nature lies hope, an attitude which sets the naturalist novelist apart from the twentieth century novelist of existential despair. Although Drabble does not shun intellectual or moral authority as guides for moral behaviour, she sides with the naturalists in the view that contemporary people have lost sight of their intimate connection with the biological and physical worlds and that they must regain a sense of this bond (Moran, 1983: 59).

But the unity of perspective in Drabble's fiction consists not merely in alignment with the past, she recognizes a new bond in the differing landscape. She is committed to an understanding of the changing characteristics of landscape and an appreciation of it:

In the last two decades, there has been an attempt at a movement towards the celebration of city life, a movement which recognizes that cities are a natural expression of humanity, not a soulless denial of it (LL 241).

What Drabble recounts in her survey of literature is applicable to her novels. Drabble's city is cold and dry, bustling and braying, brooding and bristling, laughing and longing, with its un-eaten chips, coloured cakes, shops selling knitting wools, density of butchers and grafittis. A kind of city in which people live and build for themselves. Northam, the figurative city, is unpromising but so is the South of today. London offers other charms but fails to sustain. Therefore the attitude towards the North is not simply non-pejorative but forgiving. Using her own words it becomes:

... a collage city, for those who can love what is there, rather than yearn for what is gone (LL 242).

One reads an unusual Drabble in A Natural Curiosity for not only does the tone of the women change but also their response. "Multitudes" in Drabble has become the matrix of mature human existence. It not only permits her characters to situate themselves but also leads to a recognition of human limitations and a necessity for socio-economic change in an unequal society.

A pair of binary opposites - picnic and party - become receptacles of inner and outer landscapes. While one is created and controlled indoors, the other depends on the external conditions for fun and fulfilment. The Radiant Way began with a party while A Natural Curiosity concludes with the three women walking by the lake together and the

prospect of their meeting the Queen of Novara - who "can see into the past and future". They accept:

England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out post-imperial post-industrial slag-heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons. It's not a bad country at all. I love it (NC 308).

Alix's statement and Liz and Esther's laughter is not a sign of passive acquiescence nor is it marked with a bitter distrust, but is accompanied with the narrator's (possibly Drabble's) "what else can they do?", a note of active recognition of the grim uncertainties that have gripped this landscape of multitudes. Their experiences have made them aware that they can strive for change in their own little way, hence, the laughter. It is ironic that Drabble's women like Alix, Liz, Esther and also Shirley take on a reconciliatory mode to come to terms with the dark side of life. They laugh not only at themselves but also at events. And in doing so achieve a state of grace and moderation.

Beauty in landscape, for Drabble, has to be looked for. Encumbered with distortions, changes, subtleties it has to be sought :

A world of pure form, however, remains an unrealizable dream: the reality is still muddle, some of it so extreme that it has its own purity (LL 229).

The landscape of Britain becomes a collage of the ugly and the mundane, the beautiful and the serene, the high and the low, the good and bad, the splendid and the real. And the conclusion of the novel suggests how life itself becomes the object of speculation, of uncertainty:

"One would think", says Esther, watching their friend the butterfly, "that at our age things would be *clearer*. That life, if you like, would be even more *circular* than it is. That options would have diminished to nothingness. Instead of opening up. As they do. Odd, isn't it, the way new prospects continue to offer themselves? One turns the corner, one climbs a little hill, and there is a whole new vista. Or a vista that seems to be new. How can this be (NC 306)?

Esther, the great lover of art and landscape, in a way voices Drabble's attitude to life and landscape. It reveals her great belief in optimism. Aware of human limitations, she has faith in women's response to the vista. To her spirited self it offers a novel vision, it is not without a prospect. It is not without a future. As long as there is a desire to "take that imaginative leap" (Drabble, 1988: 24), embody a newness to the act of seeing, of reflecting, of looking at things there would be a possibility of "a new Vista" and even if it is old and soggy the eye would create a landscape of its own incorporating in it a desire to appreciate and embrace, the old and inferior. An analeptic conclusion would be that a "strange new beauty was growing out of the muddle"(LL 229), and the process of refinement and a longing for purity continues to haunt the women in Drabble. The relation between (wo)men and landscape is not only deep and fulfilling but has resulted in a number of conflicting claims which have been discussed in the course of this thesis. According to Drabble, landscape continues to draw the attention of writers and "our obsession" with it will persist without fail:

The Golden Age never existed, but by the same token it will never die, while there is a writer left to embody our desire (LL 277).

And with the trilogy Drabble seems to have consciously moved away to distant landscapes, from the known to the unknown, from the remembered landscapes of childhood to that of exile. At the end of The Gates of Ivory, after completing their journey the surviving characters return to the comfort of their homes but with an understanding that their future is "unrevealed", as is the future of the landscape. Reflecting on the attitude of the novelists in the contemporary world, Drabble writes:

They are self-doubting, self-conscious, self-questioning, ironic. They suffer not only from the uncertainties that besiege all of us, in a relativist, pluralist, post-Freudian age, but also from that kind of professional paralysis that springs from the

unprecedented degree of critical and analytical probing to which they are all, as soon as they achieve any success, subjected. And yet, perversely, stubbornly, anachronistically, they continue to write... I feel that the writing of fiction is in part a mysterious process of incarnation (Drabble, 1987: 14).

Fiction "with a particularly intimate relationship to the world of daily fact, of external and temporal events" (Drabble, 1987: 2) is a mysterious process of incarnation and Drabble contributes to that process. In her fiction she has worked at a contrasting and a changing vision of landscape through women.

The end of trilogy, The Gates of Ivory, sees the return to England of Liz with her ex-husband Charles from Cambodia. It ends with a party at Liz's place, this time a party soon after the funeral of Stephen Cox and it also signals a birth of a grand-child to Liz and Charles Headleand. After all their sojourns the three women friends come together and seem rather pleased at this reunion. Middle-aged and withdrawn, they decide that they all need a break and must take a holiday together like old times. Despite the unreliability of the English weather they decide on a walking tour, and familiar as they are with the English landscape it still appeals and connotes "The essence of togetherness" (RW 110). It is what the characters have been striving for. And having failed to grasp the "multitudes", the multitudinal nature of life, they turn to landscape as a saving grace. It binds and unites them. It reconciles them to changing times, to the unknown and the inescapable. It prepares them for the future. In it they hope to discover the "essence of togetherness".

The missing links have been brought together as in a cross-word puzzle and Drabble seems to have enjoyed it more than her readers. Lately she has been criticized for having:

developed a special Multiple Choice, Social Democrat, don't ask me style, with everything said three or four times badly, instead of once well (Sexton, 1989: 4).

Paul Taylor describes her latest venture The Gates of Ivory as "deliberately messy":

... its faith in the life force is as vague and muzzy as its understanding of human evil so that, for all the density of documentation, patches of vivid local colour, and ambitious reach, this seems a curiously weightless weighty book (Taylor, 1991: 29).

What is most remarkable in her fiction, I think, is her approach to life and her books continue to reflect the predicament of contemporary lives in a changing landscape. She is someone who sees herself as "various" (Hardin, 1973: 295), this also applies to her writing, which to her is an unending process, always on the move, looking to the future, she views "it as an adventure and a journey, and excitement is ahead" (Satz, 1985: 197).

I shall let her narrator have the last word, ask the final question: Is this the grand finale? Is this the End of History [trilogy]? Or is it all a Godawful mistake (GI 445)?

Chapter Eight

Anita Desai: An Introduction

Anita Desai was born on 24th June 1937, in Mussoorie, India. Educated in Delhi, she is married with four children. She has been a winner of several major awards both in India and abroad, twice she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize. She is one of the foremost women writers in fiction in Indian English. She started writing at the age of seven and although she sees writing as a tremendous strain, lonely, exacting and unrewarding, she none the less feels that "not writing is infinitely worse" (Atma Ram, 1977: 97). As a part of her daily routine, writing has become a way of life. It enables her to clarify her experiences:

When I was very small, as soon as I learnt to write, I found a great urge in me, really a compulsion: as soon as I had experienced anything, whether it was a day at school, an outing, a walk, a picnic, whatever... I had to write it down. Till I had written it down, it was not quite complete for me... Writing became an act by which I clarified my experience, explained it to myself and completed it also (Seguet, 1988: 46).

Desai's dual heritage, both racial and cultural, of a Bengali father and a German mother, has had a strong impact on her life and it seemingly colours her writing (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 103). Her father was an engineer and his family came from East Bengal, which is now called Bangla Desh. Born and brought up in India she was also influenced by her mother's foreign culture. With the partition of India and the Second World War in Europe, both her parents decided to make Delhi their home. Desai feels strongly that although her parents could not return to their respective homelands they were very nostalgic about them, and "we knew that our past existed in some way elsewhere" (cf Appendix B).

In a sense, they were not only outsiders in Delhi but were also estranged from their cultural past. Desai often looks at the past as a key to an individual's future. The landscape of the past is important in defining and sifting one's identity. It is a self-conscious effort to achieve a sense of belonging to something that exists far back in time and memory.

Desai looks at her childhood as a quiet, uneventful time wherein every tiny event would sometimes be regarded as "disproportionately important" by her. As an adult she looks back nostalgically at the days she spent with her siblings and the extraordinary stories and songs of her mother's background which were then taken for granted but later became the very substance of her writings. In her quiet, unassuming childhood Desai was surrounded by a large number of pets - cats, dogs and birds (Robinson, 1988: 2), a love that is shared by the characters in her novels. In Cry, The Peacock, Maya feels totally bereft at the death of her pet dog Toto. Similarly in Where Shall We Go This Summer Sita's concern over a wounded bird (which to her family is a melodramatic gesture) reveals a deep sensitivity towards other species on the earth. Indeed, women in Desai exhibit an overwhelming curiosity and interest in the natural world surrounding them. Every landscape has its unique message in her novels. It unfolds a series of connections between the past and the present, the self and the world, the imagination and the reality of the woman's world.

Desai enunciates her personal response towards India with an acknowledgement of her mother's influence:

I am able to look at a country I know so intimately with a certain detachment, and that certainly comes from my mother because I'm aware of how she would have reacted to people and situations. I feel about India as an Indian, but I suppose I think about it as an outsider (Robinson, 1988: 2).

Although she has no physical connection with Germany, Desai recollects that she grew up with German as "the first language we spoke at home". She

concedes: "I know more German nursery rhymes and songs than English ones" (Seguet, 1988: 48-49). That the language of her childhood did not become the language of her vocation is not surprising, as it was followed by the introduction of English as her "first literary language, the first language I read". However as she grew up she realized how useful it was for her to be able to read poets like Rilke in her mother's tongue (cf Appendix B).

Educated in a mission school and later at Miranda House, one of the leading women's colleges of her time, Anita Desai has a strong European literary tradition to draw from. By writing about India, the country she knows best, Desai is attempting to crystallise the cross cultural parameters within the established framework of the European tradition. Despite this her work remains essentially Indian for she is not only delineating the concerns of Indian women but problematizing their individual quests in a self-contained Indian landscape. Desai expresses her women's desire to reconstruct their lives and sees it in relation to the landscapes inhabited by them.

Desai studied English literature at college and it was natural for her to be influenced by English writers like the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and many others. Her exposure to English language and literature inevitably shaped her decision to write in English. Not only has it remained "the language of books", but she sees it as a language:

that has been travelling for centuries all over the face of earth and, wherever English goes, it seems to adapt itself to those conditions (Seguet, 1988: 49-50).

It is the elasticity, flexibility and the flow of the language that she finds interesting to handle. As an Indian writing in English she is equally conscious that:

... it does close certain areas to you. There are a great many ethnic experiences that you can't convey in the English language. If I tried to describe an Indian wedding, or an Indian

funeral, I would begin to write it like some kind of anthropological document (Seguet, 1988: 50).

She sidesteps "social aspects of life" and prefers to "use the language of the interior... follow the language of my own spirit" (Seguet, 1984: 50). That the writer's spirit has also followed an absorbing interest in place indicates the importance of landscape in her fiction.

In its general sense landscape imagery relates to the essential problematics in her fiction. The writer sees and situates her women within a specific landscape. She can communicate the process of growth, change and the contradictions which women face within the society with as vivid an imagination as that of the Brontës:

I was nine years old when I first read Wuthering Heights and although obviously I could not have understood half of it, it struck me with the force of a gale and I still vibrate to it. Ever since, literature has seemed to me more interesting, more significant and overwhelming than the real world (Atma Ram, 1977: 102).

Perhaps it is from the Brontës that she has been motivated to master the art of transforming a geographical landscape "into an emotional one, and therefore so much more potent" (Intro to Agnes Grey, 1990: v). As in the Brontës, the landscape becomes a mirror of feminine desire and is used as a significant means of expression. The physical landscape is metamorphosed into a complicated metaphor of the mind, so much so, that we begin to look at the garden in Desai's novels as a metaphor for women's lives that have been shaped and modulated by patriarchal society. She has often been compared to Woolf in her attempts to probe the sediments of the sub-conscious.

Writing fiction in English has been the privilege of the educated elite in India. And it is from this perspective that Desai looks at the predicament of women in her writings. She charts out the desire of middle-

class, reasonably affluent women for a sense of place. She was particularly impressed by what Robert Graves said of the Chinese who:

rate the value of a house not so much by its architecture, size or situation, as by its *feng sui* - meaning its spiritual atmosphere (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 103).

Desai compares herself to the Chinese scholars and lays "claim to this nose for *feng sui*", as part of her "equipment as a novelist". Her women are conscious of their movement within the enclosed world of the house. The house as suggested by Bachelard "is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard, 1964: 4). It could also be argued that women in Desai tend to make constant comparisons between their father's house and the husband's house, that is their "first world" and the other world. In their search for a sense of fulfilment women continue to rely heavily on the house and when it becomes clear to them that the house does not fill their emotional and spiritual vacuum they choose to withdraw. Withdrawal becomes a symptom of a lack. It alludes to their dissatisfaction:

A psychoanalyst might say that it is because I lack a territory of my own that I search for a place and that is what has given me a peculiar sensitivity to *feng sui* (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 104).

As a writer Desai sees herself sharing a few traits with Naipaul. Like him she has always been "within the scene itself", writing about place, that is, firmly entrenched within the locale yet unclassifiable as a regional writer. "I can lay claim to no one region as my own" (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 103). Like him she has become "the rootless exile" trying to build a niche for herself. And like him she strives to create a landscape which is her "very own country", a place which can exist anywhere and be recognized as one's own. For her such a writer is more akin to a philosopher "gazing not out of the window but at his own navel" (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 105). Thus the

material springs not from alien forces but from one's deepest and most intimate self-associations.

But like Woolf, she also looks at "writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression" (Woolf, 1931: 120). And place is central to the art of writing for it not only centres the subject, in this case her woman protagonist, but offers an insight into her predicament. Simultaneously it becomes a critique of selfhood. A fragmented, unhappy self of her earlier novels and a more ironic, composedly detached self of the later novels firmly asserts the necessity to choreograph Desai's changing vision of landscape.

Although she regards herself as a writer interested in women's worlds she has been particularly cautious of labels and refuses to see herself as a feminist card-holder or a propagandist. As an artist she is committed neither to ideal nor dogma but to her "chosen art". She compares the act of writing to that of "basket weaving; you are given too much straw and you sit down and place it together and you make a shape out of it" (Seguet, 1988: 43, 48).

As all major Indian writers in English come from a privileged background it is very difficult, almost inconceivable, for a Dalit movement in English in India (Mukherjee, in Butcher, 1983: 48). Dalit are the down-trodden, the outcast(e) and the poor. But to this I might add that Dalit signifies not just the down-trodden by birth (those that do not belong to the main caste structure) but is suggestive of the marginalized, the ones who see themselves as on the periphery of the system. Desai's women are socially well placed but in an existential sense they see themselves as bordering on the fringes of life. They are poor in spirit. What is more important is that her latest protagonist, who is a male and a Jew, Baumgartner, is also no less a Dalit for he too is deprived of the right to be in the mainstream. This point relates to Desai's statement:

... I don't think I could ever write about the mainstream. I would find that extremely boring - everyone who flows along with the current, along with all the others. It seems to lack originality. The ones who interest me really are the ones who go against the current (Bliss, 1988: 522).

Healthy, normal lives do not interest her and she chooses to write about the pains and pursuits of the alienated individuals. At the same time she links the desire and pursuit of her individuals with the socio-cultural landscape.

Desai has an eye for detail and her books are concise mementoes wherein she registers every single movement and flux of her character's mind. And with her we watch and wait for the details to unfold. As in Cry, The Peacock Maya observes:

Long black bars at the windows shut us in, and the thin walls of the small room locked us all close together. There was something furtive about our movements, a tenseness in our voices, as though we were performing a scene from a play in the confines of a cage, for the benefit of a heavily breathing though invisible audience (CP 67).

The disillusioned tone of the speaker prepares us for the ensuing drama. However much she is caught in her own consciousness Maya registers the social uneasiness between unequals. Her sensitivity to landscape gives her an access to the world's unseen nuances which enable her to understand the psychological and social barriers between people. In writing her story she chooses to explore the enigma of her isolation and (of the many landscape images in the novel) the image of the garden is one of the possible means of exploring her predicament.

Although Desai dismisses much of her earlier work as "callow, overwrought and melodramatic" and "embarrassing", it is also extremely readable and particularly interesting in terms of landscape. She exploits minor events to full precision. She enters the character's world and slowly, gradually leads us into those innermost spaces which haunt and baffle their

everyday lives. An intimate world is exposed in the process of "simply pouring out what I accumulated inside me by way of experience all through my childhood and youth..." (Robinson, 1988: 2). And the world that lies before us is a world of lonely and dissatisfied women protagonists.

Notions of Indian womanhood have primarily focused on the image of woman as mother, wife, temptress, heroine, and most important of all as Goddess. In a British-oriented middle-class educational system which imported Victorian values, woman is in a particularly awkward position. Both traditional and western values exist for her in a caricatured form and she is supposed to conform to such a tradition. Desai challenges the prevalent version of the middle-class Indian women stereotype, by subverting their quest for fulfilment (within the family) with an intense dissatisfaction with the family system. More so she demonstrates their inability, sometimes their unwillingness, to change the pattern of their lives. The result is that articulation becomes a problem and nothing but the landscape acts as a mirror of their unsatisfied ego. A transference of desire takes place.

For those who reject the social (which is the symbolic in Lacanian terms) order as well as those who are forced to return to the social order, landscape becomes a convenient ally. It serves to mediate and to highlight their private and public (family) concerns. Failure to find fulfilment in relationships and society draws them to landscape where they hope for greater spiritual and visionary fulfilment. In the process a reconciliation may or may not be possible between the private and the public. An attempt to read those open metaphors which constitute landscape and "the language of the interior" which sets into motion some of the problematics of the feminine self will form a major part of this half of the thesis.

Women in Desai are in constant search for a sense of fulfilment. There are ties between friends, siblings, parents, children, partners but she

sees them as forming an incomplete whole. Landscape becomes a powerful reflection of this desire for self-fulfilment. It exists as a bearer of their past lives and functions as a paradigm of their future anxieties. In the process landscape not only delineates their quest for the lost mother but becomes their surrogate mother. I shall attempt to explore this particular feature in the discussion on Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Desai's earlier novels explore the inner fragmented lives of women. Landscape imagery allows them to probe the nature of their desire. It also puts into question the relevance of their quest. In other words, landscape defines and regulates the predicament of their lives. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is a difficult woman because of her over-sensitive approach to life, to things, to events. Monisha of Voices in the City affirms that for a woman with deep sensitivity death is the only possible alternative to nihilistic despair:

... I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the *Bhagvad-Gita* and the *Ramayana*, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city (VC 120).

Calcutta with its unbearable sense of close human proximity, its oppressive air, its lack of space which fills her with despair and later the vacuum of her marital life compels her to commit suicide. Monisha becomes a repeat of Maya in Cry, The Peacock. What is startling is the manner in which the calm is shattered by violence in Desai's fiction. It is this restless despair that she gives expression in her fiction. She locates and probes it.

Desai explores the state of nothingness in some of her women's lives. Their soft simmering anger and lackadaisical attitude arouses in us

contrary emotions of sympathy and irritation. Desai describes her women as "slipper dragging" (Desai, in Butcher, 1983: 56). It is a gesture of defiance and of dissatisfaction. The majority of her women are comfortably situated in their homes and married (sometimes with children) yet unhappy. To these highly strung, ^{on}opinated, self-consuming and unhappy women Desai gives a voice and a desire. The outside calm is a surprising contrast to their inner displacement. Perhaps linked with it are her impressions of India, a big muddle of a country wherein she finds nothing "exotic", and where she sees "the crude, brash and vulgar India of materialism and... the simple, hard, traditional India of everyday life and ordinary people" (Robinson, 1988:2). Her characters are transitionally situated betwixt and between such landscapes. Their attitude towards their landscape is equally ambiguous and revealing.

Desai's focus begins with the house. As a family settlement the house not only provides shelter but is ranked amongst the most immediate spaces within which Indian women can hope to situate themselves. It provides the basic framework ^{within which} women can compose and recollect themselves. It ensures them with a destiny. The room inside the house and the garden enclosing this house are the central metaphors seemingly in a diametric opposition with the metaphors of the city and the island. In order to understand the predicament of one of her earliest protagonists, Maya, it is important for us to see her life as structured between her father's house and garden and her husband's. Both locations act as a reflection of her subjectivity. The image of the house and that of the garden seems to echo the nature of her self-absorption and her failure to accommodate to the outside world. If she lives within the folds of patriarchy as an attractive figure, nurtured by the values of her class, she also becomes a threat to that very system which has nourished and nurtured her. She echoes the emptiness that

circumvents such a consciousness. We recognise a certain pattern in Desai's women. For most of her women, a retreat from their husband's house points towards their dissatisfaction with the social world. It signifies a lack which they have been unable to fulfil. It also brings into focus a discontinuity between their actual and the desired existence. Conventional lives do not appeal to them and they wish to escape from the world of convention to that of freedom. A congress with landscape in the form of a garden or an island or a mountain provides a stimulating retreat and a space for revaluation for some women.

Desai's notion of the subjective self as opposed to the subjected self provides an interesting ground for this thesis. With the means of landscape she is able to distance the two, that is, the individual is placed within a specific, pre-arranged landscape and her achievement lies in being able to lay out a correlation between a place and her character.

For example, like young Jane Eyre who longed for autonomy and wished to explore the outside world, Monisha's diary bears traces of her misery: "Through the thick iron bars I look out on other walls, other windows - other bars" (VC 109). In her husband's house Monisha experiences not only a lack of privacy but that of openness:

I think that what separates me from this family is the fact that not one of them ever sleeps out under the stars at night. They have indoor minds, starless and darkless (VC 139).

Monisha is unable to accept the constraints of a life which has enclosed her within the claustrophobic confines of a room in a crowded and cluttered household in the city of Calcutta. She wishes for an openness that would take her away from the boredom and enclosure of her everyday life and she sees in the open landscape a possibility of a perspective which would reconcile her mind to life and living. Indeed, it is her failure to achieve such a state of openness and her inability to take charge of herself in a traditional

household that numbs her sensitivity and forces her to seek an escape route in death.

Unlike Drabble, Desai does not focus on the decor, or the distribution of objects in the house; she stresses the interiors of the mind. If Drabble notes the details of the character's kitchen, for example Shirley's kitchen in The Radiant Way, the arrangement of the china and glass ware, the shades and contours of the kitchen walls, Desai dwells on the links between the place and the embodying spirit:

A sense of place must be so acute that it takes in the atmosphere and spirit of the scene which are of course influenced, as the wise Chinese realised, by the characters and their actions so that all are inextricably linked.

She qualifies it further with:

Indians are interested in landscape and seasons only insofar as they relate to human emotions and sensations, not in place or nature as such (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 107).

The sparsity of her landscapes proves all the more effective in delineating the emptiness of her women's lives. Sita's dejection is echoed in her encounter with the island:

Rowing across the strip of sea, the island had seemed a small, dark blot of foreign matter on the pale dun sheet of the sea... the island on which they had arrived seemed flat, toneless, related to the muddy monsoon sea rather than to the sky and cloudscape which steadily grew more gorgeous and brilliant by the second. The woman's face twisted - with disappointment or dejection (WS 20-21).

Desai replaces interest in the architecture of a place with a focus on the spiritual atmosphere, which is of course a mediated construct. The landscape imagery serves to accentuate "the language of the spirit". It allows her to probe the intricate nature of woman's desire. She sees place as her "starting point": "I tend to go somewhere, see a certain place, and the characters enter it and then the story takes place in it" (Bliss, 1988: 533).

Through a series of images focusing mainly on the house and the city, the garden and the sea, Desai articulates the multiple concerns of her novels. One of the most important of these is her concern for individual autonomy and happiness which is also linked to the larger issues of life, to that of marriage and family, vocation and choice. In Voices in the City Amla could visualize her sister Monisha's marriage to unimaginative Jiban as an incompatible contract, a contract without communication and love. Monisha's "secret window" opens onto a landscape which is invisible to every-one else, and is therefore deeply anti-social:

Monisha she saw as seated upright and mute in one corner, her gaze fixed on some mysterious point as though it were a secret window opening onto darkness, gazing and gazing, with not a word to say of what she saw (VC 198).

Desai's books focus on the seasonal changes which also reflect the mood and temperament of her women protagonists. Equally significant is her own reaction to the climactic changes. She concedes that the summers that she spent in the north of India have had a great effect on her sensibility:

The oppression, the devastation of that incredible heat that kept one almost immobile through the day... speechless and almost lifeless with heat... inspiring nights when one slept out in the open, under the stars. I really think those summers of the north make me whatever I am (Atma Ram, 1977: 95).

Weather not only transforms and modifies the individual's response to place but also renews her sense of self.

Desai, like Drabble, makes an outward movement in her fiction from the intense subjectivism of Cry, The Peacock through transitional and exploratory novels like Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Fire On The Mountain to the 'reconciliation' of outer-inner dichotomy in Clear Light of Day. Her work has a trajectory of increasing socialization which is not unlike Drabble's but is situated within a different cultural context.

In Desai's fiction we come across a critique of woman's position in society. It also provides women with a voice. It has made it easier for women to recognize the common constraints within which they function irrespective of their cultural and social boundaries. Furthermore, the boundaries do not merge into a consistent whole but bring into light various differences in women's approach to landscape:

I do accept, however, that women writers tend to place their emphasis differently from men, that their values are likely to differ. Whereas a man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation (Desai, in Butcher, 1983: 57).

Desai does not necessarily assume that a writer of one sex cannot write about another. She finds it equally interesting to speak on behalf of the other sex. In her writing she aspires for "a literary ideal" which would bring the two together:

There is the arhangini (or ardhnarishwara) figure of Hindu mythology that combines the male and female attributes with great grace and has inspired classical sculpture. Perhaps it is an ideal that could be borrowed by literature (Desai, in Butcher, 1983: 58).

Indeed, this is not an ordinary ideal and lately Desai's writing has struggled towards a landscape which would recognize and receive the anguish and needs of the individual, not confined solely to the differences imposed by gender.

Chapter Nine

Cry, The Peacock: A landscape of desire

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement (Cixous, 1976: 875).

The writing of the story of Maya, the protagonist of Cry, the Peacock is a significant act of "putting herself into the text", for not only is she driven away from her body but also the parental embrace. The writing of the story is Maya's assertion of her lack, the want she suffers from. It is an assertion of her desire; a proclamation, a lament. She puts herself into the text as a childwoman, a seeker and a lover of landscape. As Cixous says, it is very difficult to select a single paradigm in relation to women for:

... there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes - any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible (Cixous, 1976: 876).

Maya is one such woman whose "imaginary" is "inexhaustible". And it is through her that Desai seems to link the duality inherent in the "imaginary"; at one level it is a reflection of woman's creativity (Maya writes her self) and is therefore enriching, and at another "imaginary" becomes identified with autism, with hysteria and madness. It becomes stultifying.

Maya writes her story and in it she not only talks about the inexhaustible stream of ideas and passions that haunt her but also reveals how she functions within a distinct Indian framework as a symbol of desire. Maya shares an ambiguous relationship with her husband Gautama and her

father. Undoubtedly they are both attached to Maya as a daughter and a wife and yet their Hindu consciousnesses think of her in terms of the concept of illusion suggested by her name (see below pp.214 ff.). They see her as an object to be loved and cherished, to be served and replenished but never as a tie and a bind.

If one sees her as a representative of psychoanalytic, social and philosophical constructs, Maya, is a complex figure of study. Her personal history is a blending of the three. Maya, an upper middle-class Brahmin woman is married to a non-Brahmin; protected and fragile, unlike most of Drabble's women, she posits a cultural contrast to them. In Cry, The Peacock nature is a powerful mediating force between the principle character and the external world. Intelligent and extremely sensitive to her surroundings, Maya is a portrayal of a woman who has failed to come to terms with the hegemony of patriarchal order. Though she lives inside it, is very much a product of it, she does not identify with it. In psychoanalytic terms, having failed to grow out of the "imaginary" into the social Maya's case history is that of an incomplete adult, for although sensitive and well-read she is treated throughout as a child, spoilt and indulged, rather than a woman, willing to be heard and spoken to. She is a woman who having grown motherless, was pampered by the father. Shielded from reality, from the gross ugliness of the outside world, the only reality that she encountered in her father's land (a world of poetry and flowers), fails to initiate her into adult life:

... my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one (CP 89).

She remains a strange blend of the natural and the cultural. Seemingly it is the absence of a mother that has stunted Maya's growth as an individual. It is in the gardens, the enclosed landscape, however, that she seeks the lost

mother. Maya's father is the one who makes her fall in love with gardens but she seeks beyond the beauty and the fragrance of nature a deeper affiliation and understanding. Nature becomes to her a private solace, a speaking figure. In Maya's world, animals and birds and flowers fill the empty space, the lack which she has failed to complete in human relations. In making landscape her alter-universe, Maya endeavours to fulfil her deepest desire, a desire to be understood and appreciated without the fear of retaliation or rejection. Her deep fears that she would not be understood if she spoke to people, results in her total estrangement from the peopled world. She shies away from contact for fear of being misunderstood and we see her expressing herself in writing. Her conversation with her husband is, however, an indication of her alienation, for he fails to read her signs and is too self-absorbed to understand her words, just as she fails to identify with his:

... I had yearned for the contact that goes deeper than flesh - that of thought - and longed to transmit to him the laughter that gurgled up in my throat as I saw a goat nuzzle, secretly, a basket of sliced melons in the bazaar while the vendor's back was turned, or the profound thrill that lit a bonfire in the pit of my stomach when I saw the sun unfurl like a rose in the west, the west and farther west... But those were the times when I admitted to the loneliness of the human soul, and I would keep silent (CP 104-105).

Seemingly no one treats her seriously; at one extreme her father indulges her, while at another her husband fails to provide her with sexual and emotional gratification. Lonely and incapacitated, she is caught between the extremes of her situation by her obsession with fate, with death, with herself. Her sensitivity captivates her, makes her a neurotic. One might argue that Maya's plight is the consequence of her inertia, her laziness, her lack of purpose in life. But in spite of this she identifies with the monkeys trapped to be exported. She reads their thirst and hunger and empathizes with it. She understands the passive resistance and helplessness of the

women at the cabaret. She does not fail to register the dull facade that haunts the middle-class Lals and perhaps this empathy is a function of her child-like nature. Maya is a child-woman, whose refusal to grow is partly a failure of the society, that sees women as incapable of independence and resilience, a society that lives on superstitions and fears their consequences. As a contrast to Maya, Gautama's mother and sister present two alternatives in womanhood. In particular, Gautama's mother, who is seen as an extremely powerful mother figure, both to her family and the crèche that she runs, suggest another possible identity for women. But in her case maternal warmth is cryptic and speechless. She too does not use words to express her care and concern. They are visible in her actions. And Maya, always in admiration and in awe, wishes to get close to the mother in her:

... a pillar of life and living, an anchor, much more so than her son, and the only one I had now. Oh to live in her world, to be of her kind! What safety, what peace (CP 161).

It is not that Gautama's mother is indifferent to Maya. What becomes apparent is that Maya wants more than her cool-headed affection, she seeks touch and warmth, the clasp of her arms and the comfort of her smiles. An infant's longing to be close to the mother's breasts, to shut herself away from any reality is apparent in Maya's longings:

... and I drew close as I could to the young woman and nervously began to chat, laugh. Calmly she answered. I hung upon every word of hers, every gesture, all the while watching her mother out of a corner of my eye, longing for her arms, hating her detachment. I insisted on drawing her into the conversation, away from her letters (CP 164).

As we shall see, having failed to occupy a place amidst people, Maya creates a symbiotic unity with the world of flora and fauna. She becomes a child of nature, fragile and flower-like. She reads the contours of the landscape surrounding her and longs for her father's garden in Lucknow. Her failure to connect herself to Gautama's world is linked with her loneliness

in marriage. Whatever little she received from the father is taken away from her in marriage. And in the fourth year of her marriage she becomes obsessed with the prophecy of an albino that she will encounter a death. She suffers from a death fixation:

... there were still spaces of darkness in between, above and around, and it was that which gave the air such weight, I found, and not the myriad stars. Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness - loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations, and went spilling and spreading out and about, lapping the stars, each one isolated from the other by so much. And the longer I gazed, the farther they retreated, till there was only the darkness hanging, like a moist shroud, over our heads, and I thought of the long journey of the dead from one birth into another, the brave traversing of mute darkness, the blind search for another realm of lucidity in the midst of chaos. And I looked down again, and fingered one soft-petalled flower, a white one. Small white Toto, whining a little, out of fear, his futile barks dying away into a hopeless silence (CP 22).

Intense loneliness of the narrative voice, in the words of Kristeva, "yields to a *crying-out theme* of suffering-horror" (Kristeva, 1982: 141). It situates the character's abjection within her. Maya is face to face with the temporality of existence and feels helpless against it. Confronted with the permanent loss of her beloved dog, Toto, she cries out in despair "I am alone" (CP 22).

Maya provides a case-study of an intense subjectivity. However one finds it very difficult to place her within the stereotyped Indian matrix. Unlike most women she is not a conventional housewife. She belongs to a rich stratum of society and does not have to labour, to sweat and toil for bare necessities. Her concerns are aesthetic, neither economic nor social. She is however one of the married and childless, upper middle-class, post-independent Indian woman, left lone and solitary. Economic security does not instill a sense of power in her, in fact it makes her more powerless and non-effective both in her eyes and that of her protector. She is not a "uniform,

homogeneous, classifiable" (Cixous, 1976: 876) stereotype of what a woman is or should be. It is indeed more difficult to fix her within the Indian stereotype of a woman for she defies them by writing her story. As an upper-class woman she fits in with the notion of a desirable woman, who is not only beautiful but fulfils what she is required to be. At one level Maya denotes desirability, at another she becomes an antithesis of desire. As a woman in love she cannot transcend her sexuality:

... and while I held my soul, still burning in my hands, I saw my body detach itself from it and float away, to rest upon the dim mirror where I could gaze upon it from a cool distance. I studied it, absorbed: the round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered,... One might think it a lovable face. But it was not the face that a man like Gautama could love (CP 105).

The significant mirror image confirms her fears that for her to capture Gautama in entirety is an impossible dream. The thought that this lovely face cannot possess him fills her with hate. It becomes frustrating to look at the mirror image. This realization is further intensified by the reminder of the prophecy. Marked by fate is how she sees herself. And it is interesting to note that whenever she feels threatened by her fears she seeks shelter in the flowers or in the moon. Nature in its untainted form becomes her single refuge. Encased in a house as if in a "tomb" Maya's isolation is detrimental to her growth. Full of contradictions, Maya's extreme sensitivity is a sharp contrast to Gautama's pragmatism. She sees him as someone "who had no use for flowers" (CP 21), and such an attitude is read by Maya herself as a failure. A failure to live life, to understand landscape and to read its language:

Grey, grey, all was grey for Gautama, who lived so narrowly, so shallowly. And I felt sorry, infinitely sorry for him, for this slow, harmless, guileless being who walked the fresh grass and did not know he touched it (CP 196-197).

It is a battle between reason and emotions, mind and matter, nature and culture that Desai's Cry, The Peacock seemingly evokes.

Hers is not an everywoman's anguish. It is the anguish of a woman with a vocation for love and living. In Gautama she sought her guardian and protector and discovered that in him "understanding was scant, love was meagre" (CP 104). And what is for Gautama a life without vocation is for Maya a life full of meaning and fulfilment:

'I have so much to look at, to touch, and feel, and - be happy about. I like to walk about here and touch things - leaves, sticks, earth, everything. I play with my cat. And if I am lonely, I can visit my friends. The world is full - full, Gautama. Do you know what that means? I am not bored with it that I should need to hunt another one' (CP 118)!

It is a world from which she neither seeks change nor escape. She is very much a part of it and claims to be fully preoccupied in it. Maya's attachment, her passionate involvement with the world of senses - which in this case is significantly a landscape consisting of flowers, pets and leaves, has the smell of the earth and is full of friends - is neither empty nor meaningless. But Maya's lack of vocation has deeper implications. She is a person with a set of conflicting passions. She is constantly threatened by the inner emptiness and sees it as a reflection of her unfulfilled sexuality. As a romantic she sees herself as a rebel without a hope for peace, an individual without control, whose destiny is to perish. She cannot live in the world nor can she be prepared for a change. She dreads enclosure and is sufficiently apprehensive of being in the open. Inside or outside, "changing and dying,... It is always a loss" (CP 121). Gautama sees the lack of vocation in Maya's life as significant:

'I have always felt', he said, 'the necessity in each human being for a - vocation... Action - or work, or life, whichever you please - of that order is what I mean by vocation. I am certain, experience makes me certain, that only those who are capable of this manner of living, and working, are capable of peace, or

serenity - better words than happiness, both of them' (CP 116-117).

Loneliness and separation (first from her mother in death and then from her father in marriage) have in fact aggravated her neurosis. "Companionship" to her is a "necessity" (CP 19) and it is what she fails to receive.

The story of Maya is a story of a woman whose inability to construct a viable space for herself as a wife and as a woman in the public sphere has led to the intensification of desire inside her. Therefore what she creates is a private landscape of desire. She enters into the world of subjectivity where the garden remains her only possible ally. Gautama exists as a mere shadow in this enclosed sphere. Her constant grievance is "You [Gautama] notice nothing at all" (CP 20). Seemingly Maya's contradictory quest for freedom and control is rooted in her infancy:

As always, it [Gautama's voice] created in me a sensation, a much loved, long courted sensation, of walking through a dark and wet night with somebody beside me who carried a lantern, a staff and a blanket (CP 14).

The three metaphors of lantern, staff and blanket symbolize a world of light, control and intimacy. Lantern, a symbol of light, would not only destroy ignorance but also darkness. A staff would ward off danger and be used for protection. And in the comfort of a blanket cold would not interfere. It is evident that Maya has sought protection and warmth all her life. Desire is symptomatic of a lack in her which Maya hopes to fulfil first in her father and later through Gautama. Having failed to connect herself in marriage Maya's sexuality becomes a threat to her. Vulnerable and naive it wishes to hold on to a permanent, a solid, a more concrete fabric and that is Gautama's mother. Having realized that his mother and not Gautama is in possession of this anchor, Maya tries to reach it. And this wish in her substantiates the argument that Maya has failed to emerge out of the imaginary into the social

because not having lived it she cannot grow out of it. The process of separation-individuation is incomplete and so is her development as an adult:

The child's bodily tie to the mother, then, is the vehicle through which the most fundamental feelings of a highly complex creature are formed and expressed. At her breast, it is not just a small furnace being stoked: it is a human being discovering its first great joy, handling its first major social encounter, facing its first meeting with a separate creature enormously more powerful than itself,... This tie is the prototype of the tie to life. The pain in it, and the fear of being cut off from it, are prototypes of the pain of life and the fear of death (Dinnerstein, 1987: 34).

Maya's socialization is incomplete because of the absence of the mother. Maya always in admiration and in awe, wishes to get close to Gautama's mother whom she sees as "a pillar of life and living, an anchor, much more so than her son, and the only one I had now" (CP 161).

It is not that Gautama's mother is indifferent to Maya. What becomes apparent is that Maya wants more than her cool-headed affection, she seeks touch and warmth, the clasping of her arms and the comfort of her smiles. An infant's longing to be close to the mother's breasts, to shut herself away from any reality is apparent in Maya's longings. The novel's sad conclusion fortifies this need.

As seen by Desai, some of her women characters feel disorientated and unable to accept the world:

Having failed to find a way to live with the world, in the world, they retreat in an attempt to see if they can find a refuge where they may live as they choose. Ultimately they find that the world follows them, or that they cannot escape from themselves and the physical refuge does not become an existential one as well (Jena, 1989: 3).

Maya's predicament can be linked to the failure to find a refuge either in marriage or in family. Her extreme sensitivity is what makes her a

"borderline patient" (Kristeva, 1982: 49). Maya's social condition has neither alleviated nor prevented her disaster:

... my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one (CP 89).

Maya is neither a Cinderella in rags, nor a Snow White in dread of a stepmother. She is a toy princess, a prototype of a dance princess whose only contact with reality is autistic. And she reads her isolation, her exclusion as a process that has continued in marriage. Even for Gautama's family she:

... was their toy, their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I came from was less than that - it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer, and so dammed it with dismissal (CP 49).

The split in Maya's personality has resulted in her loss of belief in herself. And this leads to her interiorization of the split. She indulges in narcissistic imagination. But at a denotative level her discourse becomes a site of displaced eroticism. Unable to find an outlet it has metamorphosed into "obsessional discourse" (Kristeva, 1982: 49). Maya becomes trapped in the past of her making. Her allegiance to the father's garden drives her to the extremes of her obsession. Kristeva argues:

Constructed on the one hand by the incestuous desire of (for) his mother and on the other by an overtly brutal separation from her, the borderline patient, even though he may be a fortified castle, is nevertheless an empty castle. The absence, or the failure of paternal function to establish a unitary bent between subject and object, produces this strange configuration: an encompassment that is stifling... An empty castle, haunted by unappealing ghosts - "powerless" outside, "impossible" inside (Kristeva, 1982: 48-49).

Fortified by the presence of security, in marriage, a house and a string of servants, Maya feels empty, alone, afraid. She sits in her house "as in a tomb" (CP 129), which takes on a metaphoric significance with its false sense of

security and closure. It is as defined by her: "my own soul" (CP 188). Maya's obsession with the father figure and the separation from the mother along with her failure to identify with Gautama has led to her isolation. The tropical heat does nothing but intensify the silent, stifling anger of the house:

Sickened, I shut my eyes, but tenuous eye-lids were no protection against the leer of the sun that morning... I saw the world through my own blood that morning, and it was red.

But how long could one stand with one's eyes shut, waiting? For all the while the heat was oozing into the room, pouring in like thick, warm oil, swelling and expanding till it became physical, a presence that pressed against one's body, strangled one in great, virulent arms, was inescapable. Inescapable! And my eyes were open again, staring (CP 182).

The heat outside, suggestive perhaps of an internal fear, is not only a dreaded monster with its "swelling and expanding" (CP 182), but has shadows of inescapable death in Maya's mind. The room becomes a metaphor for her body; trapped with the fear of the albino's prophecy and burning with an unsatisfied longing for fulfilment that would not only be sexual but life saving, Maya has enclosed herself in a world of superstitions and is unable to break out of the constraints imposed by the orthodox society, with its belief in horoscopes and future-telling. It is from her Indian background that she has nurtured both a love and fear of the unknown. But in her case it is self-destructive and carries negative associations. Unlike her father, who by refusing to discuss the prophecy with the astrologer and marrying her into a non-Brahmin household wishes not to take into account the prophecy and to defy tradition, Maya is unable to overcome her fears and in the fourth year of her marriage we see her building and nurturing this fear to such an extreme that it leads to a crescendo, a final explosion, unexpected and tragic but inevitable in the circumstances.

Holding the summer heat responsible for the simmering discontent and rage and saplessness within and outside her Maya confirms that the tropical heat does indeed have an adverse effect on everyday life:

The garden and, beyond it, the street, lay spread out, pinioned by the sun, like a great pressed flower, pressed so long ago that it was now quite sapless, dry, fading fast to assume the colour and, finally, the nature of dust. Nothing could move. No leaf could stir, no blade of grass. The homely insects, the birds, bees, worms of the garden, where were they all? They had crept away, under the bushes, under the shrubs, into the trees, into the earth, their heads bowed, their eyes shut... And yet, in the neck of the lizard spanned above me on the ceiling, its pulse throbbed, and seemed a giant pulse for so small a creature, beating furiously as though it were holding its breath till its blood boiled. And then, in the very height of stillness, its tail twitched. One small, brief twitch... Anger lurked in that gesture, defiance. A growing restlessness that could explode to violence (CP 182-183).

The heat outside has forced the animal world to retire inside, to hide away from the glare of the sun. The lizard's twitch with its anger and restlessness parallels Maya's inner state of mind. Helpless against the brutality of the heat and the failure to cope with her inner freeze, her obsession with fate and an inability to locate a sense of place ends in her killing of the surrogate father, Gautama. Unlike her real father he has been unable to provide a toy world for her and failed to integrate her successfully into the world that belonged to him. But one reads this failure more in terms of Maya than that of Gautama. It is Maya and not Gautama that seeks understanding and sympathy. The story is told by her. And Gautama remains a detached prince of the tale like his namesake Gautama Buddha. Unattached and distant, he had walked out on his wife and child towards the road of nirvana. Gautama is a sthithpragya, that is, he signifies as Buddha - the utter silence of the mind. For it is such equanimity that produces illumination. The Gautama of the novel is neither as detached nor imaginative as his namesake. Seemingly his death is the transversion of the

original Buddha. Detached and indifferent, that is how Maya sees him and decides that he, a "disembodied spirit" (CP 197), did not mind whether he lived or died even though "he kept in touch with the world, however shakily" (CP 206). A mood of calm precedes the act of violence, the scene of death:

... I saw the moon's vast, pure surface, touched only faintly with petals of shadow, as though brushed by a luna moth's wings, so that it appeared a great multifoliate rose, waxen white, virginal, chaste and absolute white, casting a light that was holy in its purity, a soft, suffusing glow of its chastity, casting its reflection upon the night with a vast, tender mother love (CP 208).

Unlike its counterpart the sun, the moon has had a tender and soothing effect on Maya's nerves. The suggestive comparison of the moon with a white multifoliate rose, chaste and holy, signifies the state Maya aspires to. The child-woman in her wishes to return to the soft tender maternal embrace. To her delicate being, like the multifoliate rose, "the petals of shadow" have been an obstruction. First her father and now Gautama had severed the embrace, albeit differently. Maya sees the only recourse is to remove the "ugly, crooked grey shadow that transgressed" the "sorrowing chastity" of the moon. It is Gautama's. And it is in the moon that she sees not only a maternal embrace but like her father whose "beam is especially tender, his attention especially loving", dressed in white, with his eyes "half-closed to the sun, and small crinkles" radiating "from their corners" (CP 39), the image of the moon becomes her only hope of survival, of symbiosis:

Maya's thrusting aside of Gautama who obtrudes into her impassioned contemplation of the moon, is intended as a symbolic destruction of a force hostile to the law of her being (Belliappa, 1971: 21).

The thrust of the argument is that Maya seeks to recover both the loss of her mother and that of the father by refusing to live the adult role of a wife. She believes this will be made possible by the death of her husband. As a hysteric her only recourse is a return to infancy.

Reminiscent of de Beauvoir's study of *The Young Girl*, who devotes "a special love for nature"... (and) "worships it" (de Beauvoir, 1975: 385), Maya's love of nature, her fascination for the enclosed, landscaped gardens manifests a youthful longing for life, for colour and order. And the shifting of her mood from despair to hope, sorrow to joy corresponds with the change of seasons, with the dying and blossoming of flowers. It is as if her internal landscaped garden, that is the garden of her mind suffers with the uprooting of trees, the wilting of flowers and the prospect of a dry, sterile patch of land. Apparently any disorder in the garden outside, the world of nature, appals her and confines her to a sense of desolation. She begins to note parallels to her predicament:

The rolling cotton-balls, the flying yellow leaves, the surging clouds of dust, all seemed to flee, flee, flee, and yet could not, for they were bound to the season, and returned to continue their struggle for escape. Something similar heaved inside me - a longing, a dread, a search for solution, a despair (CP 35).

The protagonist is, however, aware of the process of evolution in nature and in a similar way hopes to flee the fear of the prophecy. But her obsessive impulse instead of freeing her cleaves her to it. The image of the albino haunts her repeatedly. So much so that even the cry of the mating peacocks becomes a cry of death and despair to her:

The title-symbol highlights the "frailty of the subject's signifying system" (Kristeva, 1982: 35). The fear of the peacock's cry and the fear of death have made the "phobic -child" (Kristeva, 1982: 36) a prisoner of her fantasies which she fails to share with any living subject. Kristeva analyses this condition as follows:

... the phobic person as a subject in want of metaphoricalness. Incapable of producing metaphors by means of signs alone, he produces them in the very material of drives - and it turns out that the only rhetoric of which he is capable is that of affect, and it is projected, as often as not, by means of *images* (Kristeva, 1982: 37).

The recurring image of the albino in her mind's eye is central to Maya's phobic fears. And the mating cry of the peacocks "*Pia, Pia,*" "Lover, lover. *Mio, mio,* - I die, I die" (CP 95), is an utterance of want. She imagines that the act of love in their case is accompanied with aggression, which leads to death and annihilation:

Let me say then that *want* and *aggressivity* are chronologically separable but logically coextensive. *Aggressivity appears* to us as a rejoinder to the original deprivation felt from the time of the mirage known as "primary narcissism"; it merely takes revenge on initial frustrations. But what can be *known* of their connection is that want and aggressivity are adapted to one another. To speak of want alone is to repudiate aggressivity in obsessional fashion; to speak of aggressivity alone, forgetting want, amounts to making transference paranoidal (Kristeva, 1982: 39).

A parallel connection is visible in the cry of the peacocks to their mates. In their ripping and bleeding and panting, loving and dying, Maya sees a direct contrast to her own idealized, static, unrequited self:

They lived lives so inverted, so given to passions of which I knew nothing, that I merely wondered at their strange colours, their many-eyed feathers,... "Lover, I die". Now that I understood their call, I wept for them, and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine (CP 96-97).

Maya with her phobic sensitivity reads a new meaning in the cry of the peacocks. It is a voice like hers threatened by the knowledge of death and the desire to live. It is a voice of want and that of aggression. Of love unrequited and ecstasy unattained. As suggested by Belliappa: "Maya's experience of love is not of ecstasy that is short-lived, but of ecstasy that is never attained" (Belliappa, 1971: 8).

Unlike the peacocks, Maya's tragedy is not only that of want and aggression but one of loss. A loss of control over herself, a receding into total dependence both physical and emotional symbolizes her total lapse into the imaginary:

It is finally to the world of childhood (which to Maya stood for a state of grace) that she reverts in her insane condition (Belliappa, 1971: 8).

The metaphoric journey to the landscape of childhood is suggestive that no such voyage is possible without a price. Maya pays a price for it and that is the life of Gautama:

'It had to be one of us, you see, and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see, to Gautama it didn't really matter. He didn't care and I did' (CP 215-216).

Maya returns to her father's house after the death of Gautama. The return is a step signifying regression. The atmosphere of the house in the words of the narrator:

... was more like that of an expensive nursing-home for convalescents. So quiet was it that the very clock in the library seemed to move its hands with deferential slowness, like a funereal priest gesturing with sticks of incense and bowls of ganges water (CP 209-210).

The narrator's impression of the house in Lucknow brings into light not only the history of Maya's pre-marital life but is a portent for the future. The languid spirit of the house has had a debilitating effect on Maya's development.

The tragedy of Maya's predicament is that from her birth to her later life she has suffered from a deep lacuna, a loss of a sense of place. Her entire life is one such craving for a proper place which she could identify as her own without the fear of expulsion or of rejection. Maya's obsessional discourse throws light on her desire to belong, to be loved and accepted. What she does realize is that even her father's house was a temporary haven, a toy world, which had handicapped her, paralysed her, incapacitated her to function anywhere else be it the home of her husband or the wide public sphere:

If we see the hysterical woman as one end of the spectrum of a female avant-garde struggling to redefine women's place in the

social order, then we can also see feminism as the other end of the spectrum, the alternative to hysterical silence, and the determination to speak and act for women in the public world (Showalter, 1988: 161).

To Showalter, a continuum is visible between hysteria and feminism. Desai's woman protagonist Maya, functions at one end of the spectrum. Her final cry, laughter accompanied with a scream of horror, of dread, is a tragic moment of confrontation. Her fears are inarticulate but not unfounded. For we know where it would take her. Another asylum, a new home for convalescents, a different tomb awaits her. Is Maya aware of her destiny? Does she know what awaits her? No, she does not. Perhaps, she does. We can only surmise. But what one is certain of is that Maya's search for a sense of place, her spiritual quest for a parental embrace is temporarily fulfilled in Gautama's mother. If Maya is that "hysterical woman... struggling to define woman's place in the social order", Gautama's mother "belongs to the other end of the spectrum, the alternative to hysterical silence" (Showalter, 1988: 161). Her active public determination "to speak and act in the public world", on behalf of the helpless and oppressed is visible in her gesture of caring for the orphaned and the homeless. It is a pity though that her help and support to Maya come too late. She undergoes a loss of her own son in the process, and is unable to avert the tragedy. What is comforting is that she has neither rebuked nor rejected Maya, but understood her:

They met for an instance, there was silence, and then both disappeared into the dark quiet. All around the dark was quiet then (CP 218).

Published in 1966, Jean Rhys's novel Wide Sargasso Sea offers a striking parallel to Cry, The Peacock. It echoes a similar loss of a sense of place. It is well accepted that the protagonist the mad Creole (Antoinette) has her origins in the character of Bertha in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre but there Bertha remains silent. Rhys gives her a voice and a history in her own right.

As a speaking figure she uses a language of despair and desire. She opens her mouth and lets out her shame and anguish and her husband Rochester, in Cixous' words "... surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives" (Cixous, 1976: 876), accuses her of madness and forces her into the English prison - "A large house". For Rhys' Antoinette, it is a house without a looking glass:

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself... What am I doing in this place and who am I (Rhys, 1967: 178)?

The split between Antoinette and her home accounts for the split in her image of herself. The house becomes "a cardboard world", cold and dark, and unlike the "tomb", in which Maya is encased, it offers no warmth to her. Although the two stories are distinctly individual, one notices certain conditions common to both. Maya and Antoinette are equally sensitive to landscape. The red, white and black colours predominate in the world of Maya while red, green, purple and blue are Antoinette's colours. As suggested by Horner and Zlosnik: "The colour, warmth and passion of the West Indies landscape express Antoinette's desires" (Horner and Zlosnik, 1990: 168). The father's house occupies a similar place in Maya's life. The two women have a brother each who has escaped their destiny. Unlike Maya, Arjuna "was a wild bird, a young hawk that could not be tamed, that fought for its liberty" (CP 134). There is a difference between Cry, The Peacock and Wide Sargasso Sea in that Antoinette's material conditions are much more oppressive than Maya's. Her circumstances are more acutely responsible for her madness than Maya's. Their madness is similar but the causes are different.

It is not just a failure in heterosexual relationship that brings about the fall of Antoinette and Maya. Both are products of a certain socio-cultural structure and function within a defined paradigm. Having lived with a distinct class and cultural identity they seem to subvert the values of their class with a move towards anger and aggression. At a macro level the history of the nation constitutes their private discourse. A colonial discourse representing a culture of displacement, a discourse of the silent and the oppressed which ultimately leads to a discharge and an explosion. As in Wide Sargasso Sea a double metaphor is at work in Cry, The Peacock:

... woman's sense of alienation is expressed through physical dis-ease, which is then caught up in a metaphor of topography. The result is the conflation of the body's desires with the landscape itself (Horner and Zlosnik, 1990: 175).

The two women take their revenge but it is at the cost of their own lives. They share a similar fate, although all that Antoinette does is dream of her revenge. She is not a murderess like Maya. Both of them have suffered a spiritual death unlike Bertha's physical death in Jane Eyre. It is Maya alone who lives up to her deviance. She destroys the other. This destruction however is symptomatic of her own inner death. Rhys and Desai convey that women with an obsessive longing for love and happiness are doomed to exclusion, solipsism and madness. It is as though like Maya, Antoinette too has been "struck into threatening immobility by a ruthless force of fate" (CP 185).

The following section of this chapter intends to look at Cry, The Peacock as a text which not only is a reassertion of the philosophy of Gita but attempts to relocate Gita in a contemporary context such as to create a modern landscape of transcendence. In this process Maya becomes an embodiment of herself, an appearance and an illusion. Maya as a character

emerges as the concept of Maya, the realization of the transitoriness of all existence and hence a repudiation of the permanence of things.

Maya is powerful so long as one does not recognize its source of abode. In itself Maya is illusion but through the consciousness of the imperishable it acquires a purpose and a meaning. In Hindu philosophy, Maya is born out of an illusory attachment to the physical world which is eternally perishable and transitory. Gita, in its discourse on non-attachment, warns mankind against it. Maya signifies a permanent trap, from which there is no escape. It perpetuates man's entry into the cyclical order of existence. For not only is it a symbol of unending conflicts but it obstructs one's journey unto the ultimate. It sways man from the quest of the Absolute, which is moksa. Moksa ends the cycles of birth and death, in turn ending all forms of illusory attachments. Hence, moksa is a release from Maya which ensnares and entraps man. Maya is desire itself and in the Hindu tradition desire is to be sublimated and conquered, for its play is temporary and full of conceit. In Cry, The Peacock, Maya, carries with her such connotations: "Only a dream. An illusion. Maya - my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion" (CP 172).

She is a woman. She is weak and needs protection. She lives and desires. She is sensuous and full of colour like Maya itself. The understanding of Maya does not rest in the belief in inaction but it is based on a realization that this world is temporary, fleeting. It eventually leads one to a state of realization. But it is this realization that eludes Maya.

However in my reading of Cry, The Peacock reason and passion exist at binary poles. If reason is Gautama and passion Maya then the two function as distinct opposites whose fate is not to understand but to undermine the other. Reason does not understand the undertones of passion, its desire to reach the alien and the unknown:

In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me (CP 104).

One is blind to the other. If reason is boring, passion is idle, vain. Reason is dry, passion is fluid - it refuses to remain still:

One is too weak. One wearies, one feels inadequate to its divinity, and so one chooses, rather to drift along the downward stream. It is less tiring than fighting the sea, a wild sea. We aren't made to fight the tide, the current, one cannot remain always on the crest of the wave, the edge of the waterfall. One needs to breathe (CP 121).

Gautama's statement locates the essential problematics of the novel. His words are marked by an admission of his vulnerability and his limitations. His statement becomes a prophecy in the light of the novel's conclusion. Neither Gautama nor Maya survive. It is passion that kills reason. But passion alone does not have the power to survive, to sustain - it loses itself in a dread of horror. The world will never accept me on its own says the voice of passion. Maya's cry, her sharp scream is a reflection of this fear. It reflects an explicit contact with oneself as an anomaly. In the novel Desai offers a proposal that between reason and passion one has to die. As we see, passion - Maya's helplessness without reason - has forced her into childlike dependence. From this perspective one might argue the necessity for a balance, a harmony, an order. It is in Gautama's mother that one witnesses this equilibrium and also to some extent in Maya's father. The older generation having gone through the process of struggle has learnt to maintain its balance whilst the children of the post-colonial India have failed to create this symbiosis. An ambiguity is visible here. A symbolic death.

Maya's story is a reworking of the philosophy of Gita. Gautama tries to explain to Maya, the essence of Gita:

Listen. "Thinking of sense objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing

anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory the discriminative faculty is ruined and from the ruin of discrimination, he perishes". (CP 112).

The cycle can be traced as follows in Maya: attachment leads to desire and desire to anger which results in delusion and delusion leads to further enmeshing herself in attachment, to death, to madness, to confinement. Maya perishes. The sum of her dream, her desire, is disaster.

The Gita affirms that a true seeker is spared the misery attachment causes. Maya is an unsuccessful seeker in the novel. Her attachment to sense objects becomes a source of her deviance. In her struggle to understand the meaning of love, attachment and involvement Maya finds herself absolutely alone. She maintains that the world will not be able to understand the acuteness of her isolation. To her both Gautama and his mother represent ways of living alien to her own, one which she would find hard to come to terms with: "I cried, shrinking from her, for if she stood for life, then she stood for the world as well" (CP 158). If the mother figure appeals to Maya and she sees it as an "anchor" to hold on to, she also finds her "world", frightening and demanding. One which she cannot live in and yet, cannot be without. As for Gautama, he is far too remote, detached and untouched. If his is the world of logic, of books without pictures, she rejoices in "the world of sounds, senses, movements, odours, colours, tunes" (CP 92). Maya's passion for the world of senses swallows her and her conviction that Gautama would never be able to understand, to reach this world leads to the killing of Gautama: "He was not on my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain, and would always remain so" (CP 114).

At another level it could further be argued that Maya and Gautama have both failed to understand the essence of the self and the other, of the Purusha and the Prakriti:

The Gita affirms that there is a supreme Mystery, a highest Reality that upholds and reconciles the truth of these two different manifestations. There is an utmost supreme Self, Lord and Brahman, one who is both the impersonal and the personal... He is Purusha, Self and soul of our being, but he is also Prakriti; for Prakriti is the power of the All-Soul, the power of the Eternal and Infinite self-moved to action and creation... The supreme Atman and Brahman, he manifests by his Maya of self-knowledge and his Maya of ignorance the double truth of the cosmic riddle (Aurobindo, 1970: 440).

The failure to realize and to come to terms with the nature of "the highest Reality", despite their philosophic disquisition brings the fall of Gautama and Maya. While one insists on logic, the other insists on emotion and unable to reconcile the two opposing forces they succumb to the cycle of Maya.

At another level Cry, The Peacock reveals how "writing her self" is a new and disturbing phenomenon in the life of an Indian woman. It takes on a hieratic significance. It is, after all, a necessity. It is called for. Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence is an evocation of that necessity. The protagonist Jaya writes her story and in the process displays the need for speech and autonomy. As suggested by Hammer:

It is in the house every morning that we must cut the umbilical cord of dreams.

The house is... also a spiritual structure of hiding and revealing, of bounding and merging, of world-embrace and world-withdrawal.

One of the most important systems of the house is that of entering and leaving (Hammer, 1981: 382).

The process of leaving and entering is integral to an Indian woman's experience. It is to the house that her first duty lies. The life outside is of secondary importance in most cases. She might be a successful and dynamic working woman, yet her primary task as a mother, a wife and a daughter is to be able to restore the harmony inside. Maya leaves her father's house at the

time of marriage to enter the new one that belongs to her husband. And in this process she encounters a rupture which gives way to frustration. We see her returning time and again to the house that she has left behind, in her dreams, in her isolation. The desire to retreat does nothing but alleviate her sense of alienation. Despite all material comforts she sees herself as "unhoused". According to Bachelard: "The normal unconscious knows how to make itself at home everywhere,..." (Bachelard, 1964: 10). And Maya being a victim of acute sensitivity is a protagonist unable to "come out of himself [herself]" (Bachelard, 1964: 10). She is expected to redefine, restate herself on alien terms and this is precisely what Maya fails to do. The husband's house does not lend her a sense of inner security, she fails to be at peace with herself.

Maya is not a working woman and much of her time is spent in the house. Bachelard suggests that "... the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard, 1964: 6). At one level Gautama's house fails to protect the dreamer, it imprisons her. On the other hand, it is made clear that although she has moved away from her father's house to that of her husband Maya is unable to focus her attention on the present, she does not dream of a future. All her dreams are of the past, a past haunted by the prophecy of death, a past protected and sheltered in the presence of the father. The present house is nothing but a constant reminder of a world that she has left behind, forever. She is committed to a past which denies the present. It harbours profound fears and confusion in the mind of the protagonist:

I watch a small butterfly flicker amongst the flowers: it has white wings, each with an orange fleck. Bright and fluttering, it is as much of a gay paper-cut as the flowers. The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes (CP 36).

She has lived like a toy princess and moves from one house to another without being able to understand the plasticity that binds her. Maya confines herself to this house both as a child and an adult. "To be at home is to be in a space that receives and accepts one" (Hammer, 1981: 383). The process of self definition is however incomplete in her for she fails to mediate the inner and outer sense of space. The house does not offer her psychic, inner landscape a sense of belonging. It refuses to accept an emotional shift which has occurred in marriage. She seemingly suffers from a loss of a sense of place. The father's house becomes a palimpsest to which she can return only after the death of Gautama. It is sad but also fitting that the search for location, for a sense of place, a longing for a proper home, her unfulfilled desire will end in the asylum.

Chapter Ten

Where Shall We Go This Summer?: A landscape of consentement

Through the bushes like a puff of air,
out of every house like smoke I strayed;
where the rest enjoyed conforming, there
stringent as some foreign form I stayed.
Into hands that clasped so fatefully
mine could only enter with confusion:
one and all increased the self diffusion,
and diffused was all that I could be (Rilke,
in Leishman, 1959: 179).

In Cry, The Peacock, one had noticed the relevance of the father's house and the enclosed garden in Maya's life. The house is a central metaphor in Anita Desai's landscape vision. The desire to reinstate and to house oneself in a landscape which would not only be a familiar space but also a space of recognition and a space akin to one's being constitutes the problematics in Desai's fiction. Sometimes it is within the four walls that her characters hope to contain themselves. At other times the desire to "house oneself" expands itself into an island or a city (as in Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Voices in the City.) It is in these wider locations that her women protagonists learn the art of withdrawal and attachment, of living and waiting, sharing and withholding. In the present chapter the focus is the dialectics within which the island itself becomes a representative of woman's desire to house herself in Where Shall We Go This Summer? In order to expand this argument a Rilke poem will be used as one of the reference points. Desai has been a great admirer of Rilke and is seemingly influenced by his writing (cf Appendix B). Rilke's poetry is based on a very profound understanding of life. He emphasises "inseeing", the art of being able to put oneself into the very centre of things, and his poetry succeeds in creating such a centre. Written sometime in February 1914, To Benvenuta

conveys his understanding of the emotional and the lyrical through intensely powerful images. In a letter to Benvenuta, whose real name was Magda von Hattingberg, Rilke points out:

... how glorious it is to insee, for example, a dog as one passes by... to let oneself precisely into the dog's very centre... For a while one can stand being right inside the dog, but one must be careful to jump out in time, before its environment has completely enclosed one, since otherwise one would simply remain the dog in the dog and be lost for everything else (Rilke, in Leishman, 1959: 29).

Rilke stresses the necessity to be able to "jump out" of the centre before being enclosed permanently in it. Perhaps one can align the crisis in Rilke to that in Desai. It is possible that she has made her journey back to her childhood, that is, to her mother's land through the images and sounds in German. She reads Rilke in German and his poetic intimations, his spiritual and artistic journeys seem to permeate her novels. Seemingly it is from him that she learned the art of:

... transforming into 'inwardness' that immense variety of 'outwardness', that so often emptying, extroverting and mechanising pressure of 'outwardness', which distinguishes our modern civilization (Leishman, 1959: 41).

In her fiction, Desai creates an interior landscape for women, which offers to mediate between the outwardness, the external emptiness and the inward, inseeing jouissance of their being. The poet in Rilke makes a similar appeal for understanding in To Benvenuta. Comparing this with the predicament of Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? we notice that in both these works, the protagonists undergo a spiritual journey. It is this movement outwards, that concretizes their "inwardness" and equips them with an understanding of the human condition. It allows them to come to terms with their situation. Like Rilke, Desai's protagonist Sita makes a spiritual journey and sees the return to ^{the} island as a simple means to achieve

"purest inner possibility" (Leishman, 1959: 44). Sita had drifted in and out, that is, moved from one particular life to another, from being a young girl into a house wife and a mother, from the familiar life on the island to the unfamiliarity of city-life, without being able to locate herself. She suffers from a deep sense of alienation, which has a hypothermic effect on her. And it is in the three sections of the novel that Desai demonstrates the possibility of the island being a refuge and an illusion as against the boredom of the mainland. In the struggle between the inner and the outer world, the imaginary and the social, the self and the non-self, the familiar and the foreign, the island provides such a centre to Sita. She is able to reconstruct the past in her mind and it is only when the predicament of the present takes over that the time past is forced to resign itself to the time present.

The structure of the novel parallels the structure of the poem. Rilke perceives that in the struggle to achieve some sort of harmony between the inner and the outer selves it becomes important to assert one's relationship with the voice within. Desai, perhaps, is equally interested in presenting the inner world of her protagonists. At the core of Desai's fiction is this intense desire to define and discover what is hidden, unrecognizable, fragmented and unfamiliar:

I feel Elizabeth Bowen spoke for me when she wrote of herself:
... Imagination of my kind is most caught, most fired, most worked upon by the unfamiliar: *I have thriven, accordingly, on the changes and chances, the dislocations and contrasts which have made up much of my life.* That may be why "my" world (my world as a writer) is something of a mosaic. As it is, it is something that assembled itself (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 102).

This consciousness of the unfamiliar is of particular interest with regard to landscape. If Cry, The Peacock is about a woman writing her self, Where Shall We Go This Summer? is a story of a woman in search of a self.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the story begins with Moses waiting for his memsahib. "Waiting was what he did most of his time: it was not only his prime but also his legitimate occupation" (WS 7). While Moses is a servant in waiting, Sita is a woman in waiting:

"Are you waiting for someone?" she was occasionally asked by one of the children dashing past or by her husband, as she sat out on the balcony, smoking, not reading the book on her lap, looking at and then away from the sea. Sometimes she answered with a nod for it was true, she was always waiting. Physically so resigned, she could *not inwardly accept* that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small, enclosed area, with these few characters churning around and then past her, leaving her always in this grey, dull-lit, empty shell. I am waiting, she agreed - although for what, she could not tell (WS 54). (emphasis mine)

Like Rilke's protagonist in To Benvenuta, who does not enjoy her assigned status in the house, Sita too has failed to conform, she has reached a state of "inwardness", and her "inwardly" refusal is symptomatic of her disappointment with life. By wishing to return to the island Sita hopes to infuse life with some meaning, some magic in her own right.

In the development from the first novel to the present one, the landscape location of the garden is transformed to the island which becomes Sita's refuge and consolation. The island offers maternal refuge to her. Like Maya, Sita's extreme sensibility makes her a phobic personality. She fails to adapt herself to her husband's family. And it is not surprising that her own children are very critical of her. They find her attitude to life stultifying. The novel shows the retreat to the island as a significant interlude in the life of Sita:

She had no longer the nerve or the optimism to continue. No, she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more (WS 58).

Sita is afraid that the life in the city has benumbed her. To her it is a world reeking with blood and violence, and what she cannot accept, come

to terms with, is that "Destruction came so naturally; that was the horror" (WS 45). She is heavily pregnant, with her fifth child. She dreads the prospect of losing the baby's innocent self in a world where nothing but "food, sex and money matter" (WS 47). Confirmed in her fears, she returns to discover the island and hopes that it might confer a magic on her:

She had come here in order not to give birth... she was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. Wasn't this Manori, the island of miracles... She had had four children with pride, with pleasure - sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure - with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition (WS 31-32).

Earlier pregnancies had provided her with something to look forward to. She had enjoyed giving birth. The process had filled her with a sense of vocation. It was a release of her restless energies. Perhaps in her children she had hoped to fulfil her restless dreams. But the children not only separate themselves from her, they also reject her. They swiftly accommodate themselves to the outside world of horror and dirt, filth and violence and this is what Sita cannot inwardly accept.

The break between her and the child is perceived by Sita as a terrifying moment of loss. For if it is birth, it is also a loss of the precious, untainted self that had been embraced by her womb. She is equally distressed at the thought of bringing forth a child into a world which is insensitive to human existence. A life that is built on aggression and indifference does not appeal to her.

Withdrawal from her husband's home to the island of Manori is followed by the ambiguity of the second section focusing on the winter of 1947. The second section of the novel becomes an attempt to retrieve the life on the island of more than twenty years ago. It is not only a celebration but an explanation. It seeks to highlight the character's total predicament and her

disenchantment with life. It also explains her need for altering the present. This section of the novel reflects on the childhood of Sita. It is here that we read of her first entering the island with her father and the other members of the family. As a contrast to their early lives, the life on the island acquires a distinct meaning. A child of pre-Independence India, a child of a freedom fighter, "the second Gandhi", Sita's childhood had verged on separation and seclusion:

... Sita could tell from her own experience, their lives had been lived inside jails, in crowded assemblies, in mobs, in slums, tenements, and villages where life was not picturesque or calm, but harsh and barbaric. They had known all the tensions of political life, although only on the brink of it, and its cruelties. There had been long separations, dark seclusions. There had been austerity and fear. It was always made clear to Sita that this was no age for games or sweets but one for prayer and sacrifice (WS 63-64).

The three distinct sections of the novel reveal her state of being in three separate spheres of space and time. The spatio-temporal sequence of the novel highlights the inner mood and anxiety of its principal character. The house as a metaphor continues to link the break perceived in the consciousness of the character and the maturity of her perceptions. It represents the tensions faced by the central protagonist and the breach between her desired self and the existing self. For it is in the island of Manori that Sita experiences the joy of freedom and confronts the ambiguity of life. The life of those around her fills her with curiosity and Sita's encounter with the world of magic of her father leaves her with mixed feelings of dismay and wonder.

Soon after India attained Independence, Sita had moved with her siblings, her father and his disciples, to "Jeevan Ashram", which is also "the home of the soul". The house on the island of Manori becomes a direct

contrast to her earlier insecure existence and it is here that she recovers her lost childhood:

On this island, strange experiences and strange sensations made her think and grow too large for the chrysalis of children and so she slowly, unwillingly emerged. She felt this strangeness in the atmosphere not altogether comfortable, as a moth that has emerged from its cocoon not into sunlight, but into a grey nonlight that does not warm the damp wings or give them strength for flight (WS 76).

As in Cry, The Peacock the face of the lost mother remains an enigma to the daughter. It is an even greater enigma in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Sita's entry into adulthood is marked by the loss of faith in the idolized image of the father. It is in the island of Manori that her growing self becomes aware of the fact that "her father's daylight, practical charisma had its underlit night-time aspect,..."(WS 76). Her suspicions are enhanced further by her inability to enter his world wherein he preferred, probably incestuously, the eldest child Rekha.

The mystery of the mother's absence becomes a puzzle to the growing daughter. In her early years the absence of the mother as well as the father (for he spent a lot of his time in prison) was taken for granted. The island now forces Sita to confront the disturbing influences around her. On it she witnesses the play of magic and aura, simplicity and deceit. She recognizes on the island the lacuna that the mother's absence has created in her life. She recognizes her failure to radiate as a complete individual:

Life seemed complete, full, without her, there was no reason for her to exist. Sita had imagined she came into the world motherless - and the world was crowded enough so. She had always lived in the centre of a crowd, having been one of those flower children of the independence movement whose chins were chucked by chuckling freedom fighters in home-spun, who had spent hours at a stretch, mosquito-bitten legs dangling, at the edge of the dais on which politicians-in-waiting sat cross-legged before lowered microphones, addressing vast crowds beneath them (WS 84).

This failure is further enhanced by Sita's disillusionment with her father. To the outside world he becomes a messiah, a saviour, a man with a magic wand but Sita, having seen his "underlit night-time aspect" (WS 76) cannot revere him any more. A split has taken place between the idealized image and the identified one. For Sita any possibility of communication is remote because of her father's incestuous preference of one sister over the other. Sibling rivalry adds to the displacement of the protagonist Sita. The father's attachment for the elder sister leaves no ground for understanding and love in Sita's life.

The final split between her and the other members of the family takes place in her supposed recognition of the "rubies and pearls" that belonged to her mother. Sita's awareness of the mother's absence alters her relations with her father:

In that always murmuring casuarina grove, that always animated house on the knoll with its meetings, its gathers, its music, its shift and flow of ideas and activities, she now felt herself separated from them, the chosen one, chosen by the ghost for a flashing vision of its jewels although it remained invisible and fleshless itself (WS 85).

The house in Manori, with its whitewashed exterior and the dangerous, fraudulent interior, with its "rubies and pearls" shocks her. The father as a figure of love and authority fails to impress her and Sita, separated from the mother figure, becomes a vagrant spirit, "a wanderer, always in search of the ghost. Who, what was she" (WS 85)? In Where Shall We Go This Summer? we see the withdrawn, wandering, restless character of Sita always in waiting. Invisible and fleshless, the ghost of the mother is validated by the sight of the jewels that the father crushes and pounds for the treatment of the poor and ignorant. More so it can be suggested that Sita is jealous of the father's preference for Rekha. In the words of Dinnerstein:

... the jealous woman... can feel at the same time pained by the other woman's access to the man and excited by the man's access to the other woman, through which she is offered

vicarious re-access to a female erotic figure. The eruption of this more or less buried early erotic interest can distract or humiliate or baffle her, taking the sharp edge off jealous anger (Dinnerstein, 1987: 46).

The girl's identification with the mother is incomplete because of her lack of contact with her. It is the sister who has taken the vacant place beside the father. Her sister's accessibility and her own inaccessibility to this father fills Sita with a longing for the missing mother on one hand and nurtures heterosexual jealousy on the other. The desire for the mother is intensified by the mystery surrounding such an absence. We are led to believe that the mother "ran away to Benaras" (WS 148). In a world dominated by masculine values the young girl has no option but to withdraw and to withhold herself. She not only feels unwelcome but shy. She fails to open up. And the only way to overcome her isolation is to find solace elsewhere and it is here that we see the island becoming a significant symbol in the novel; like Maya's garden it is her first primary refuge. It is important to note however, that Sita had moved away from this island after the death of her father. There was nothing to hold her back. After living for twenty years on the "mainland", Sita realizes the need to return, to go back to the island:

The mainland - the very word implied solidity, security: the solidity of streets, the security of houses. She had not realized then that living there would teach her only that life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment - but a thin crust, a flimsy crust that, at every second or third step, broke apart so that she tumbled in, with the most awful sensation, into a crashed pile of debris (WS 58).

In contrast with the life on the mainland, life on the island seemed bizarre, unappealing and at first, Sita had been more than relieved to leave it behind. But despite the presence of her husband and children, Sita feels drained, washed out with "dull tedium" (WS 58) on the mainland. It appears to her as a landscape without vision. She cannot enjoy her truncated existence in the city of Bombay. Hence, Sita's return to the island is an

attempt to restore the magic and the mystery that surrounded the place. In it is visible an effort to find and to recreate her lost self. As in Rilke's poem, one can see the protagonist struggling to define herself. The opening of the poem echoes a lack of self-confidence and a desire to transcend such a lack. It is, ^{the} protagonist's desire to escape which compels her to withdraw. As suggested by V. Rao:

The island concretises the feeling of isolation of Sita. She retreats into it as into a womb, with an obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity. Her childhood memories are full of the sea, the waves, the sky and the rugged, rustic characters of the little village on the island... Manori also concretises the nostalgic memories of Sita's childhood. The island primarily exists in its full reality only in her mind. The island is no more than a projection of her inner psyche (Rao, 1978: 46).

At the outset, the island signifies a desire to return to the mother's womb. The split between her and the island has not been complete. Sita still thinks of it as inseparable from herself. She clings to the memory of it. It has not been possible for her to see the landscape as a mere "projection of her inner psyche", hence the return. Later she sees it as more than a refuge. At a deeper level the island is a seat of conflict raging inside Sita's mind. She might have left it, escaped it, but she has not been able to resolve the puzzle around it. She cannot forget the mysteries residing in the bosom of the island. These were the mysteries related to her life, her mother's absence, her father and his relationship to her elder sister and his interest in the cult of magic, of deceit. Sita's nostalgia for the past is evoked by her stifled present and the fear of the future. The past has been buried for a long time but the tedium of the present offers no respite and Sita's refusal to walk into the future and her lack of optimism compel her to "find the island once more" (WS 58). The island that had engulfed her in her youth and also frightened her, so much so

that she had left it with a sense of relief, beckons her to return if she wants to save the child from being born.

What ^{the} island seems to provide Sita in her adult years is the satisfaction of being "inward". If, as suggested by Rilke:

Extensive as 'outwardness' may be, it will hardly, with all its sidereal distances, bear any comparison with the dimensions, with the depth-dimension, of our inwardness (Rilke, in Leishman, 1959: 18).

Sita wishes to fulfil such a longing by entering the island. She realizes the necessity to be able to "insee", to put oneself at the centre of her past which has somehow crippled her present. The only way to be able to reconcile herself to the past, the father's land, is to enter it and then as the truth reveals itself, to "jump out" of it.

Nostalgia mingled with fear reaffirms the need to create a sense of belongingness in Sita. The past has become a magic refuge from the dreary mainland of today. But as the time for the baby's birth draws to a close Sita becomes less self-absorbed. She is happy to see that her children have begun to appreciate the life on the island, but it does not mean much to them; brought up in the city, they are children of comfort. The island has little to offer their growing minds; it offers no more than a short respite. The novel traces Sita's changing relationship to the island. Once it was a home, it provided her shelter and refuge but now she has responsibilities to fulfil. And it is significant that Sita can return to the island only as a guest now, her home is elsewhere, it is on the mainland. She cannot run away from her life as a mother and a housewife. She reads a sense of reproach in the silence of her children:

Whenever she turned or looked up, she saw them staring at her, watching her as though waiting for her to break down and admit failure. To them, she realized with a painful sloughing-off of disbelief, it was life in their flat on Napean Sea Road that

had been right and proper, natural and acceptable; it was this so called "escape" to the island that was madness (WS 102).

In the third section of the novel Sita is confronted with the present-day reality. She realizes that the Manori of her past has nothing to sustain her children. It is a land with palms and deserted beach and open drains. Sita realizes that revisiting the past is impossible:

If it had ever existed - black, sparkling and glamorous as in her memory - it was now buried beneath the soft grey-green mildew of the monsoon, chilled and choked by it (WS 103).

It is Sita's disillusionment with her immediate surroundings that had forced her to make a return journey. She was bored with life on the mainland and hence this trip to Manori. But on her return she is made aware of the opposing forces existing between her and her children: "they had no memory of its past glamour, and so she and they moved always in opposite directions" (WS 103). Sita is not alone like Maya, therefore her struggle to recapture the past does not end in solipsistic isolation. She understands the futility of her actions well in time. She must relive the black, sparkling glamour in her mind and learn to respond to the charm and vicissitudes of present-day life with equanimity.

Not only has Sita had an unfulfilled relationship with the absent mother and failed to develop a rapport with the elder sister but her relationship with her daughter Menaka is extremely complex, dramatic. Menaka, is a pragmatist like her father. The mother-daughter relationship is fraught with anxiety and tensions. Menaka does not approve of her mother's highly eccentric temperament. De Beauvoir gives us an insight into this sort of a relationship:

In her daughter the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation with herself; and when the otherness of this *alter ego* manifests itself, the mother feels herself betrayed (de Beauvoir, 1975: 532).

Sita too desires to see herself in Menaka. As a child Menaka had shown an aptitude for drawing and Sita was proud of her creativity. She wanted her to pursue the career of an artist. But Menaka feels neither compassion nor pity for her. "She had had enough of her mother's disorder and nonsense - she would escape it wholly." (WS 117). For Menaka art is nonsense and boring. She is more into the world of numbers and tubes. Chemistry, Maths and Biology seem to her to belong to the world of "logic, order, sense." Her mother's obscure view of life "... what she thought and said did not interest Menaka, stubbornly did not interest Menaka" (WS 117). Not for her the dull tedium of her mother's obscure self, the disorder and nonsense of her temperament. It is the father and not the mother that she wishes to emulate. As a young girl she turns to the father's authority: "subjectivity, will and desire" (Benjamin, 1990: 115). Identification with the mother is not particularly helpful and it would not be a farfetched claim that Menaka by refusing to empathize with her mother's anxiety ridden world is seeking to avoid her destiny. What is obvious to Menaka is that in order to enter "the symbolic order", she must learn to identify with the father. She makes him her "reference point" (Kristeva, 1977: 35). In Kristeva's terms, Sita's position is:

... outside time, with neither past nor future, neither true nor false; buried underground, it [she] neither postulates nor judges (Kristeva, 1977: 35).

The daughter can see her mother's failure to adapt to the social order, her inability to "re-establish" herself has led to her marginalization. It is a position which Menaka rejects, refuses to accept. What makes the encounter between the mother and daughter electrifying is Sita's sense of waste in her life. Unlike her daughter she has not been able to gain access to the temporal scene that is "the paternal order of descent" (Kristeva, 1977: 34). She is

subconsciously more bound to the mother. Conscious that unlike her daughter she has had neither the talent nor the luck to pursue and develop herself, Sita remains in "an eternal sulk" (Kristeva, 1977: 37) before her family.

Sita defines her predicament in the following terms:

"I wish I had your talent. I would nurse it so carefully - like a plant - make it grow, grow. I used to think - after I left this island and had to think what I would do next - that if only I could paint, or sing, or play the *sitar* well, really well, I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am," she said with stinging bitterness, rubbing the ash this way and that with her slipper. "I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me - even if no one else had cared" (WS 117).

The above ensemble sums up Sita's predicament. Without a vocation, talent, or a sense of recognition, Sita has fallen into a state of stasis. She is full of self-contempt. In this passage the three major anxieties can be identified as the anxiety of vocation, the anxiety of acceptance and that of place. When she sees her daughter, Sita becomes doubly conscious of her life; it has been a life without a vocation hence without meaning. Sita can see quite clearly that her daughter has abandoned her and opted for the father. As suggested by de Beauvoir the mother resents the privileges given to her own daughter and is constantly reminded of those she had lived without when she herself was a child: "... she cannot bear to have her double become *an other* (de Beauvoir, 1975: 534). Sita wants the double to live and cultivate what the mother has lived in her mind, that is, the life of an artist. And for Sita an artist alone can live a life of imaginative freedom, she can be expressly "inside", be in the world yet live outside it. An artist alone can transcend the miseries of current human existence. Having lived a life of a mother and a wife, a daughter and a woman Sita is still unsatisfied. She feels everyday life is in itself dull, corrupt and uninspiring. It has very little to offer in terms of fulfilment. To be able to

establish and live one must create her own raison d'être and an artist committed to her vocation alone can fulfil such a dream, add meaning to her life.

Rejected by her own mother, Sita has always lived with a strong instinct for rebellion. She has rebelled against the values imposed by the society on the mainland. By refusing to give birth to the baby she has lived rebellion in her mind, by coming to the island she has lived and fought and fulfilled her childhood fantasy, of becoming a young girl with less to care. What she has been able to achieve through her mind, she wishes her daughter to live in her art. A life of vision. In a landscape without meaning, without vision a commitment to art alone can bring "oblivious joy" (WS 115). According to Rilke, "May this gazing out of myself, which consumes me to emptiness, be got rid of through a loving preoccupation with interior fullness" (Rilke, in Leishman, 1959: 44). Perhaps one way of overcoming this sense of nothingness is suggested in Sita's retreat to the island.

The island becomes a mirror of her consciousness. It serves a multiple function as a principle mediator between reality as it was and reality as seen by memory, between the house of soul and the house of betrayal, the world of spontaneity and that of restraint. As a young girl Sita's stay on the island had left her with no sense of vocation. Life was not structured for one. Sita's girlhood had verged on exclusion. Not surprisingly, as an adult she is unable to prepare herself for entry into the objective world of order, logic and sense. She remains an outsider. Excluded and shapeless, it fills her with a sense of void. She continues to be a ghost of the past, in search of her mother, a wandering spirit. It is in this framework that Rilke's voice becomes a representation of the Indian woman's predicament. Sita is diffused and foreign in her own world. She had strayed out of her father's house and later

from the husband's house in the mainland. Her life has taken^{on} a cyclical semblance.

Sita's return journey to the island of Manori is positively refreshing. The monsoon enlivens her interest in life, in nature, in the wild pleasures of the unkempt world. She becomes the young girl of her youth, carefree and uncaring. She is simultaneously made aware of the responsibility of the baby nurturing in her womb. The island may be divested of magic but it still retains the power to enthrall her:

Thus, in the third part the functional background of the island has fully served the purpose of being a metaphor with many meanings. (Rao, 1978: 48).

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the island is both a threat and a solace. In it, she has both been received and rejected. Her memory ceases to see it as a mere magic landscape. On her return to the island not only is she able to discover old joys but is forced to reconcile herself to the past mysteries and future uncertainties. Also, it seeks to create a precipice between Sita's inner state and her external appearance.

The three seasons of monsoon, winter and summer render the varied moods of the character and reflect her states of being. The shift in the seasons has an added significance as it reflects the pattern of human life and endeavour. It has an underlying conceptual harmony which highlights the protagonist's changing vision of the island. The monsoon acts as a catalyst, after the sweltering heat of the summer it comes as a positive relief. It brings with it an understanding that Sita must yield to the transitoriness of her existence on the island. She must shed her attraction and resentment towards her past and learn to harmonize the precarious and the permanent, the self and the non-self, the past with her future.

The structure is partially reminiscent of Woolf's To the Lighthouse. Like the lighthouse in To the Lighthouse, the island has a

metaphysical connotation in Where Shall We Go This Summer?; it becomes a repository of opposing principles. Just as "the lighthouse becomes, for Mrs Ramsay, an outward correlative for this inner sense of self" (Horner and Zlosnik, 1990: 120), the island is for Sita an expression of her intensely subjective self, it is "an oblique correlative" for her childhood identity. It affects the way she looks at life and the way she responds to it. On her return she is able to see her present self disconnected from the past and the ineffable link that she shares with the island. Sita's inner stasis thaws on the island and she feels "oblivious joy" (WS 113) as she plays with her children games of mud and sand:

She felt surrounded by presences - the presence of the island itself, of the sea around it, and of the palm trees that spoke to each other and sometimes, even to her. They were so alive. In the beginning they had seemed harsh, rattling their oversized, brittle leaves together as if in warning, or disapproval; standing on one charred leg each, offering a minimum of shade or greenery. Yet, for all their stiffness and dryness, she came to see how extraordinarily responsive they were to every nuance of light and air, how alive... Every moment of the day or night they stood there, responding to the elements differently, curiously, so that really they were not stiff at all but so responsive, so alive as to seem birds rather than vegetables - stiff-legged, tough-feathered cranes that sleep with one eye open, always prepared to spread their wings, squawk and hiss (WS 126-127).

As an adult Sita does not feel restricted on the island. Not only does the present encounter with the sea and the island provide her with some inner respite but it also teaches her to respond to life. Thwarted by the life on the mainland she abandons herself to the "presences" within Manori. She succeeds in being "completely inside" on the island. The island provides her a nexus and a nest. And once she is able to see inside, be within herself, Sita is temporarily satisfied, she is able to look out. Her vision does not remain stifled it expands beyond the self. The self having reached the inner zones of

existence realizes the necessity to look outwards. She becomes conscious of the ties which bind her.

Family forms an important nexus in a woman's world. It is within the institution of family that Desai's women seek to construct a viable space for themselves. The failure and difficulties which they encounter in the process becomes her major concern. Woman's primary sphere is the man's private sphere, the home. It is in the home, within the family structure that Desai's women live and grow. The feminine desire for a landscape, the intense urge to locate themselves within this landscape is an expression of their intensely private self which remains concealed within the home. It could be argued that the home, the family which constitutes a man's private^{world,} is a woman's public sphere for there is another private interior within which she hopes to collect and compose herself. And it is this intensely personal domain that Desai's women have recourse to. Maya's hankering for her father's garden and Sita's return to the island are significant gestures in themselves. For in them we witness not merely a hysteric's reaction or a mad woman's anguish but they stand apart as attempts to restore their lost selves.

Their own process of "mothering" has been incomplete because of the absence of the mother, therefore the need for symbiosis has remained unfulfilled. The natural mother's absence has failed to initiate them properly into the "separation-individuation" process, an important one through which a female child learns to separate and see herself as an individual.

It could also be suggested that both Maya and Sita have been totally caught in the "semiotic"; Maya disappears into history, that is, into her father's house, Sita has to return to the island in order to relive the memory of the father. The father has to die again in terms of his memory, in her mind. The influence of the father has been very strong in their minds and they must learn to outgrow it, to live without it. The landscape, however, takes on a

maternal significance. In it women search for a deeper symbiosis. They subconsciously learn to relate to the landscape. Manori holds such a place in Sita's life. The yearning for the lost mother, this maternal hunger, transfers itself to the yearning for the lost island. Sita's moment of awakening is set in contrast with her stay on the island. The return to the island brings with it a plethora of memories. It comes as a turning point in her reassessment of filial ties.

It is on her second visit to the island that Sita learns to make a pact with life. First the monsoon "like an unceasing burial", and later "a break in the monsoon" emphasize the urgency of Sita's mood ranging from despair to helplessness, to a sense of belonging and calm to reconciliation as a final human gesture. Like the disorder wrecked with the tide of the storm and the sea, Sita too needs to bring her disorderly life into order:

Sita was left on the bed, smoking, rubbing her toes in the ash, feeling them draw away from her, into other regions, regions safer and duller, shutting themselves in with the barbed wire of prudence, caution, routine and order, leaving her in her own disorderly region that smelt of raw tobacco, was lashed by the monsoon storm that swept so freely over the desolate island, leaving her there out of disapproval, horror even, and an instinctive rejection of her wild values and wild searches, leaving her (WS 118-119).

Through her encounter with the island Sita comes to an understanding that "wild values and wild searches" will not lead her anywhere. She cannot live without the approval and love of her husband and children. The island itself has become a mirror of her desolation. The wild storm has disrupted the life on the island and for Sita this comes as a revelation. Even the seasons move in a rhythmic pattern. Monsoon gives way to sunshine that scatters "its dull silver coins upon the waves" (WS 119). She can see that the island which had always seemed protected and secure is only partially so, the monsoon has disrupted its calm, and terminated her

own search for a sense of security. She recognizes that the desire to prevent the birth of the baby is impossible.

Sita sees a distinct parallel between her and the jellyfish. Of her flight she says to her husband:

"Perhaps I never ran away at all. Perhaps I am only like the jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand-bar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that's all. I hadn't much to do with it at all" (WS 149).

As her stay on the island and the time for delivery come to a close, we notice Sita reading a different meaning into her flight. "Washed up" and "stranded" like the jellyfish, she cannot go beyond a point. However the point that she is making in relation to her state and that of the jellyfish is reflective of her womanly condition for which she neither holds her husband nor her children responsible. In her sad confession she absolves the rest of her family:

"But you have nothing to do with it. Nothing. There's just the sea - it drowns us or strands us on the the sand-bar - and there's the island. That's all" (WS 149).

Thus between her and the island none can intrude. It seems as if her journey to the island and the experience of the sea are exclusively her own. Even her children remain outsiders. On this fateful journey she wishes for no companions. It can therefore be suggested that the symbolic trip to Manori has strong imaginative potential. Her encounter with the sea and the island remains a personal, an intensely private sojourn and she can share it with none for fear of being misread. Sita contrives to tell nothing. Seemingly it is the wildness of the sea and the island that alone can empathize with the "wild values and wild searches" of Sita's interior landscape. Sita has lived a circumscribed life, a brief "pilgrimage" to the island has not been without fulfilment. And from this pilgrimage Sita had hoped to receive not simply a refuge from her everyday tedium at the mainland but positive sustenance for

the future. At one level is her wandering spirit in search of her mother's land, at another is an individual aware of her life full of constraints. Like a vagrant wind she lets herself be carried by the waves of the sea and the wildness of the island, in the process hoping to forget the world of logic, sense and order and also hoping to escape the ritual of birth. Pregnancy instils in her a need to escape and she "deserts" the surface of the mainland in order to "descend" to the depths of the island. According to Kristeva pregnancy provides an:

... escape from the bonds of daily social temporality, interruption of the regular monthly cycles: woman deserts the surfaces - skin, eyes - so that she may descend to the depths of the body, to hear, taste, smell the infinitesimal life of the cells (Kristeva, 1977: 35-36).

This descent into the depths is associated with Sita's descending into the very centre of her being. In doing so she had hoped to be able to relive some of the most intense moments of her life. The process of "in-seeing" could possibly be realized on her encounter with the island. She must not only break away from the surface of the mainland but bring herself close to the essence and odours of the island. Whilst the island has provided her with a stage to enact her longing for "in-seeing", the metaphor of the sea is a poignant reminder that she can probe within limits. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? becomes a complex composite of the social and the imaginary. At an extreme she symbolizes the primordial state in woman:

The child: sole evidence, for the symbolic order, of *jouissance* and pregnancy; the child, thanks to whom the woman, herself an instrument localized in time, will be coded into the chain of generations (Kristeva, 1977: 36).

Subsequently, the unborn child and her family make her aware of her inability to continue on the island, lead her out from the imaginary existence into the world of the social. For life on the island means in the long run a life in isolation, rejection and disapproval, not to speak of horror. Sita is

conscious of her responsibility therefore she would not desert the surface forever. She will not be the "deserter" like her mother:

Even vast nocturnal Heaven's splendour
needs some earthly stance to be discerned:
self-surrender answers self-surrender,
acts that gratify are acts returned.
Not in need of me did Night appear;
when, though, to the stars I still repaired,
I the injured to the unimpaired,
what upheld me? Was I here
(Rilke, in Leishman, 1959: 179)?

A complex image of the poet's self-surrender counterpoised with his need to repair, in this context return to the stars, is symbolic of the poet's quest for the imaginative. And, yet, his feeling of rejection by the night is so intense that he questions his very presence. In "To Benvenuta", poet Rilke is foreshadowing Sita's predicament on the island "Who, what was she?" She knows that her trajectory has taken her away from her duties as a householder. The life on the island is for Sita the antithesis of city, where only "food, sex and money matter" (WS 47). If one entails narcissitic self-indulgence, the other ^{involves} sacrifice and self-surrender. The return was an attempt to restore her sanity, to transcend her loss. The island has possessed her and yet the dialectic of her situation is only partially resolved for the island as such has been indifferent to her absence. It has not missed her. Even the inhabitants of the island reject her, have no need of her. Unlike her father, she is "plain" and "mad" and easily forgotten:

"The house is still there. The well is there. The coconut trees are there, and the cheekoo trees. What do we want her there for? After all, she - she is not like her father... Let her go. Who cares? We will only remember *him*, the father. How he lived, and his magic. The island is his, it is really his." "... Who is she to come here to live?" Jamila demanded. "Let her go" (WS 156-157).

A series of statements paradigmatic of Sita's rejection by the inhabitants, their assertion that they do not need her, makes her departure

from the island a necessary condition. Like the symbol of night in Rilke, Moses sees her presence as an intrusion, she is an unwelcome guest. One is left in no doubt that like Rilke, Sita too has instinctively sensed her rejection. But behind this rejection is a note of self-assurance. Her brief attempt to repair her "injured" self is revealed in her Cavafian "No". She is reminded of Cavafy's verse:

He who refuses does not repent. Should he be asked again, he would say No again. And yet that No - the right No - crushes him for the rest of his life.

She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative - a life un-lived, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great "No", but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written (WS 139).

Sita's "self-surrender" after a brief "No" is the only recourse left to her. Her "No", although futile and presumptuous, offers her injured self a fleeting satisfaction, a temporary relief. She has had the imaginative potential to live a life of vision. It corresponds with her need to be "inside". She has been able to hold on to this need with her courage to say "No":

... 'inseeing' into the possibilities, conditions and limitations of individual 'being' required, in some sense, a getting outside of them, a rising above them, the achievement of a kind of God's eye-view, a kind of angelic vision (Leishman, 1959: 29).

Anita Desai's Sita, makes a prodigious attempt to locate herself in a landscape of her past. Her escape to the island of Manori becomes more than an escape or a withdrawal. It is a process of recreation and reconciliation. It is an expression of her intensely private desire "to be inside". By letting herself into the island's very centre she fulfills her passion of "divine inseeing".

The island of Manori, the house, the lapping waves of the sea, the monsoon showers, all of them, an embodiment of the cosmic principle provide an inner space, a womanly space to Sita. And it is within this space that Sita's imaginary and remembered landscape converge into a deeper and a more positive, feminine landscape. Hopefully she would not only reconcile herself to the wandering ghost of her mother, but forgive the father and be able to relate to her daughter. She returns to the mainland to give birth to the baby.

The conclusion of the novel is not explosive or violent like most of Desai's other novels. What saves Sita from complete disintegration and a lapse into autism like Maya, is her children, her pregnancy and her own willingness to reconcile herself with life's vicissitudes:

She felt the long, straight, monotonous track of her life whip itself round her in swift circles, perhaps a spiral, whirling around and around till its very lines dissolved and turned to a blur of silver, the blurred silver of the mirror-like window-panes. All was bright, all was blurred, all was in a whirl. Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere (WS 154-155).

Unlike her legendary namesake, an important figure in the Ramayana, Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? chooses exile of her own accord. The legendary Sita too was pregnant at the time of her banishment from the kingdom of Ayodhya, by her husband Rama. The myth of Sita is an important ideal of Indian womanhood. She incorporated chastity and endurance, patience and purity, surrender and courage. It is said that she was born of the earth. Sita is brought back to the kingdom of Ayodhya after many years of exile in the forest. On her return she is asked to give a proof of her chastity once more, to which she revolts and prays to her mother, the earth, who gave her form and body, to open up and receive her unto her arms. The mother concedes and Sita merges into her. The metaphor of "the

earth as mother" is a dominant feature of Indian folklore and religious tradition. Although one sees no distinct parallels between the modern Sita and the legendary Sita, one does notice that Desai's Sita is a suggestive transversion of the mythical figure. Her exile is an attempt to restore herself. The return to the island is an expression of her desire for maternal embrace. In it she seeks not a complete harmonious return but the strength to envision a future. She returns to the mainland, not alone but with her husband and children.

It is true that Sita has once again gone back to the tedium of the mainland. For life, unlike her woman's body with its rises and falls, has "no periods, no stretches" (WS 155). In Raman she sees a brand of courage and cool^{ness} that she lacks herself. She becomes conscious of the anxieties he must have suffered from, while she was away:

... her, the unborn child, Menaka and Karan, living alone on the island in this wild season. His boys at home must have worried him too, while he was at work in the factory which was not without its problems either (WS 138).

Twenty years ago he had come to save her from the island and provided her the security of the mainland. In accepting his offer the second time Sita chooses not mere compromise nor reconciliation but an acceptance of her own limitations and constraints. It is what Rilke calls consentement. In his Introduction to Rilke's poetry Leishman describes consentement as:

an Umschlag, a turn, a peripeteia: the prevailing mood is no longer one of strain and tension and effort, but of acceptance, or - to use Rilke's favourite word - of consentement: now almost ecstatically joyful, now gravely tranquil, now sadly resigned (Leishman, 1959: 37).

A similar experience is echoed in Sita's return to the mainland. The centrifugal force of such a turn gives a humane touch to her spiritual aspirations. Her unearthly stance and her futile "no" are measured against her tired acceptance of her return to the grossness of the city. And since she is

not only a householder but an expectant mother, her feet cannot but be on the floor. Her eyes cannot remain inward, trapped in ^{the}enveloping darkness of her soul, but would have to extend their gaze unconditionally to her husband and children, hence the outside world. The trajectory is somewhat similar to that in Rilke who has pursued a similar course of consentement in his poem To Benvenuta: from straying to self-diffusion to self-surrender and at last to rest and warmth. Sita's choice of return too is to be read as a positive affirmation of her being, and it is her awareness of her limitations which would seemingly lead readers to an understanding of her former stance, her courage to utter the Cavafian "no"- however futile it might have been in the circumstances. Diffused and dissatisfied with that diffusion she had walked out and had tried to express it with her symbolic "no", to discover that not only is the unity achieved through such an experience intense but short, painful but illuminating. She would seek relief from it before it overtakes her and she loses herself on the way. Unlike Maya and Monisha she will "jump out" and transform herself into other centres - as a wife and a mother. Hence, she will acknowledge her role as a householder.

The "pilgrimage" to the island is one associated with consentement. It confirms the breach between the desire to refuse and the inability to do so. It confirms the difficulty of her situation. What Sita "could not inwardly accept" (WS 54) she would have to learn to live with, outwardly. There is a resignation in her consentement. It could be argued that as a pilgrim Sita has successfully ended her pilgrimage. She has paid her tribute to the neglected island. As in Rilke's "inseeing" she too has lived and created a centre for herself, she has moved into the island and made it her own. She must "jump out" of this centre before it imprisons her into a permanent stasis, reduces her to nothingness. Further, her return to the mainland puts an end to her role as a guest. As a married woman she cannot live in this maternal

refuge for ever. She must depart lest her presence becomes a burden, a threat, a concern. As suggested by Kakar:

... in Indian society,... a daughter is considered a "guest" in her natal family, treated with solicitous concern often accorded to a welcome outsider, who, all too soon, will marry and leave her mother for good (Kakar, 1978: 61).

Sita's unusual upbringing has problematized her relationship with her mother. Through the image of the island she strives to re-experience her un-lived encounter with the mother. Thus the separation from the island is as ambiguous as is the separation from the mother. Sita's pregnancy had inspired her to seek the assurance of the island. This move could be correlated to the daughter's return to her mother's house at the time of her confinement which is rather common in an Indian household. As suggested by Kakar:

Thus, in many parts of India, the expectant mother goes back to stay at her own mother's house a few months before the delivery. This stay helps her to strengthen her identification with her mother, a prerequisite for her own capacity for motherhood (Kakar, 1978: 77).

But Sita's confinement has to be cut short, for the island will not be able to fulfil the function of the caring mother, it is merely an emblem of such a caring. It does little to support her convictions.

She is now being led home, to the nest where she would have to play host to the rest of the family. The house in the mainland and the life of duties is not solitary, it is what she shares with her husband, Raman. Only her inner world continues to be the world of a stranger, it is the world where she cannot insert anyone. The island alone has been a site of this inward yearning. And here too she cannot rest forever. She must return, she must accept, or be prepared for rejection, for desertion and disapproval. She cannot transgress the privileges of a guest-daughter, who is also an outsider.

Rilke's voice echoes a similar development in the concluding lines of To
Benvenuta:

Can I feel already through this dreary
track the current your warm heart outpours?
Only some few hours, and then my weary
hands shall tenderly be laid in yours.
Ah, how long their rest's been overdue!
Can you feel how, years now, an unsharing
stranger among strangers I've been faring,
and at last am being led home by you (Rilke, in
Leishman, 1959: 180)?

Chapter Eleven

Fire on the Mountain: A landscape of refusal

Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life - as she realized on her first day at Carignano, with a great, cool flowering of relief - and at last she had it. She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction (FM 3).

In her book About Chinese Women, Kristeva argues that women:

... cannot gain access to the temporal scene, i.e. to political affairs, except by identifying with the values considered to be masculine... we have been able to serve or overthrow the socio-historic order by playing supermen. A few enjoy it... Others, more bound to their mothers, more tuned in as well to their unconscious impulses, refuse this role and hold themselves back, sullen, neither speaking nor writing, in a permanent state of expectation punctuated now and then by some kind of outburst: a cry, a refusal, an "hysterical symptom" (Kristeva, 1977: 37).

As we look at the women in Desai's fiction we find an interesting development in their response to the temporal order. Maya "refuses" the temporal order; although at a symptomatic level Maya voices her story by writing it down, her murder of Gautama is at the extreme of outburst and refusal, which proves self-destructive. Monisha's suicide in Voices in the City is similar. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer?, is another example of a woman bound to the lost mother; her flight from the mainland and her desire not to give birth signify her refusal of the temporal order. Her "no" proves to be futile \ in the face of the forces she is fighting against. For it is in the nature of the child to be born once it is ready. At the end of the story Sita becomes aware of the futility of her desire not to give birth, but she lives with the consolation, a consolation of having at least tried the no, the big "No". Sita chooses to go back to society and the birth of her

child and her role of a householder. It could well be argued that for Sita, a mother and a wife, it is not possible to "refuse" and to hold herself away permanently for her responsibility to the household binds her. She has no choice but to return to the world of duties and obligations.

As a chronological development of the woman who refuses and perishes followed by the one who refuses and returns, the figure of Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain can be seen as the one who refuses society in her old age, after her responsibilities are over and duties fulfilled.

Does she belong to the third category of woman whom Kristeva describes, who neither enjoys nor sulks, neither identifies nor punctuates her "state of expectation" by sudden outbursts? As we follow from the two extremes posited by Kristeva (note the quote on the first page of this chapter), she is the woman who rejects conformity having once experienced it. She has no wish to join the temporal order. Instead she escapes by refusal:

To refuse both these extremes. To know that an ostensibly masculine, paternal (because supportive of time and symbol) identification is necessary in order to have some voice in the record of politics and history... to act first with all those who "swim against the tide", all those who refuse - all the rebels against the existing relations of production and reproduction. But neither to take the role of revolutionary (male or female): to refuse all roles, in order, on the contrary, to summon this timeless "truth" - formless, neither true nor false, echo of our *jouissance*, of our madness, of our pregnancies - into the order of speech and social symbolism (Kristeva, 1977: 37-38).

Is Nanda Kaul, then, a third type of woman or simply a development of the other two? I shall argue that Desai examines "women's time" (Kristeva, in Moi, 1986: 188) within a traditional framework of gender roles that can be seen to cut across cultures and in the process displays a different form of refusal in Nanda Kaul. Although striking similarities are visible between Nanda Kaul and her predecessors and together with them she seeks a kinship with landscape, one is left in no doubt that she fulfilled her role of a householder with a sense of duty.

Published in 1977, Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain "grew out of one particular bit of soil and no other". Desai writes that for her the landscape of Kasauli had "the substance of both dream and nightmare" (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 105). As a child she had wandered up and down the rocky hillsides making new discoveries by herself. In this novel Desai explores her childhood visit to the land of Kasauli and "childhood being the country that exists in time, not space" (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 106), she filled the "empty landscape" with insects and birds and grasses. The writing of Fire on the Mountain has been an intensely exploratory process, a mosaic of memory and imagination, observation and reflection.

With varying emphases, it could be argued that this novel is not simply "her story", the story of one woman struggling to cope with her dreams and fears. It is an attempt to give voice to that long muted silence which has been a hallmark of Indian womanhood under patriarchy. For not only do we hear the sad and quiet voice of Nanda Kaul but the cool and indifferent voice of girl-child Raka, and the voice of Ila Das which is like "a cackle of an agitated parrot" (FM 111) serve as a connecting link with the spitting and crackling of the fire in the landscape of Kasauli.

Desai addresses the nature of "refusal" and inscribes it with a craving for a sense of place in Indian women. Kristeva,^{too,} argues in favour of woman's refusal and sees it as a genuine reflection of woman's dissatisfaction:

... by calling attention all times to whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, disturbing to the *status quo* (Kristeva, 1977: 38).

Desai's women are shown in search of a landscape that would accommodate their need for "refusal" of the patrilineal society. Kasauli fills this void in Nanda Kaul and later in Raka's life. The garden, the house, the city and the island existed as emblems of escape and refusal in the earlier

novels. Nanda Kaul retreats a step further. Whilst the previous landscapes were rooted to the ground, the concrete, and the escape was a temporary relief to the women, this time Desai's central protagonist has made a decisive permanent departure from the solidity and clutter of . . . social life. Not only is the woman "outside time" but by choosing to live at Carignano "she is outside the city". Cixous asserts "the city is man, ruled by masculine law" (Cixous, 1981: 49), and there Nanda Kaul has been unrecognized, unloved. Life in the city, we are led to believe, life with the husband and her children "was alien to her nature" (FM 145). Being outside time in a man's world, Desai's women assert a need for a "women's time". For Nanda Kaul it is realized in old age. What ensues in the process is supposedly a play of opposing emotions, of moral and material conflicts and of human limitations. Carignano on the mountain top is set off as a contrast against the full and busy life that Nanda Kaul lived as a Vice Chancellor's wife in Chandigarh:

The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her (FM 29).

Between her and the old, full house there existed only one bond, that of duty, responsibility. It did not become her as she always saw it as "his house, never hers" (FM 18). Its "fluctuating and unpredictable excess" had stifled her. "She had suffered from the nimiety, the disorder" (FM 30) of the plains, and could avoid it only at a very late stage in her life. She abandons herself to landscape. As we assess her need we see in her a sense of ennui and a disappointment in her life as a householder. To the outside world she was an object of envy, "always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining-room, entertaining his guests" (FM 18), whilst what she wished for was just to be herself. As a "Vice-Chancellor's wife" she is a woman whose function within "a feminine subject position" is that of duty and subservience.

Nanda Kaul is unhappy in that role. Desai's deviant women challenge the "prevailing assumption that motherhood and child-rearing bring women 'natural' self-fulfilment" (Weedon, 1989: 130).

Woman as mother is assumed to acquire a specific status in society. Mothering becomes an arena for woman wherein she is able to realize herself. It gives her a status and a value. By acknowledging the boredom and tedium of marital and maternal life women like Nanda Kaul and Sita are going against the current. They question what tradition decrees. They do not revel in motherhood. Their maternal concerns have oppressively overshadowed their personal concerns. For Sita it was not easy to shed all responsibilities towards the family as she was still young and so were the children. In her old age Nanda Kaul escapes beyond maternity, and the landscape reflects this:

What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness. This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course - its starkness. It had rocks, it had pines. It had light and air. In every direction there was a sweeping view - to the north, of the mountains, to the south, of the plains. Occasionally an eagle swam through this clear unobstructed mass of light and air. That was all (FM 4).

Here is the landscape providing both a prospect and a refuge. The barrenness is, by contrast, an expression of the fulfilment that can come to Nanda Kaul not in her husband's full house but in the land of Kasauli. The house in the city had provided neither joy nor respite. Despite its "excess" it lacked an essential harmony. It failed to provide a sense of ease. The view from Kasauli is so enriching that it compensates for its starkness. In fact it holds a certain appeal for a woman wishing to lull the city clamour and disorder. For in escaping from the city not only is she trying to escape from the demands of the patriarchal system but also her own past. The view from Kasauli invites no closure as the garden in Maya's life nor does it stand enclosed and remote and distant from the world as the island in Where Shall

We Go This Summer?. The sweeping view from Carignano, both of the mountains and the plains, is symbolic of the spiritual and earthly transcendence that Nanda Kaul wishes to attain. It also functions as the meeting-ground between the mountains and the plains. It gives her the space to contemplate and assess the nature of her existence. On the surface, Kasauli is stark. Yet, it is the place she can call her own. At a manifest level it could be argued that Nanda Kaul's retreat to the mountains is a significant gesture to protect herself. To protect and restore that which is her own is her only concern in the landscape of Kasauli. Thus we see there is more than retirement in her escape. A prospect of freedom and that of renunciation. Barren and stark, on the one hand she is seeking to be desireless. Having fulfilled her role as a householder she is on her way to vanaprastha. On the other^{hand}, her renunciation of the world is marked with profound disillusionment and unhappiness.

The landscape of Kasauli functions within unrestricted paradigms. It suggests a desire to return to the mother's womb by rejecting the temporal, phallic order. For very much like the foetus in isolation who lives and cannot be commanded but can only command and yet is helplessly dependent on its mother, Nanda Kaul seeks to enclose and shut herself off into the world which neither demands nor promises. Alone (except for the servant Ram Lal - who is equally an outcast by virtue of age and his position as a servant), Nanda Kaul wishes to become like the child in the womb that neither owes nor fulfils. It alone surveys the prospect within. To Nanda Kaul however the prospect is not without memories nor regrets. From the sweeping hills she is also seeking an inner calm and tranquil. In this respect it is important to point out that she succeeds only partially and is miserable.

This brings me to a more detailed analysis of the predicament wherein I wish to argue that the landscape of Kasauli has a double function.

It serves an ambiguous function as a landscape of refusal. Nanda Kaul's retreat to the mountains is symptomatic of her desire to be a sanyasi, a recluse. Through sanyas she wishes to attain the possibility of liberation. She sees a threat to her present calm and stillness, in a series of "bags and letters, messages and demands, requests, promises and queries" (FM 3). "To be a tree, no more and no less", tall and thin, the desire to merge with the pine tree is symptomatic of an inner desire to be stripped of all human identity. (The relevance of this desire is later put into question by Desai.) Nanda Kaul seeks to emulate the spirit of the soaring eagle "in repose, in control" (FM 10) of all that she surveys. Amidst all the calm the news of her great granddaughter's possible arrival is "an unwelcome intrusion" (FM 3). Unwilled and uncalled for, it becomes a threat, a warning: "Discharge me, she groaned. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge" (FM 30). The very word discharge echoes like an anguished refrain all through the novel. It repeats itself. It also carries the meaning of refuse as detritus - sickness, as if something is morbidly wrong with the body. To be discharged, that is to be released, is a necessary corollary to the feminine body which "with its periods and stretches" (as in Where Shall We Go This Summer?) seeks release. The woman asks for complete release once actual and metaphorical menopause sets in. It is in epicurean terms atarexea, a state of "untroubledness", an absolute tranquillity, a release from the pains of the mind that a woman like Nanda Kaul is aspiring for. To be discharged signifies desire for Moksa. In the Indian context it does not remain a sickness; rather it is a release and is the highest of Hindu ideals.

Kasauli as a landscape of refusal is a land of the dispossessed. The history of Carignano completes the image of refusal. For in it had lived a string of cynical, lonely English maiden ladies, who either died or were shipped back to England in 1947, soon after India's Independence with

"virginity intact, honour saved, natives kept at bay" (FM 9). Before Independence it had been a refuge for the English women and after Independence it becomes a refuge for the Indian, Nanda Kaul.

As a land of the dispossessed Kasauli, and especially Carignano, becomes a home of the sullen and the dissatisfied, the rejected and the unhappy, the deviant and the hysteric. Its austerity is its charm and its remote location is both a promise and a threat. We see then a fusion of the landscape as a refuse of women and a refuge for women. Carignano is therefore a home to the woman who refuses and of the one who is refused. It is indeed a landscape of refusal. On this site Nanda Kaul and Raka encounter their "natural" selves. It not only exists as an idyll, but is a composite of the beautiful and sublime and absorbs the dirt and the waste of the hills. In its open-ended closure it faces the danger of natural as well as social forces.

Furthermore, as we look at the nature of refusal in Desai's women what strikes us is that conscious of their victimhood, their sense of abjection, and the desire to respond to the need for self-authenticity they choose the landscape as a principal mediating construct. Desai places them within a specific landscape and it is through this specificity that the predicament of the woman's time is structured. They search in landscape a communion which the social world has failed to offer.

From the very beginning of the novel we are made aware of Nanda Kaul's rejection of the world of demands and requests. She is tired of it all. She fears the violation of her privacy in Raka. For Nanda Kaul "this privacy achieved only at the end of her life..." (FM 36) is of great value and she dreads the loss it. The thought of "having a relation, a dependent" (FM 35), is unnerving to her. In the narrator's words, "The amount she had jettisoned away from her life might take another's breath away" (FM 32). As a mother and a wife she had no self of her own, every thought, every action of

hers was centred and occupied by those who lived with her. She had neither time nor space to nourish her interests. She had no private self. It should be stressed that at Carignano, prior to the arrival of Raka, Nanda Kaul is seeking a degree of self-possession. However I wish to argue that solitude is for Nanda Kaul a state of compulsion rather than of choice.

Desai explores the relationship between Nanda Kaul and Raka, as a central concern in the novel. In *Nanda Kaul* we encounter abjection. In the words of Kristeva "The abject would thus be the "object" of primal repression" (Kristeva, 1982: 12). This primal repression is the inability of the individual "to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic" (Kristeva, 1982: 12). This leads us to the beginning of the argument wherein I had tried to see Nanda Kaul as a progression of the other two women in earlier novels, Maya and Sita. Unable to enjoy her place within the "symbolic", the world of masculine order (for she stands here betrayed by her husband's infidelity and her children's alien nature) Nanda Kaul's exclusion, her refusal, is punctuated by Raka's arrival on the scene.

It is through Nanda Kaul and Raka that Desai seems to be spinning the vital fabric of the novel. What happens when one abject confronts another? A struggle ensues. A close combat results in the pursuit of the one and the flight of the other. Each is repeatedly wounded in the symbolic realm and is equally conscious of her rejection. (The unfaithful husband, the image of the drunken father beating Raka's mother, the rape and murder of Ila Das, the issue of marriage of Preet Singh's seven year old daughter to an aged widower are moments that reinforce women's abjection.) These are the images of the masculine order, intensely physical and brutal signs of violation that exist in the society either in the name of tradition or as a result of women's silence where speech is deemed contrary to their nature.

We now begin to question the moment of truth in the life of Nanda Kaul. She had no wish "to be drawn into a child's world again - real or imaginary, it was bound to betray" (FM 45). What she was unprepared for is the child's total rejection of her adult world. The girl-child has made herself a complete recluse which to Nanda Kaul is a prodigious feat:

She was the only child Nanda Kaul had ever known who preferred to stand apart and go off and disappear to being loved, cared for and made the centre of attention. The children Nanda Kaul had known had wanted only to be such centres: Raka alone did not (FM 79-80).

Raka has no wish to confine herself into the centre of the adult world. This centre, which had appealed to other children, for it appeased and gratified them, is of no significance to her. Here is a child who seeks neither attention nor gratification. Here is a child who prefers "to stand apart", to be distant and to disappear. Raka's abjection is viewed by Nanda Kaul with mixed feelings of awe and wonder. She sees it from a distance and wishes to be drawn into it. It is "quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, 1982: 1). It makes no demands. It holds itself aloof. Nanda Kaul makes desperate attempts to involve the child in her conversations, her fantasies, but fails. The child's sudden disappearances intrigue her. Her absence as much as her arrival is disquieting. "Raka's genius. Raka's daemon. It disturbed" (FM 64). It makes the abject seek another object. For one "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 1982: 4) in the other. The building of the world of the fantastic is some such endeavour on the part of Nanda Kaul to draw her in, not to let her go, nor to let her slip away:

It was as if Raka's indifference was a goad, a challenge to her - the elusive ship, the golden catch (FM 98-99).

The encounter is full of gaps. It is a radical dismissal. Raka's silent disapproval signifies the ascetic refusal. I shall argue that ^{the} abject, in this case Raka:

lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rule of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out (Kristeva, 1982: 2).

The situation could indeed be reversed in this combat of refusal. For Raka is as much a threat to Nanda Kaul as Nanda Kaul to her. Her Nani's world of fantasies is as painful a distraction as her mother's world of nursing homes and mysterious illness.

But Nanda Kaul has no recourse to the inner world of Raka. She is unable to conceive what is going on inside her. Raka's bare exchanges with her do not provide her ^{with} any clues to the nature ... of her external and internal wanderings. She is whole and cannot be probed nor explored. She cannot and will not be seduced. And this is precisely what:

... beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, (in this case another abject) which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced (Kristeva, 1982: 1).

It is Raka's indifference, her complete independence which attracts her, which she desires for herself. With someone like Raka she begins to feel a deep although mistaken affinity and has no wish to see her go. She offers herself to Raka much to her own surprise but receives no assurance. To Nanda Kaul, Raka is her desired mirrored self. In her she sees an authentic image of her desired self. She has had many children and grandchildren, but only in Raka does she see a reflection of what she would have loved to be:

You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me,
Raka (FM 64).

This is more a moment of confession than an acknowledgement. Although Nanda Kaul sees Raka as her lost self she does not receive any such confirmation from Raka. Raka neither acts nor confirms the self-image. Raka holds herself aloof. In the midst of her present calm and previous

disappointments, there is the "natural, instinctive and effortless" rejection of herself by the child which shatters and shocks and silently mocks the "planned and wilful rejection of the child" by Nanda Kaul. The success of the one reveals the ensuing failure of the other. It is interesting that it is Nanda Kaul and not Raka who identifies herself with the other. It is the girl-child who becomes the role-model for the older woman, a moment of self-analysis and revelation. Most significant is the attempt made by Nanda Kaul to re-enter the world of the girl-child Raka. We know that something deeply moving is happening to Nanda Kaul. First, she wished to refuse. Then she understands in her refusal a crucial rejection of herself. She is seeking an assurance, a comforting feeling. She wants to be loved and to love. She is a woman who wishes to exchange love for love. And it is the love of the abject that she desires. She is a woman who wants neither to be left alone, nor to be rejected. Her husband's adulterous affair with the mathematics lecturer, her children's selfish demands, her busy life as a Vice Chancellor's wife, nothing at all has been able to ruffle her as deeply as Raka's rejection of her. For it is much more than rejection. It is an "imagined" recognition of herself in Raka that climaxes her quest for love, for assurance and for acceptance. She sees herself neither in society nor in family for she is much too much of an individual but in the spirit of Raka she witnesses a mystical fervour that is desirable and enchanting, enlightening and satisfying. In the child's seemingly natural refusal she reads the failure of her forced refusal. It is the conclusion of the novel that brings about the final failure. However falsely, Nanda Kaul believed she had finally defined herself; this assurance is shaken by the death of Ila Das and by Raka, the imagined soul mate, who throughout the journey had refused to enter the imaginary world of Nanda Kaul. This is what she cannot take, accept, and live with. It is this refusal which brings the final collapse.

Nanda Kaul had retreated to the mountains, away from the demands of the flesh and faces, not only seeking retirement but also a life of contemplation. She had hoped to ascend and soar above human attachments and obligations. She was convinced she had nothing to do with the world of requests and queries. She wanted to be free from bondage. Carignano's remoteness, its sparsity, its stillness and calm were the very features that made it convincing as a landscape of refusal:

Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing (FM 17)?

Is this what Nanda Kaul wishes for herself? Does this explain her need for renunciation? Is her renunciation an act of volition? Desai seems to be questioning this in the novel. One is made aware of the truth that left with nothing Nanda Kaul does not wish to live. She cannot live. Raka's arrival forces upon her the recognition of her own delusion. It is not a life left with nothing that she wishes to be in. The story of Nanda Kaul's refusal, is seemingly, marked with a "state of expectation" (Kristeva, 1977: 37). It becomes a sharp contrast to her previous indifferent self. One is made to understand that her refusal is both a voicing of her rejection by the symbolic and the unwillingness to identify with it. Therefore she is a structural progression from Desai's earlier women protagonists, Maya and Sita.

What seems so intriguing is not the forced exile of Nanda Kaul but a restless spirit of adventure that has made Raka a recluse. And it is in her that novel becomes a subtle discourse of women's disaffection. It demands to be read differently. It conveys its essential meaning:

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice - she was born to it, simply (FM 48).

The above ensemble sets in motion the nature of Raka's abjection. Although she has not been through a "long route of rejection and sacrifice", unlike her great grandmother, she has nevertheless been a witness to ^{the} "rejection" of her mother by the drunken father. In her short life Raka has experienced and rejected what Nanda Kaul took a life time to understand and reject. Nanda Kaul's renunciation which turns out to be a "forced refusal" is significantly determined by her past. Raka too decides not to be. Her rejection of the two extremes posited by Kristeva is a step towards recognition of the self as an independent, solitary body with the "gift of avoiding what she regarded as dispensable" (FM 53). In a sense she is more powerful, more courageous than any of Desai's adult women. For in her one witnesses a woman who "refuses all roles". Although this refusal has its ground in her childhood experiences with the social order. This refusal is not without disillusion. It is rooted in her inability not only to identify with the adult world but also to "socialize" with the children of her age. Her "long illness" acquitted her of any need to do so (FM 64).

Raka has achieved that instinctive communion with the landscape which Nanda Kaul had dared to reach in her old age, after the death of her husband. Raka, the child is free, if only temporarily, from the world "of school, of hostels, of discipline, order and obedience" (FM 59). Having left it behind she feels no discomfort. She is very much at ease with herself. A natural recluse and yet a conscious refusal. Girl-child Raka's resistance to the adult world is symptomatic of the lack of trust that her own experiences inculcated in her. It is not a "normal" rejection but as suggested by Rao "Desai's indictment is not against Raka, but against the adult-world which has made her so" (Rao, 1990: 7).

Raka's refusal is set as a contrast to Nanda Kaul's refusal. She too, I wish to suggest, is an abject. For there is in her a wish neither to be

involved nor to be included. She too has a "sense of the abject" (Kristeva, 1982: 6). She too has been exiled from the city, like her great-grandmother. She has faced it in her father's attempts "to bring her out of her shell". In her mother's "squelching and quivering" and "crying", she has developed a nausea, a disgust for the temporal. The past is what she is constantly hoping to forget, like Nanda Kaul. But it throws its shadows and Raka too shivers at the sight of it. Her visit to the club is one such opening of the wounds. The sight of the cantonment revelry brings back the pain:

Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse - harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept (FM 71-72).

The abject is born amidst violence and sobs. The visit to the club and the sight of the "caged, clawed, tailed, headless male and female monsters" (FM 71), reminds Raka of what she has thrust aside, by being outside the city, thus from her memory. But she knows she cannot protect herself for very long. Petrified she runs away from the club. "*Hate them - hate them...*" she sobs, as she clumsily breaks away from the scene. This brief but significant moment of fear, of anguish, is a key to Raka's abjection. Seemingly it is a logical step towards refusal to be.

Raka's love of solitude becomes an expression of her attempt to *achieve* self-possession. And this she has been able to receive in Carignano:

Carignano had much to offer - yes, she admitted that readily, nodding her head like a berry - it was the best of places she'd lived in ever. Yet it had in its orderly austerity something she found confining, restricting. It was as dry and clean as a nut but she burst forth from its shell like an impatient kernel, small and explosive (FM 91).

It is not clear what she finds confining or restricting, the austerity of the house or that of her great-grandmother. If it is the adult world that is likely to be a threat to her freedom, then she knows:

She would have to break out into freedom again. She could not bear to be confined to the old lady's fantasy world when the reality outside appealed so strongly (FM 100).

If, socially the place has had nothing to offer it has given her immense psychological and spiritual satisfaction, freedom of movement and thought. Raka had lacked "the necessary pass, the key" to the world of "clubs and parks of the cities" (FM 90-91). The imagery of the nut bursting forth from its shell reveals her true inner self which can neither be compressed nor confined for long. Desai has presented the ambivalent nature of attachment and detachment that constitutes Raka's mental framework. She is a representative figure in the text because of her cool detachment from the social world and her passionate love of the natural world.

It is the "ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli" (FM 91) that stir her imagination. It seemingly offers release from social formations that are inextricably linked with patriarchal structures. Raka is conscious of the demands made by the social world, and in contrast through the landscape of Kasauli [which is of course a constructed notion] seeks to free herself:

... she ignored that great hot plain below. Her eye was on the heart of the agaves, that central dagger guarded by a ring of curved spikes, on the contortions of the charred pine trunks and the paralysed attitudes of the rocks (FM 48).

While Carignano has been a house of the dispossessed, Kasauli too is a landscape of refusal with its curved and contorted, charred and paralysed symbols of survival. Raka is drawn "to the kilns and agaves and refuse of the ravine" (FM 48). It is, one might say, an abject's identification with the landscape that is so fascinating and therefore does not leave her as an abject. It is Raka's "jealous, guarded instincts of an explorer, a discoverer",

that distinguish her from her great-grandmother. Striking parallels are visible between Raka's natural curiosity and Nanda Kaul's human curiosity, Raka's abject interest of the outside world and Nanda Kaul's abject interest of the inner world of Raka. One is directed towards the natural refuse and the other to the solitary refuse. (For we must not forget the letter written to her by her daughter.):

'But there is one problem I can't help Tara with... and the problem is, of course, Raka... and Tara thought I could take Raka with me. But that is quite out of the question. Poor little Raka looks like a ghost and hasn't quite got over her typhoid yet. She is very weak and the heat and humidity of Bombay will do her no good... We can't think of a better way for her to recuperate than spend a quiet summer with you in Kasauli' (FM 15-16).

Raka's sickness has not only weakened her physically but also made her unfit for the city. She comes to recuperate, to recover. Recovery for the refused comes in her love of refuse. Kasauli with its dirt and refuse yields more to her imagination than the "great hot plain below":

The refuse that the folds of the gorge held and slowly ate and digested was of interest too. There were splotches of blood, there were yellow stains oozing through paper, there were bones and the mealy ashes of bones. Tins of Tulip ham and Kissan jam. Broken china, burnt kettles, rubber tyres and bent wheels (FM 48).

Here is a Kasauli not simply as a refuge but also the dumping ground. The figure of Raka rummages about the rubbish heap. Its uncompromising expanse induces both terror and admiration. It invites, it confuses, it baffles and excites her. It is in the landscape of refusal that she can be herself, an adventurer and a recluse. Moreover, an ingenuous assimilation of the beautiful and the waste transforms the place in the eyes of Raka. Raka is conscious of her state and fits in very well with her new surroundings:

I'm shipwrecked, Raka exulted, I'm shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock - my boat, alone in my boat on the sea, she sang (FM 61-62).

Equally deep is the autochthony, that is, the feeling of belonging to the place. And between her and landscape none should intrude. She dislikes being watched, probed, questioned. She is parsimonious, unwilling to disclose: "she hated her great-grandmother intently watching her ascent (FM 61). She sees it as an intrusion. Raka is, indeed, the "Newly Born Woman" (Cixous, 1986: x), a woman whose craft lies in being "selective" about people, places and listening. A woman who knows^{how} to avoid. A woman who resists. Seemingly it is in the landscape of Kasauli she has discovered her new-found freedom. An only child, a victim of parental negligence, she finds in the wild, uncompromising, and lawless landscape of Kasauli an immense affiliation and a source of inspiration. It enables her to reach herself. And this is where landscape seems to be playing a contingent role in the lives of Nanda Kaul and Raka.

It is not surprising that somebody as young as Raka is seeking in the landscape what the outside world, that is, the material world has denied not only to her but also to Nanda Kaul. Nor do we need to marvel at Nanda Kaul's desire to get to know, to be close to Raka. For in Raka she sees the courage and the spirit to be. Like her, Raka too wishes to be left alone and undisturbed. "Stop learning in school that women are created to listen, to believe, to make no discoveries" (Cixous, 1981: 50-51). It seems Raka has grasped the significance of this message and the landscape alone is her confidante and instructor. She identifies with the landscape of the refuge and in this process does not experience a "loss of self", but she becomes, she inhabits, she enters. "The safe, cosy, civilized world", of the plains, of the city, is like a prison to her "to which she owed no attachment" (FM 91). It is alien to her nature. She yields to Kasauli not only because of its charm but also its indifference. The landscape of Kasauli supports her desire to be: undisturbed, unquestioned, unnoticed. It offers Raka a space to be her self:

In abjection, revolt is completely within being... Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores, or seduces the symbolic but does not produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture (Kristeva, 1982: 45).

Raka is an abject who manages to challenge the symbolic. She does not let herself be seduced nor is her rebellion "completely within", although the world sees her as the "crazy one from Carignano" (FM 91). She transcends the realm of the abject and that of the hysteric by "a radical overstepping". She fuses these codes into one by a radical split. An ambiguous return. "Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani - look - the forest is on fire" (FM 145). The request and the tapping and the whispering of the girl-child Raka, and the command to "look", marks her as an iconoclast and a mystic who has not only disrupted the prevailing order but by being able to foresee the necessity of her action, her vision, has managed to affect the centre. She is the imago mundi, who between heaven and the earth and also perhaps between the imaginary and the symbolic has created a new cosmos, a new abode for women.

"Small and explosive", Raka carries the weight of the text, its essential philosophy on her fragile shoulders. Her setting the forest on fire is a gesture of defiance and a significant refusal of the existing order. The fire serves a purificatory function. It not only cleanses and purifies but is a vital move towards liberation, that is, the truth. Desai explains the gesture with:

Don't you see it is because she is the only absolutely pure character amongst all the others and she doesn't want to have anything to do with all the lies and illusions in which the other characters are living. In setting a fire, she is really burning up all these illusions and all their fantasies and reducing them all to just a flake of ash, which is the truth (Seguet, 1988: 44).

Finally, one reads in her gesture an appeal to the disinherited Nanda Kaul. Raka was indifferent to her but this indifference was shrouded in a deeper understanding of the refused and rejected Nanda Kaul.

Here it would be interesting to point out how the world process, the samsara, is thought of as feminine in India:

In the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad two paths are described, one the "way of the gods", also known as the "way of the sun", and the other the "way of the fathers", which is also called the "way of the smoke" or the "way of the moon".

It is the woman who is considered to be the *adhara* i.e. the support, as opposed to *adheya*, meaning that which is to be supported i.e. the masculine principle.

The way of the sun is the way of moksa, whereas the way of the smoke, or the moon, is the path of samsara. This samsara takes man back into the womb of the mother, whereas moksa delivers him from the cycle of rebirth... feminine figure as she has been depicted in Indian art is the visual representation of the way of smoke into which all those who are to be reborn are to enter (Sahi, 1980: 113).

Raka, the moon child, becomes a symbolic threat to the masculine principle for she has paved the way for "smoke", by setting the forest on fire. It is also her refusal to compromise. And seemingly might bring with it greater disruption and destruction of the existing natural order and calm. Refusal entails a price. Landscape has to pay this price just as Ila Das was forced to do by the patriarchal system. Raka with her practical and visionary insight has recognized and acknowledged the necessity to respond to and then to reject the existing order:

Down in the ravine, the flames spat and crackled around the dry wood and through the dry grass, and black smoke spiralled up over the mountain (FM 146).

There is something new and significant about her gesture. It illuminates and questions the necessity for a woman's time. It is a significant challenge to the surviving order. Visible in her gesture is the silent reproof that there is no moksa for the other. The path of salvation has been closed for a while and re-entering the samsara is nothing but her punishment, her defiance of the other. It becomes in creating a woman's time a universal protest against the repressive folds of patriarchy. As a particular sign of refusal it is Raka's attempt to be restated as a Newly Born Woman.

From the refusal of Nanda Kaul and Raka we now move on to the rejection of Ila Das:

Then a strange, unexpected figure made a silent entry - she looked like the wisp of a ghost, unsubstantial and grey. I had to hold my breath and concentrate very hard in order to make out her features and proportions... I had not thought of her for some twenty-five years but now her ghost had arisen and was slowly climbing the hillside towards me. I found I could no longer run out of the house and that the laughter had died in my throat. I would have to write her story. I had not known that it was her story I was going to write when I set myself to write about Kasauli, but I realised that it was she who embodied the spirit of the place (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 106).

Clearly it is the figure of Ila Das that embodies not merely the spirit of the place but also that of the age. In Ila Das, Desai is attacking the colonialist structure which lacking in insight and imagination, perpetuated women's dependency by denying them any access to change or history. A woman like Ila Das continued to live in a world that refused to "see", whilst the society itself was undergoing radical changes under the British Raj. What Ila Das represents is the state of the privileged upper-class women:

'Isn't it absurd,' she rattled on, 'how helpless our upbringing made us, Nanda. We thought we were being equipped with the very best - French lessons, piano lessons, English governesses - my, all that only to find it left us helpless, positively handicapped' (FM 127).

The above ensemble evokes a repression of sorts. Being "equipped" with nothing of value, of use - she is made into refuse. There is more than regret in her voice. It displays her rage against a cocoon like existence. In a distinctively questioning mode Desai's women offer us a critique of society. Their privileged position within the colonial infrastructure has failed to ascribe any positive feature to their post-colonial existence. Ila Das' upbringing has become a barrier to her; incompatible with the requirements of everyday life it has alienated her from her own people. Despite repeated efforts she is unwelcome, she cannot enter their world:

'Now if I were one of the peasants in my village, perhaps I'd manage quite well. Grow a pumpkin vine, keep a goat, pick up kindling in the forest for fire - and perhaps I could cut down those thirty rupees I need to twenty-five, to twenty - but not, I think, less' (FM 127).

A point is being made here, rather explicitly, about the state of her existence. Ila Das is conscious of her refused status but unaware of her misfortune, a misfortune that would befall her in the dark of the night. Whilst the life of Nanda Kaul, using Cixous' terminology, was "pushed to the point of choking", [where] nothing gets through" (Cixous, 1981: 49), for "she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing" (FM 145), the tragedy of Ila Das is more gruesome: "Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished. Now it was dark" (FM 143).

Pushed beyond choking, the woman welfare officer's voice is not only stifled permanently but her body too is violated and finished. She is laughed at as a hysteric and is later decapitated, silenced because the society sees her as a disparagement of the existing social order. The tightening of Preet Singh's fingers around her mouth is a moment of male assertion which forces her to gasp and finally chokes her to death. In a sense she is the "hysteric" of whom Cixous says:

They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body... the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance (Cixous, 1981: 49).

As a welfare officer Ila Das has been nothing but a nuisance in the eyes of orthodox men like the priest and Preet Singh. Her talk of change and social reform is seen as a threat to the old and oppressive, that is, the patriarchal order. She is the woman who disturbs by challenging and suggesting. She is the voice that disturbs, amuses, irritates, the voice of the body that men begin to fear therefore decide to kill. She is an utterance. She speaks and is disliked, made fun of, for doing so. Speech becomes a sign of refusal and men cannot take it, accept it and hold it. They can only silence it through violence and decapitation, rape and bloodshed.

At the end of the discussion what becomes evident to us is the ambiguity of the landscape in the lives of the three women. As one looks at the signified implications of the mountains in the novel, one discovers a series of representative symbols. Mountains not only signify a desire for uplift, but being close to the clouds become a pathway to Gods. That is why the rishis contemplate in the mountains. Pointing vertically they represent an ascending order. Just as the human body strives to purify the mind by focusing inwards and upwards, the mountain in its very stature, seems to invite a desire for transcendence. It becomes an intermediary between this and the other-world, that is, heaven and the earth.

The retreat to the mountains was a refuge to women who had been discarded as refuse. The hills which had blessed Raka and Nanda Kaul are the very hills which devour Ila Das providing neither sufficient sustenance nor security. Or is it the return to the valley that kills her? Perhaps, it is her inability to find a refuge in the mountains (which is what she wanted and Nanda Kaul thought of offering but decided against it) that forced her to retreat to the valley, that is the world of danger and filth. Also one cannot help thinking that by choosing to go to the mountains Nanda Kaul herself has made a bold decision. In its enclosure and isolation the house provides seclusion but can also attract the unruly. If Ila Das had been offered a refuge in Carignano she would have saved herself. The novel ends on a note of tragic uncertainty and disaster. Like the landscape it is set in, it offers no absolute answers. Therefore the paradox.

Chapter Twelve

Clear Light of Day: A landscape of affirmation.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past...

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered (Eliot, T.S.,
1971: 13, 16).

The essential theme of Clear Light of Day employs a set of images reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's Burnt Norton. The rose-garden in the poem, the rose-walk and the echo of birds and the childhood memories in Clear Light of Day constitute a striking parallel with the mood of the poem. It is a novel about time as much as a novel about place. As a significant progression from the story of Maya in Cry, The Peacock, it is a more positive assertion of the woman's ability to structure what Kristeva calls "women's time". In her conception of time Kristeva presents us with "the time of linear history" and "monumental time" (Kristeva, 1982a: 32). If linear time is confined to history, monumental time is recorded as "All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space". Time is conceived in ideological terms by Kristeva; monumental time is seen as less artificial and more organic than the linear time. As suggested by Toril Moi: "Kristeva's explicit aim is to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so as not to homogenize 'woman' (Moi, 1986: 187). Desai's fiction seems to point towards the necessity for "women's time". For she is not only engaged in the exploration of multiple female concerns, but is situating her women like

Bim and Tara within a particular cultural and historical context. These are women with a colonial past, living in urban surroundings. These are women who have not been refused access to linear time but have been situated within the folds of "linear temporality". As witness to India's partition and Independence this generation of Indian women has been confronted with a series of questions regarding their position in a "sociosymbolic contract". In her quest for self-identity within the sociosymbolic contract Bim challenges the existing order. This leads us to the argument in Kristeva wherein she proposes that cyclical and monumental "temporality renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish" (Kristeva, 1982a: 35). India's struggle for Independence followed by the political division of the country in the name of religion in 1947 had grave social, economic and psychological implications. The novel demonstrates this rupture and anguish by focusing on the lives of a particular group of people living in an old part of Delhi. It is an attempt to relate the atmosphere of the place before and after Independence. The event is marked by rapid changes in the outside world and the changes within the confines of the house. The summer of 1947 was marked with Raja's illness at home and the country's partition outside. It marks the beginning of Bim's responsibility towards others and Aunt Mira's strange bent towards alcoholism. It is also the year that marks Tara's escape from the drudgery of the old Delhi house and the death of her father. It marks Bim's development as a new woman. Indeed, the socio-political changes within the country have a strong bearing on the personal history of these characters.

There are multiple conceptions of time in Clear Light of Day. Time is what one steps into, it surrounds the characters. Time is not an independent module but always a self-reflexion. It is the way one structures action. It is neither purely linear nor monumental. Time is marked off in relation to memory and interpretation. And the idea of "woman" is manifest

in time. We encounter a subjective reconstruction of time past and present in the lives of Mira-masi, Tara and Bim. It is through the lives of these women that time is identified as a meaningful entity in the novel. Female subjectivity which is equally a product of history and human condition, with its features of "regularity and unison", "repetition and eternity" (Kristeva, 1982a: 34), assumes a specific role in all cultures.

As a new woman Bim chooses to redefine her position in society. As we compare Bim to some of the earlier female figures in Desai's fiction we witness a shift in perspective. From the women who sulked and sighed for recognition and love, for example, Maya and Sita, housewife Nanda Kaul who detested her life that had been wasted on an infidel husband and demanding children, childless and unhappy Monisha, shadows of Sita's run-away mother, Raka's weak and ailing mother, Bim and Tara's mother - all these female figures evoke elaborate images of disquiet and of female repression and servitude. Some of them are so deeply entrenched in the traditional value system that they fail to question the relevance of its assertion or their own expectations. Those who do get involved end up in hysteria or suicide. Their lives without meaning and substance bore them. They are in search of an existential refuge, but once such a refuge is provided, they realize they can no longer survive in its midst. Married to affluent husbands, they have to rely on patriarchy for subsistence. Educated but servile, married but unhappy, they have nothing of their own to fall back upon. As wives they fail to understand or to be understood, as mothers their failure is of a greater significance for they are unable to reach their children. As daughters they have received no maternal guidance. So what remains is perpetual failure as a woman. They cannot respect themselves. They have no pride in being what they are. This lack of self-possession heightens their sense of victimhood which is left without any fulfilment, psychic or moral. These lives without

fulfilment are lives deprived, lives dissatisfied, lives unanswered. It is here that Bim emerges as an answer, an alternative, an image of a new woman. It is in her that we see a woman's landscape becoming a landscape of affirmation. Desire and refusal, magic and deceit in the woman's world had been dismissed as irrelevant in a man's domain. Public and private worlds did not meet. Lives were compartmentalized. Isolated and withdrawn, unloved and unhappy these women sulked in their bedrooms and peeped out of their windows with a wretched pent-up anger. It becomes apparent that women's anger and refusal to conform tends to challenge the existing patriarchal system.

It is neither easy nor desirable to sympathize with such behaviour. It evokes a certain distrust. They are neither lovable nor loved. Solipsistic and insecure they face a reader's curt dismissal. Furthermore, they have nothing positive to say about themselves. They are negative and negated. By focussing on the female outsider and her conflicting need for recognition Desai has opened ground for speculation. If refusal is one form of protest, assertion is another. If dependence entails boredom then self-sufficiency is the answer. We find, then, that for Desai as much as for her female protagonists, struggle leads to a recognition of one's limitations and a clearing up of those norms and conditions which impede women's progress. Here landscape serves an appropriate function as a mediator between her public and private concerns.

Maya in Cry, The Peacock, suffers from an incurable emotional freeze, and becomes a victim of her own fragility. Unlike her, Bim in Clear Light of Day is an older woman with a mature understanding and a desire to live a full and radiant life. She works towards the betterment of society and makes herself useful. She does not recede into narcissistic imagination. She sees to the needs of others. She is a woman not in search of a vocation but in

control of her vocation. Her vocation of love and living is not a mere abstraction, a product of her fantasy, but adds significance to her everyday life.

Bim is a possible new woman who has learnt that the possibility of accommodation in modern society can come only with a degree of self-recognition and practical wisdom. It can come with a possible negotiation between the woman's role within the family and the society. Although Desai feels there is nothing new in Bim for:

women have been committed to responsibilities for centuries and a great many older women in the past generation were very courageous and strong, had great achievements (Cf Appendix B).

I shall argue that in comparison to the women portrayed in her earlier novels Bim appears to have a stronger personality. She renegotiates the terms of woman's life. Indeed, although she is no great women's liberator nor a social reformer, she is out of the ordinary lot of women. She is an exception to the ordinary. She is what George Eliot describes as one of the women:

... who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion (MM 25).

Bim's life has been unheroic in worldly terms but as far as the values and the ideals of an individual go she is new to Desai's fiction. Despite the unexceptional nature of her life she comes out as different from the other women. She shares their affinity with the landscape. Like Maya, the garden occupies a prominent place in her life. What is striking is that having made a journey outwards in space Anita Desai's new woman protagonist decides to return to the closure of the house but with a different intent. Bim is one such

woman who has lived in the father's dilapidated house and spent all her summers in the garden of her childhood. But she is not atrophied like Maya. She lives within the confines but the act is neither forced nor unwilled. Unlike Maya she is aware of the duties and responsibilities and the restrictions imposed by the house and seeks to realize herself both inside and outside the house. She chooses a vocation. She seeks to be of use. Maya's hankering for the father's garden is a significant refusal to see herself in relation to the present. Like Baba, Bim's younger brother, she fails to grow out of her childhood past which is combined with feelings of nostalgia and regret. She can significantly be defined in relation to her obsession with some of her past memories.

Bim however is aware of the changing times and sees the past, the landscape of her childhood, in relation not only to the past but also the present. Her present is not without love and obligations, affection and responsibility. Seemingly her success lies in her being able to reconcile the notion of the time past and time present.

Clear Light of Day sees the past in relation to the present. It is a journeying back to the garden which highlights the return as a changing vision of the landscape. The spirit of the house and the garden is repeatedly invoked in Desai:

I found myself returning to the house and the garden that had been the setting for that first book and using it once again in Clear Light of Day but by now I had travelled further in time and was able to see in perspective because time is mental distance (Desai, in Olinder, 1984: 104).

So what she sees is a landscape with a perspective on time. The return signifies that . . . childhood creates a landscape to which one can only return in one's mind. Memory functions in a very curious way so much so that it gets enriched by imagination and is restructured by the rigours of time. The

opening of the novel is an opening into the garden of childhood. For Bim's sister Tara, the return to the garden is full of ambiguity:

But the rose walk had been maintained almost as it was. Or was it? It seemed to Tara that there had been far more roses in it when she was a child - luscious shaggy pink ones, small crisp white ones tinged with green, silky yellow ones that smelt of tea - and not just these small negligible crimson heads that lolled weakly on their thin stems (CL 1).

The rose walk seems to have suffered neglect and abandon, the dust and heat of the ensuing years. And yet Tara is aware of the little that has changed in her absence. The garden bids her to see the timelessness that pervades the house and its inhabitants:

"How everything goes on and on here, and never changes," she said. "I used to think about it all," and she waved her arm in a circular swoop to encompass the dripping tap at the end of the grass walk, the trees that quivered and shook with birds, the loping dog, the roses - "and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home" (CL 4).

In Clear Light of Day the landscape of the garden becomes a tangible space wherein the sisters meet and recollect the shared past. It is an abiding factor in the lives of Tara and Bim, the two sisters. The house fulfils this function in the life of Tara, who has moved out of it by marriage. She returns to this house not only to confirm its presence but also to affirm her love for her siblings. Marriage to Bakul had offered the so-called controlled and exclusive comfort and glamour and mobility that wealth alone could promise. She had escaped the stifled and restricting spirit of her parent's house by marrying him. Tara has replayed the role of Maya with successful results. Yet Tara, the one who escapes, cannot resist the childhood nostalgia and returns again and again only to find that years of marriage and living abroad has failed to dispel the impact of the old house. The house has had a lasting effect on her psyche.

The house, with its rose walk, the unpainted walls, the veranda with its bamboo curtain, the dusty guava trees, the deep neglected well and many little remnants, remains unchanged. It is not the mere exterior elements that constitute the landscape in the novel. This landscape would be incomplete for Tara if it did not carry with it intimate associations. In fact it is Tara's visit that summons back the past. It is the house of her childhood as much as a house of her loved ones. It is the house that carries with it not only her past but also the memory of her Mira-masi, her dead parents, and is still a house of her sister Bim and brother Baba. It is the people with whom she shared this house that add a significance to the dead objects and the natural surroundings of the house. The house is meaningful only in relation to its inhabitants. Her family gives semblance and order to her past. For Tara it is impossible to relate to the house without explicit social connections. The return to the house however carries different connotations for her. She is not bound to it the way Bim is. She returns and leaves of her accord. For her the return is a holiday, an experience of repose and recollection. It is a reminder of the self that she has left behind and would not like to return to permanently. She can take it only temporarily and it could also be suggested that although Tara has moved away in space she is actually the one who fails to distance and to free herself. Her return signifies a link which she has neither clung to nor shelved permanently.

On the contrary, Bim has lived in the house with her mentally retarded brother and has continued to be a part of it without desiring change or escape. But what is interesting in Bim's case is that although she has not moved spatially she has constructed a viable space for her self both as a sister and a lecturer in the hearts of her sick Baba and the ongoing flux of her college students. Even the brother and sister who desired and escaped cannot help admiring her courage and tenacity.

Bim is therefore the woman that one could look forward to, unlike Desai's earlier women protagonists. Bim escapes the heterosexual plot, that is, she turns down marriage and maternity but looks after the everlasting baby in Baba. She is not a biological mother but is a strong maternal figure in terms of responsibility, caring and commitment. It is with her that the house acquires a new meaning. It receives a new shape and a form. It is in her that we see how one can work and subsequently succeed in representing woman's time. Bim demonstrates that "woman's desire for affirmation" (Kristeva, in Moi, 1986: 207), can be expressed by being able to negotiate between the social and the imaginary. As in some of the earlier women an identification with one should not necessarily lead to separation from the other. Although Desai has no wish to label her characters, it could be argued that labels are useful if they are not treated as absolute pigeon holes (cf Appendix B). It could therefore be suggested that as a "new woman" Bim's character shows a certain resilience and stability. As a young school-girl and later as a woman she retains her interest in the social world.

Unlike her parents who neither cared for nor loved their children, who played bridge and attended clubs, it is Aunt Mira who cares and shelters them. Initially seen as "a poor relation", "a discarded household appliance" with "a scarecrow-like appearance" she brings with her a "new season in their lives, a season of presents and green mangoes and companionship" (CL 105). Aunt Mira's arrival had led to a series of interesting changes in the life of the children. She fulfils multiple roles; if she becomes a mother and a nurse to the children, a "useful slave" to the family, she is also viewed as a possible and "a useful convert" by the zealous Theosophists. Deprived of a sense of fulfilment in the house of her in-laws who held her "unfortunate horoscope" responsible for the death of their son, married and widowed a virgin, her repressed insecure self received neither

love nor assurance. From an object of curse to a "useful slave" and then to an object of ridicule, she is finally reduced to being a "parasite" and is "turned out". "Another household could find some use for her: cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone" (CL 108). In the company of the Das children she feels "owned", she is glad that she is wanted:

They crowded about her so that they formed a ring, a protective railing about her. Now no one could approach, no threat, no menace (CL 111).

She knows that they will protect her from further humiliation. In contrast to her life at her in-laws, she feels secure and loved. Seemingly she could channel her maternal craving onto Das' children. They gave her life a definite semblance: "She fed them with her own nutrients, she reared them in her own shade, she was the support on which they leaned as they grew" (CL 111). She becomes their mother.

As we compare and contrast her development to that of Bim we see Aunt Mira as a victim of society, "ruled by masculine law" (Cixous, 1981: 49). She is able to repossess herself in the company of children:

They wrapped themselves around her, smothering her in leaves and flowers. She laughed at the profusion, the beauty of this little grove that was the whole forest to her, the whole world. If they choked her, if they sucked her dry of substance, she would give in without any sacrifice of will - it seemed in keeping with nature to do so... She was the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth.

Touching them, watching them, she saw them as the leaves and flowers and fruit of the earth. So beautiful, she murmured, touching, watching - so beautiful and strong and living (CL 111).

As a tree, the soil and the earth she represents explicitly a landscape of fertility. For someone who has been discarded as of no avail, it is indeed reassuring to know that what she has to give is necessary for some. Furthermore, Aunt Mira seems to have accepted her role as a carer and a

nurturer in Bim's family with gratitude. She gives without asking or expecting anything in return. The profusion of their warmth assures the woman that she is capable of giving love and understanding. Of all the children Tara feels closest to her. Tara, the shy and aloof, seeks in Aunt Mira a security which her family seems unable to provide. She also seeks in her a space that the outside world seems to threaten and repudiate. Aunt Mira is both the mother earth and the tree and the soil that holds and receives, nourishes and protects, is warm and comforting, generous and good. She is indeed, "a new season", who not only sets the house in order but in giving herself to the children she creates for them a landscape of affirmation. The house gains a status and a value in the eyes of the children. It firmly attributes to their development as adults.

Significantly, Aunt Mira plays an important role in the development of Bim and her siblings. They are in need of her just as much as she is in need of their love and affection. Children provide her maternal body with a quality and a sense of belonging. She is someone who has never brought her own needs and demands into the world. She has lived her life for others. Her early widowhood not only deprived her of her right to enjoy her sexuality but also reduced her destiny to that of a "useful slave".

Once Bim and her siblings grow up and withdraw from her company Aunt Mira sees herself in a state of abandon. And in times of acute loneliness the spirit of the house seems to permeate her inner being. This house not only protects her but exposes her vulnerability.

In Aunt Mira is a woman who having devoted herself to the social world, that is, the world of in-laws and distant relatives succumbs to the realm of the imaginary in her old age. If the house provided her with space to participate and to experience the joys and travails of mothering the Das children, it has also made demands on her imagination. Years of toil had

given her neither the time nor space to think of her life. A woman "sealed into her chamber" cannot *restrain* her indignant self for long and seeks the comfort of the bottle. Her loss of control over herself is intricately associated with her lapse into the imaginary. It also reveals her long repressed frustration. In her state of stupor she becomes "obsessed by the idea of the well - the hidden scummy pool in which the bride-like cow they had once had, had drowned,..." (CL 99). The image of "the bride-like cow" is crucial as it reveals a parallel to Aunt Mira's life, a child-bride's life, that has withered and wasted with the death of her young husband. The metaphoric significance of the "enclosing darkness" of the well beckoning her, wanting her to get closer signifies her female predicament. It is in her desire to return to the enclosing darkness of the well that she seemingly suggests a desire to connect and enclose herself in a maternal womb that would protect her from the outside world. She seeks to identify with the hidden and the dark, that which is under the ground. The act of tearing her clothes, the fear that she is being eaten up by the rats, lizards and snakes is symptomatic of the old woman's sexual predicament. It comes with her separation from the children. Child-care had given her a responsibility, a centre to which she came wholeheartedly. Given the change in situation, Aunt Mira cannot live, add meaning to her life. Therefore, she recedes completely inside. She falls into the trap set forth by the imaginary, in this case hallucination.

Unlike Aunt Mira and Tara, Bim seeks to be a "heroine". She becomes the heroine of the novel. She redefines heroinism. She becomes a bridge between the ones who have gone away and the ones who could not leave. In her caring and her loving she mothers the abandoned dog of the Hyder Ali's and the neglected brother Baba. It is she who retains the spirit of the house and yet converts it with her responsible self contrary to the earlier irresponsible attitude of her parents. She is the one who controls and cares,

who actually serves without giving the impression of doing so. It is her presence that makes the house acceptable to Tara. It brings into focus not only her previous guilts but also the consolation that the bond between her and Bim possesses an elasticity that could never be severed.

It is Tara's return that draws attention to the time past and the life she shared with her family. The novel is divided into four parts and each part meanders in and out of the remembered past and the existing present. It is the unfolding of time past and the characters' reconciliation with it that constitutes the story.

The house is as full of paradox as its inhabitants Baba and Bim. Baba listens to the same old records and Bim refuses to attend her niece's wedding. Like the house they live in even the surroundings have not changed. It is the history of the house which constitutes the history of the Das family:

... the sense of dullness and hopelessness that reigned over their house took on the intense aspect of waiting. They were always waiting now - superficially, for their parents to come home from the club, or Aunt Mira to put Baba to bed and come and tell them a story. Yet when the parents were back and Aunt Mira free, they were still unfulfilled, still waiting (CL 122).

The Das children were always anticipating and hoping for miracles to happen:

Perhaps for the white horse to appear again on the dunes, followed by the golden dog. Or for some greater event, some more drastic change, a complete reversal of their present lives and the beginning of a new, wondrous phase. They would wander about the garden, peering intently into the phosphorescent green tunnel of a furled banana leaf, or opening a canna lily pod and gazing at its inner compartments and the embedded pearly seeds, or following the path of a silent snail, searching for a track that might lead somewhere, they had no idea where (CL 122).

The spirit of anticipation in the minds of Das children is visible in their response to the garden that is inhabited by flowers and centipedes. They learn to interpret their own moods and anxieties as reflected in the landscape.

In the process of looking backwards the two sisters are attempting to understand the nature of human lives and seem to be wanting to clarify the spirit that permeated the house. As children they had sought for a solution in the path of a snail or the opening of a pod. They hoped for life to change and had searched in their landscape for a track and an answer. Even as children they could feel the stasis of their little lives, lives neglected by parents and unsatisfied by Aunt Mira's tales. Their eyes were tired of the monotony that pervaded the house. They secretly loved the aura that Hyder Ali carried with him as he marched on his horse. The image fascinated Raja and it is this image of Hyder Ali that he wishes to emulate not only as a child but also as an adult. As an adult he is trapped as the hero of his childhood. He inhabits and enters all that Hyder Ali stood for. Like Baba, Raja too never develops himself. He too remains caught in the past. As the two sisters pause reflectively and glance backwards in time a whole series of family incidents and dreams is encountered.

Through her recurring use of the garden imagery Desai commemorates the complexity inherent in such a landscape of the past. The garden is not fully inside, unlike the terraced rooms, nor is it open for public viewing. It has thorns and briars, it has long hedges and is wild in its outgrowth. It opens and conceals, it explores and withdraws. If it had invoked a landscape of desire in Maya, in Bim, the garden performs a fully mediatory function between the outside world and the house with its closed doors and overgrown shrubs. It has its own *modus operandi*. Bim with her brother Baba retains a degree of affinity for this interior slum, neglected and wild, and later by bringing in some of her students into the house she is able to negotiate between the inside-outside dichotomy. The garden becomes a principle of mediation. It does not entrap her nor does it leave her vulnerable

at the hands of the city. It marks a radical development from the approach adopted by Maya, in her passionate love of the landscape.

In Clear Light of Day what lends a purposeful immediacy to the landscape is neither the flight of Tara nor that of Raja. It is the silence of Baba's spirit and the grit of Bim's uneventful life that lends credibility to the house in Old Delhi. As a young school girl Bim meets the challenge of the outside world. She with her strong instinctive personality makes a decision "I shall do things". "I shall earn my own living and look after Mira-masi and Baba and - and be independent." (CL 140). Herein she constructs a new definition of heroism. Bim is the new woman who by asserting her desire for independence, for knowledge, for self-mastery is choosing to be an individual.

This is the first note of originality that strikes a Desai woman. Hitherto her women were not aware of their needs. They were unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives and had limited control over them. Bim, on the other hand, is aware of what she would like to be, to do. She too goes through periods of unhappiness. She is also moody, cynical and dissatisfied. She is short-tempered like the rest but what makes her different is that she is loving and responsible. Above all, she is humane. What she does is not out of a sense of duty only but out of love for her family. What she aspires for is not mere happiness in marriage and children but a life enriched in values and vocation.

In Clear Light of Day the setting is significant to the rhythm and pattern of the story. The garden and the city are the root metaphors in the novel creating a landscape in perspective. The garden and the city signify the private and the public, the inner and the outer landscape inhabited by woman. Bim's garden is as much a part of her as her life in the city. She

chooses not to move out permanently from the dried, neglected garden. The garden functions as a poignant metaphor linking the past with the present:

On either side of their garden were more gardens, neighbours' houses, as still and faded and shabby as theirs, the gardens as overgrown and neglected and teeming with wild, uncontrolled life (CL 23-24).

The shape and contours of the garden mirror the inner lives of its inhabitants. Grey-haired and neglected, their neighbour Jaya and her sister have suffered rejection at the hands of their husbands. Bim sees them as "haggard and eaten up", the nature of the image is symptomatic of the fade and gloom and the dried up expanse surrounding the house. Not only does the garden become a relic of their childhood but in its wild uncompromising outlay it becomes a place of withdrawal and retreat. If it is restricting in its closure, it is also a sign of freedom for it enables a woman like Bim, and also Tara to reflect and pause. The summer days and the wilting flowers form a picture of life being subjected to harsh changes. The image of the dead cow in the back garden well, haunting and terrifying, the well "bottomless and black and stinking" with its dark secret, is as much a part of the wild landscape as the purple bougainvillea. The garden is by its nature both a preserver and a destroyer. It carries the heavy burden of the past in the shape of the well, the well that haunted Aunt Mira as a navel, a symbol of life and a fearful reminder of death:

But there was no milk, the cow had died, drowned in the well. In that well, deep and stony and still, in which all must drown to die. The navel of the world it was, secret and hidden in thick folds of grass, from which they all emerged and to which they must return, crawling on their hands and knees.

She crawled towards it, dragging the cotton wings. When she reached the edge, she would peer in, then lower her head and go tumbling down, and at some point, at some time, strike the shining surface and break through to the dark and secret drink.

She opened her mouth to drink. She whimpered for that drink (CL 90).

As suggested earlier in her longing and helplessness Aunt Mira becomes a child seeking her mother's embrace. The desire to return to the well is symptomatic of the desire to return to the safety and comfort of the womb. Like a child longing for her mother's milk she hankers for the bottle. Furthermore, Bim's statement "I always did feel that - that I shall end up in that well myself one day" (CL 157) is a significant reiteration of those fears. It is not surprising that even a figure like Bim is deeply disturbed by the thought of the well. It threatens her for the memory of her Aunt Mira's plight is far more distressing than that of the cow, drowned in the well. The spirit of the house therefore makes her encounter with the city a necessity. Unlike Aunt Mira it prevents her from infinite regression. It is her indomitable spirit that enables her to balance her inner fears and outer resilience. Both the city and the garden remain central to Bim's life constituting a meaningful whole. The two landscape images help her redefine her personal identity.

In Bim, Desai has created a new woman who is very much an exception to the rest. She meets the challenge of the outside world. She is responsive to those around her and is sufficiently aware of what she wants from life. Clear Light of Day is made up of people who once shared their lives with her and of those who continue being with her. It is made up of the house which she calls her own and feels most comfortable in. In the novel the past is vivid in the minds of the two sisters Bim and Tara, who are often "overcome... by the spirit of the house" (CL 20). The day leaves Tara hot and dry in the summer heat for:

Here in the house it was not just the empty, hopeless atmosphere of childhood, but the very spirits of her parents that brooded on - here they still sat,... day after day and year after year till their deaths, playing bridge with friends like

themselves... [while the children] floated on the surface, staring down into the underworld, their eyes popping with incomprehension (CL 21-22).

Tara's return evokes nostalgia and regret, criticism and speculation and furthermore, it invites affirmation and continuation. What is significant is the process of looking back and that of reconciliation with time. Unlike Tara and her sister Bim, their brother Baba lives in the time past listening to old records and refusing to emerge out of the imaginary. He is tied to the pre-oedipal semiotic babble. He neither speaks nor communicates. He neither contributes nor contradicts. He is situated in his little room and has no wish to venture or to experiment. He is static in time and space. His child-like face and soft baby complexion too have not suffered any ravages of age. He neither lets out his suffering nor his anger. He neither accepts nor rejects the shades of past. For him the time past is always time present and vice versa.

Clear Light of Day explores the possibility of a choice available to women. It becomes a study of shared past and individual guilt, of shared uncertainty and individual suffering. The novel explores the restraints imposed by the house and links it with the possibilities that the world can offer to its inhabitants. The closure is seen in contrast to the vibrations of the outer world. Yet, this closure alone is not viewed with contempt or disdain. It can be broken and resisted in the figure of Bim. It can also be retained in the figure of Baba. It haunts Tara and eludes Raja. Despite their earlier fears of "suffocation", of being trapped and choked in the spiritless uninviting grey mass of nothingness they survive:

As they grew into adolescence it seemed to Raja, Bim and Tara that they were suffocating in some great grey mass through which they tried to thrust as Raja had thrust through the thorny hedge, and emerge into a different atmosphere. How was it to be different? Oh, they thought, it should have colour and event and company, be rich and vibrant with possibilities. Only they could not - the greyness was so massed as to baffle them and defeat their attempts to fight through (CL 120).

The image of the house stands as a focal point in the lives of the characters. The growing children find the enclosure of the house suffocating and it is this suffocating boredom of the house that Tara and Raja wish to avoid. Both Raja and Tara seek recourse to romanticism and as adults emulate a romantic escape. Tara falls in love with Bakul, a young officer in the foreign service and not only manages to leave the house but also the country. The prospect of distant lands was all too alluring to be resisted. Raja follows the Hyder Alis to Hyderabad and makes himself acceptable within their fold by marrying Hyder Ali's daughter Benazir. All this comes much later in life but Bim had already realized that this is not what she was interested in. Neither Tara's romances nor Raja's poems sustained her interest:

... they were not what she wanted. What did she want? Oh, she jerked her shoulders in irritation, something different - facts, history, chronology, preferably... Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* that she had found on the drawing-room bookshelf... what need of imagination when one could have knowledge instead? That created a gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge (CL 121).

Furthermore, Bim's schoolgirl vitality receives no challenge from Tara. Tara is quiet and preferred the familiarity of the home which to her "took on an aura of paradise when she was separated from it". It is this difference in the sisters that the narrative draws attention to:

Whereas school brought out Bim's natural energy and vivacity that was kept damped down at home because of the peculiar atmosphere of their house, school to Tara was a terror, a blight, a gathering of large, loud, malicious forces that threatened and mocked her fragility... To Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet. Tara, on the other hand, wilted when confronted by a challenge, shrank back into a knot of horrified stupor (CL 123).

As in Drabble's fiction, in Anita Desai too, memory is the basis of imagination. It stirs, invites, adds to and edits the residues of imagination.

Her novels evoke a past of regrets and recriminations. Both Tara and Bim are rooted to their past in their own significant way. Tara might have escaped the house but the spirit of the house continues to nauseate her. She is bound to her childhood house in an inescapable way. Bim has neither moved nor forgotten the bitterness of her brother's escape. She remembers him as a hero who failed in his crusade. The childhood is not lost because of her brother Baba's continuous hold on it. But life does not end inside the house for Bim. She chooses to be different. She creates what she in a way likes most. She pursues her interest in "facts, history, chronology". What shapes Bim's heroinism is her inner sense of rebellion, her childhood experiences at home, her parents' indifference, Mira-masi's widowhood and more so the spirit of the house. According to Ellen Moers:

... the clash between intention and realization is the drama of literary creation itself. And where *heroinism* is concerned, the by-products of the struggle - changes in literary form and language, in tone, imagery, setting - are often more interesting and more important than the particular heroines it has produced (Moers, 1986: 124).

In Clear light of Day the maturity of her heroine's perceptions sets in motion the tone, imagery and setting of the novel. Yet it could not be classified solely as Bim's story. It is a novel about situations and choices. Tara and Raja, unlike Bim and Baba would not have been able to respond to the house with such felicity had they not managed to escape. Life would have been insufferable in the precincts of the house. Desai's Tara and Raja, have chosen the best available alternatives. Unlike Bim, who as a child was equally stifled, equally bored by Aunt Mira's tales, and dreamt of being a Joan of Arc but did not see marriage as a feasible alternative nor sufficient enough to fulfil herself, Tara lived in a world of romances and chose to be a wife and a mother in "a neat, sanitary, disinfected land" (CL 28). But then:

To look at Bim one would not think she had lived through the same childhood, the same experiences as Tara. She led the way so briskly up the stairs on the outside of the house to the flat rooftop where, as children, they had flown kites and hidden secrets, that it was clear she feared no ghosts to meet her there (CL 23).

Unlike Tara, Bim has always been a fighter. She pursues knowledge and a career. She even becomes a surrogate mother to her brother Baba. She uses a language of concern with her students. In the words of Desai, she is a "triumph" and "a paradox". She chooses to retain her individuality, and work with a degree of self-possession. But somewhere deep inside her Bim is aware of her limitations:

"How my students would laugh at me. I'm always trying to teach them, train them to be different from what we were at their age - to be a new kind of woman from you or me - and if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how I myself haven't been able to manage on my own - they'd laugh, wouldn't they? They'd despise me" (CL 155).

Although she does not see herself in this light, Bim is a new kind of woman.

Her decisiveness distinguishes her from others and her simmering dissatisfaction brings them somewhat closer to her. It is in her conversations with Bim that Tara comes to understand the fragility of her sister's nature. All these years she had lived with the thought that the two of them were embodiments of opposing principles. Bim, the active and she, the passive. Bim, the stubborn and she, the relenting. Yet the remark of Jaya, their neighbour, is unacceptable to her: "Bim has her own mind,... Bim always did. You were always so different, you two sisters" (CL 162). Tara realizes that Bim has suffered equally from their past and it is this shared past that gives a certain value to their lives. She answers back to Jaya:

"We're not really," she said. "We may seem to be - but we have everything in common. That makes us one. No one else knows all we share, Bim and I." (CL 162).

For Tara as much as for Bim the landscape of the past is integral to her sense of being. It affirms their present ties and validates their past ones. In sisterhood Bim also sees a reflection of "her own despairs." It is a link which neither time nor space could forestall. And amidst it all the house is the landmark that gives a continuity to this link. There is a present which sits on the lap of the past. As noted by Woolf:

present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else (Woolf, 1989: 109).

The desire to avoid pressure of the present brings Tara time and again to the old Delhi house. It is also true that her present is constantly being probed by her previous guilts. Guilty of running away when Bim was being attacked by bees, guilty of choosing to escape when Bim was nursing sick Raja, guilty of not being on her side at Aunt Mira's death. These guilts have stretched over the years. For Tara as for Bim "Nothing's over, ever." Yet neither Tara nor Bim have chosen to live permanently in the past. Tara has her husband and family and Bim her job. And this is what they will return to. It is desirable to do so.

Clear Light of Day is a novel of female development as much as a novel of female choices. Desai seemingly explores the varied alternatives women can and do choose according to their nature and circumstances. She focuses on women's inner needs and anxieties. Bim chooses to be a woman of vocation. She, unlike her sister Tara, is in pursuit of knowledge and has no room for romance in her life. She chooses not to marry which is an unlikely proposition for an Indian woman. In her uncharacteristic response to marriage Bim expresses her need to be different. Stripped of her desire for husband and children she values her love of her siblings and her commitment to vocation. She recognizes the difficulties that women like Mira-masi had to face in an indifferent patriarchal system. The mode of argument is that it is

her mother's indifference and her aunt's powerlessness and her father's disinterest that has shaped her desire for autonomy. Yet in doing so she neither renounces her maternal instincts nor her personal ambition. She more than fulfils them. What we see in her is a femininity which survives without seeking recourse to marriage and children. To her the Old Delhi house becomes a meeting point, a residue of love and a critique of human relations:

... it was dark and shadowy, shaded by the bamboo screen at the door, the damp rush mats at the windows, the old heavy curtains and the spotted, peeling walls, and in their shade she saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her. There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew. No other love had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger and disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. Whatever diminished them, diminished her. What attacked them, attacked her. Nor was there anyone else on earth whom she was willing to forgive more readily or completely, or defend more instinctively and instantly. She could hardly believe, at that moment, that she would live on after they did or they would continue after she had ended. If such an unimaginable phenomenon could take place, then surely they would remain flawed, damaged for life. The wholeness of the pattern, its perfection, would be gone (CL 165).

There is more than affection in these thoughts. In her thoughts she is wishing for a continuity which has been disrupted with Raja's escape. There is a desire to re-establish this chord and complete the pattern which could be made whole only in love. It aims towards a self-knowledge which Bim wishes to hold on to in order to define the self. In her love for her siblings she sees a continuing bond, she reads a necessity to forgive and start anew:

Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and

because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally... All these would have to be mended, these rents and tears, she would have to mend and make her net whole so that it would suffice her in her passage through the ocean (CL 165).

The ritual of "her passage through the ocean" is symbolic of the rite of purification which Bim seeks in her family ties. Bim comes to an understanding that for her to be whole is to be able to fill up the gaps which have been left gaping for long. Anger and remorse would neither heal nor console, neither bridge nor assure her love for her siblings. It would only hurt. It would simply create a greater edifice of uncertainty and bitterness. She realizes gaps in her own understanding of her loved ones, their desire to escape it all by accepting the first choices available to them, and it is this understanding of her limitations and those of others that brings into focus her intent to forget, to mend and to reconcile.

It is "Baba's silence and reserve and otherworldliness that she had wanted to break open and ransack and rob" (CL 164), and in it she sees a vision of herself as a hunter who had yearned for the "white bird's grace" only to discover it would be ruthless to do so. For Baba knows "neither grudge nor punishment". He lives beyond. It is the saintly and the spiritual dimension of his nature that she needs "to become whole and perfect" (CL 166). This recognition enables her to respond to the vision of sharing. It brings with it a discovery that a loss of faith in others would bring in a loss of faith in herself. Her love for her family stipulates her past and her future. It would be impossible for her to perceive a life without love, her self without incorporating a sense of continuity with her siblings: "There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one..."(CL 165).

Bim is able to negotiate between the house and the city, the past and the present, the private and the public worlds. She manages to create and survive a pattern of life focusing on the need for self-affirmation and

caring without confining herself to the constraints of a house. We could say, then, that in *Bim* the house is neither a centre of negation nor of separation.

Clear Light of Day is in some respects a personalized response to India's predicament. In its mediation between past and present, its accommodation of change within the traditional and the religious, it is suggestive of conciliation which could radiate outwards into the larger political scene.

Anita Desai's novels do not follow romance plots with particular emphasis on a narrative pattern that:

... muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success (DuPlessis, 1985: 5).

On the contrary, she explores the nature of human ties and of personal identity. She challenges the dominant narrative structure by interpreting woman's time with the help of landscape. Her romance plot does not valorize traditional standards of conformity but living within those standards her women articulate their need to question them. In an attempt to focus on woman's desire she not only speaks of Maya's anxiety but also reflects on those features responsible for her failure to integrate. Sita, is another case in point. In *Nanda Kaul* and *Raka* we subsequently witness a life devoid of love seeking fulfilment in the landscape. Through *Bim*, Desai investigates a positive affirmation of the landscape. But this landscape is neither secluded nor devoid of her loved ones. The house immobile and indifferent unlike its inhabitants retains its value only through them. It is her ability to locate herself to the outside world that gives a poignancy to the house of her childhood. Each memory is a thread that binds her to the future. Yet she is not tied to the memories alone. And she knows that stronger than everything is time, "Time the destroyer is time the preserver". If time binds, it alone can

set free. She also recognizes in her quest for fulfilment a love that is timeless.

The house has also nourished and nurtured them all:

With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her own family with all their separate histories and experiences - not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her (CL 182).

It is the metaphor of the soil that celebrates the circuit of progress and nurturance. It is the soil that continues to bind and hold them all in time. It provides warmth and enables them to relate not only to themselves but the rest of the cosmos. This soil is vital for the growth and refinement of the self. The metaphor of the soil is equally reminiscent of the figure of Aunt Mira who had nurtured Bim and her siblings. She is the soil, the image of fertility and since she is alive in memory, neither Bim nor her sister can ever think of losing contact with the soil that has given them succour and spirit. It is with the imagery of the soil that the changing vision of landscape is structured into that of affirmation. Bim is wise to see through the landscape of the past a natural extension of her present self and that of her siblings into the time future. She also realizes that the past is as culpable as its people and asks to be forgiven. The landscape has had the power to form and modify, to enlarge and deepen, to impede and reject.

What I wish to suggest is that Desai's Clear Light of Day presents a search for an affirmative landscape.

Through ^{Landscape} is visible an assertion of the individual's need for autonomy and self definition. It is difficult for her women to resist its long-standing appeal and impact. If it be negative and threatening it can also be a

solace and a comfort. It enables them to relate to their innermost selves. Furthermore, it stresses the female bildung as a continuing process. For Desai, female bildung has not been a stagnant, static state of no return. It is continually evolving, a sign of human progress and capable of producing better human beings. In rejecting "romantic thralldom" a term used by DuPlessis, Desai's Bim is eroding a centre hitherto linking women's destiny with marriage and children and viewing it as an only means of fulfilment in their lives. Her act of renouncing the two is matched by her thralldom to her siblings and her students and also her pets. It is not a state of nascence that she aspired to. On the contrary. Having recognised in adolescence what she aspired for Bim seeks to concretise her ambition and becomes a model of feminine self-assertion. In her at last is a landscape of affirmation.

Chapter Thirteen

Conclusion

As suggested in the Introduction, it has not been the intention of this thesis crudely to "compare and contrast" Drabble and Desai, but of course similarities and differences have emerged in the course of the study. Despite the fact that these two writers come from dissimilar cultures and environments, we have seen that they reflect similar concerns and anxieties in their exploration of women's predicament in a modern society.

The similarities between the two writers can best be expressed by the "voyage out" theme. From their earliest novels in the 1960s to their most recent writing, their heroines have developed from self-obsession to self-realization through the community. This thesis has argued that a changing use of landscape is one of the most important means by which the "voyage out" has been charted.

Margaret Drabble's early novels should be read in the context of the "permissive" 1960s, the decade of the sexual revolution and the prelude to the latest phase of the feminist movement. In particular, A Summer Bird-Cage and The Millstone explicitly depict a generation of highly educated, upwardly mobile women to whom domesticity and marriage seem

insufficient. The novels are marked by a stress on individual self-fulfilment, through class realignment as in Jerusalem, the Golden or sexual passion as in The Waterfall, with little regard for wider social concerns. Drabble's women in her early novels are anxious to break away from a monotonous, repressed and grey childhood which is mirrored in the landscape of the North of England. To the young and aspiring heroine of Jerusalem, the Golden the South of England is a landscape of possibilities: colourful, culturally rich, sexually glamorous.

But in the later novels, beginning perhaps with The Middle Ground [1980], Drabble's women start to undertake their "voyage out"; as the heroic age of the 1960s recedes and they grow older and more mature, they not only become interested in wider social issues but insist that a faith in the community can lead to deeper self-realization. This change leads to greater tolerance and affection for provincial life and to reconciliation with both the aspects of modern industrial society and, as in The Realms of Gold, with the landscape of the Midlands and the North of England. As her women become less self-obsessed and more concerned with the lives of others, so her landscape settings reflect this outward movement, from the closed room of The Waterfall to the archaeological city of The Realms of Gold or the barren wastes surrounding Whitmore's prison in A Natural Curiosity.

There is a similar pattern in Desai's novels. Maya's solipsistic world in Cry, the Peacock is finally overtaken by the reconciliation of inner and outer, private and public, of Bim's world in Clear Light of Day. House and garden are the prominent features in both but in the early novel they are dangerously claustrophobic and in the latter, for all their witnessing of past sorrows, they represent harmony and mediation. The "voyage out" for Desai's women, however, is more violently charted than in Drabble's novels; her women feel the constraints of their marital status fiercely and are more bound to their social situation. Change for them is more difficult than it is for Drabble's mobile and financially independent women. In some cases the repression in Desai's women turns outwards and erupts into violence. Wilder landscapes and extreme incidents relating to landscape convey the collapse of constraint and conformity. For example, Raka's act of setting the forest on fire in Fire on the Mountain is one such expression of violent aversion against social norms; Raka, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, all the oppressed women in the novel, find an expression of violent resistance to conformity in this destructive gesture.

In spite of the differences of their cultural situation, then, what is common to the women in Drabble and Desai is a prolonged struggle to redefine and reconstruct their personal identity. As we examine the nature of desire in The Waterfall and Cry, the Peacock, we notice certain similarities between the two. Both have used the natural landscape imagery to elucidate the course of desire. The snow in The Waterfall and the storm in Cry, the

Peacock unleash a set of responses in the two protagonists. Their unsatisfied sexual longing is enunciated in their encounter with the external world. The falling of the snow and the birth of a daughter along with the entry of James leads Jane Gray into a world of passion and brings her out of the enclosure of the house. Maya, the central figure in Cry, the Peacock, suffers from narcissistic despair. Her inability to satisfy herself in her husband's house and the obsessive longing for the father's house has disturbing implications. Unlike Jane Gray of The Waterfall she is unable to requite herself. It could also be suggested that if the act of writing saves Jane Gray from disaster it cannot do the same to Maya. She remains trapped in her own consciousness. Jane Gray lives to see her "poems in print", but Maya's story ends in a tragedy. Moreover, the conditions within which the two women long for love and recognition are specific to their cultures. Where Jane Gray can move outwards into the world of writing, to a measure of equality and independence which is the cultural right of the middle-class European woman, Maya seems caught within an inherited stereotype of the Indian woman as petted and beloved plaything, a gift from father to husband, a child-wife. In the figure of Gautama's mother, Desai shows us that this model is neither universal nor inescapable, but its force is palpable and Maya as an extreme exponent embodies a critique of this "ideal". As Desai herself has explained, Indian mythology deifies woman:

Her ample bosom and loins, her enticing curves and buxom proportions make her not merely the ideal mother but the ideal woman - consort, lover, plaything... Around her exists a huge body of mythology. She is called by several names - Sita,

Draupadi, Durga, Parvati, Lakshmi, and so on. In each myth, she plays the role of the loyal wife, unswerving in her devotion to her lord... The myth keeps her bemused, bound hand and foot. To rebel against

it - either in speech or action - would mean that she is questioning the myth, attacking the legend, and that cannot be permitted: it is the cornerstone on which the Indian family and therefore Indian society are built (Desai, 1990: 972).

This is the mythological context within which Cry, the Peacock should be read. The thesis has pointed out that Drabble has a definite cultural and literary heritage to draw on. With a degree in English literature and an established tradition of women's writing in English, she seems more firmly rooted to the thought of her predecessors. In contrast, Desai has a fractured inheritance. She has been exposed to multiple cultures and influences. Her mother's German background and her own English education at school and college, an interest in European literatures, all combined with her life and experiences in India, has been crucial to the development of her fiction. As a post-1947 Indian woman writer in English, Desai is very much influenced by the change in the socio-political scene. The "voyage out" of her novels depicts something of the transitional world in which Indian women have found themselves. In the earlier novels, her women's obsession with their enclosed lives within the family is placed at a distance from wider social and political movements and their attempts to save themselves are realized through landscapes of displacement. Where Shall We Go This Summer? is an obvious example in which Sita imagines the island as a refuge in which she can halt the processes and passages of time; the only history that she is reconciled to is

that of her father's equivocal and distant past. Although she returns to her home in the city and her responsibilities there, the present and future have yet to be addressed. In Clear Light of Day, the last of Desai's novels to be discussed, the woman's realization of herself within the community is finally achieved. In this novel, a complex symbolism links the inner life and the family life of some of the central characters to the social and political divisions which have occurred at the national level.

Clear Light of Day personalizes the social suppression of women in Aunt Mira. She is incomplete without a husband and has no alternative but to be a servant. However, in *Bim*, Desai portrays a woman whose education enables her to go against the conventional marriage plot. Although she says no to marriage, she does not reject womanhood. She becomes a mother to Baba, for she not only takes over the responsibility of this mentally retarded brother and the pet dog of the Hyder Ali's, but accepts her vocation as a college teacher with immense pride and pleasure. She is the epitome of assertion and caring in Desai. The journey outwards thereby illustrates her ability to renegotiate the movement from the house to the city on equal terms. She may be seen as the "new" Indian woman, and Desai as a "new" Indian writer who, like Drabble, has moved away from the love-and-marriage plot formula to a more open-ended affirmation of the possibilities of a woman's life.

I have also discussed the influence of Romantic writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats in the case of Drabble; Rilke in the case of Desai. Drabble writes about rooms and ditches while Wordsworth wrote about cottages and ponds. Like the Romantics, Drabble and Desai support the view that the individual imagination alone can add meaning to life. Like the Romantics, they share a nostalgia for the past and lovingly recapitulate images of loss and beauty in the trivial and the ugly landscapes. The Realms of Gold and Where Shall We Go This Summer? prove a case in point.

Drabble may be seen as a more affirmative writer than Desai in that her late novels unreservedly accept human limitations and imply commitment to social change and progress. This affirmation has resulted in novels which seem to be more in the nature of documentary than fiction (this is true of her trilogy in particular) for which she has received much adverse criticism. Yet this very rejection of the "normal" fictional deployments of a tightly constructed plot and a focus on the inner life of one or two characters is a mark of her acceptance of multiple positions. Not one self locked in its own obsessions but many selves in a complex social continuum. In Desai's case, the limits of this affirmation are clearly spelt out in a recent essay in the TLS: "Society demands one answer, the artist another" (Desai, 1990: 976). She asserts that: "Artists are those people who very much feel the presence of nothingness and yet out of nothingness one creates something" (Cf Appendix B). Drabble sees archaeology as "a very good metaphor for writing fiction. You are building structures and they sort of correspond to something in the

outer world if you're lucky" (Cf Appendix A). The archaeological analogy is suggestive of an excavation which gradually unfolds deeper levels.

This thesis has examined the constant shifts in women's perspective in relation to landscape. Hence, in exploring the major subject of the thesis I have based my choice on those particular novels which explicitly seem to make a point in relation to women and landscape in Drabble and Desai. A diverse methodological approach has been maintained in order to explore the woman-question from different positions. The aim has been to accommodate and demonstrate a few possible ways of asking, interpreting, and exploring. In their pursuit for self-recognition, women in Desai's and Drabble's novels reach an understanding that absolute freedom like absolute happiness is an illusion and can only be attained with a certain degree of inner equilibrium. Living in an age of material consciousness the two writers reflect on the increasing decline in human relationships. Trust, faith and stability together with tradition, security and a sense of possibility constitute their major concern. They seem to proclaim "life is what you make of it" but at the same time they also acknowledge the presence of social, political, individual and moral constraints. For them, writing fiction is a way of life and enquiry. What Drabble says of fiction can also be applied to criticism, that its function is to: "...explore and show how characters go in and out of moods without any one of them being the final statement about the characters or a way of life" (Cf Appendix A). We have seen that the landscape imagery

not only emphasizes the nature of boundaries within which women articulate their need for recognition, but provides possibilities of affirmation. Thus "the voyage out" theme in Drabble and Desai makes way for another encounter, a fresh vista or yet another beginning.

Appendix A: Interview with Margaret Drabble

RU: The landscape of the North is very important in your books. In your earlier books you seem not to approve of the North, the women protagonists wanted to escape from the North to the world of possibility, and in your later books A Natural Curiosity and The Radiant Way you seem to have come to accept the landscape of the North ?

MD: I think that's very true. I think that when I was young I felt as a lot of young people feel the need to get away from the family, and the need to establish my own life. This is reflected in the parents of the earlier books they want to break away, find the excitements of the world. But I think as one gets older, perhaps having broken away you then appreciate more the values of the place you came from. I don't think I would want to live in the North, but I enjoy going back more than I used to. My mother who was a Yorkshire woman, never liked going back. She always found it very depressing. Even at the end of her life she still didn't enjoy going back. And I think I have much more positive feelings than she had.

RU: Could you tell me something more about your parents?

MD: Well, my mother was born in Mexborough. It is a small mining town near Sheffield. I was born in Sheffield. But both my parents were born in South Yorkshire. My father was born in Hamiltshire, my mother in Mexborough, the two small mining communities quite near one another. And then my father moved to Sheffield. He studied law. He was a lawyer. My mother didn't like Sheffield either. I think she found it repressive. Both my parents went to Mexborough Grammar school which is quite a good Grammar school and they went on from there to the university and they were the first of either family ever to go to university. So their's was the first generation of higher education which again is a very common first generation educated people. And I think that to them education represented getting away from your roots. Although they didn't do it themselves, quite so in degree, they were always encouraging us to do so, whereas I think that's not entirely typical. And I think there are many people who try and persuade their family to stay at home. We were always encouraged. Education was the route forward and I suppose we all did that. I've two sisters and one brother and we all left the North. We all now live in London or near London and I think this was typical of a certain kind of middle-class, upwardly mobile middle-class.

RU: And this was actually a phenomenon of the postwar period?

MD: It was very much so. Grammar school, Welfare state, education, bettering yourself. I think that people were more immobile before and between the war partly because of the depression, the slump. But after the war there was a feeling that people should be mobile and they should go where the work was and yes, I think my parents conform very much to that pattern and so did I.

RU: And did it change the position of women ?

MD: It certainly did. It had a very powerful effect. My mother taught English in a girl's school before she got married and then when she got married she had to give up her job because that's what women had to do by law. Then when the war broke out married women were called back because the men

were in the armed forces so married women went back to work. And I think that had a very strong influence on women's emancipation. The war itself. As the first world war in Britain brought the vote, so the second world war made women realize that they didn't have to stay at home. But when they were married there was a possibility of a dual career and we were certainly brought up by my mother although she had given up her career later, she believed that we should have a career as well. Nobody explained how you did this. In practical terms it was never as easy. You had to invent how to do it. But the expectation was that you could go to university and have a career and get married and have children which we tried to do anyway.

RU: But this liberation doubled the responsibility of women, they were expected to be efficient both at home and at work.

MD: They still are. I think it was one of those things that wasn't thought through. It wasn't really appreciated particularly as all domestic servants disappeared during the second world war. Before the second world war even my parents who were not very well off had a maid and they actually called her a maid which is something you would never do socially now, you would never refer to a maid except in very high societies. But we had this girl who was completely untrained girl, who was just a general help around the house. And that all disappeared with the war. In fact, we had a wonderful maid called Nelly who I was terribly fond of. She used to look after us when my mother was teaching, and she was called out by the armed forces, she was called up into the A.T.S. I don't even know what it stands for. She went off into the army and that was a great breakpoint as well and suddenly all these young girls, there had been plenty of them, they all vanished. They realized that they could get better jobs than just being a domestic servant. That completely changed the nature of domestic life, but also the other great revolution after the war in women's lives was the sort of machinery revolution. The washing machine. I remember the first washing machine we ever had. We had a prototype dishwasher which never worked, a complete disaster. We had to wait another twenty years before we got one which worked. But my father was always very interested in that sort of a thing because he was a feminist himself. He thought it was wrong that women should spend all their time in the kitchen, so he would always try and get any new bit of equipment and that made an enormous difference as well. The electric and kitchen equipment. I remember the first mixing machine, the first one of those which had little electric beaters that just went around - just so thrilling. That was the beginning of the possibility of what we now consider perfectly normal modern life.

RU: We take things for granted.

MD: Absolutely. Nobody had a refrigerator. Now not only do we have refrigerators, we have the freezers and all these things made sort of women's double lives more possible than they would have been. So it was very much a period of rapid change. And all the attitudes that went with that were changing too, but some more slowly than the others.

RU: Is the difference between the North and South becoming less significant to you?

MD: No, I am still fascinated by it. I am writing a piece at this moment about the idea of the city and I am sort of trying to contrast London and Sheffield my home town. It could fit equally well with Hull or Manchester. And I think there is a big difference between the southern metropolitan city and the

provincial city which is much more self reliant for its entertainment and social life and so on. And also the attitudes are very different [of the people]... London is a very cosmopolitan city...

RU: In fact over the three years Hull has changed a lot...

MD: So it's developing?

RU: It is. In places like Hull one gets students from all over the world.

MD: Well, that's probably a new lease of life without the university that would never have happened. I think Sheffield has that. But after the war when I was a child this wouldn't have been true at all. Sheffield was a very homogeneous society and people didn't travel very much. They really did stay at home. And quite often we would meet people who lived in Sheffield, who had never been as far as Leeds, which was the next big city. I don't think I ever went as a child. It was a big journey in those days because the transport wasn't so good. And there were very few people from any other ethnic group in Sheffield. I remember the first Greek restaurant that I went to and this was a tremendous excitement. My father took me and it was thrilling going and the food was unlike anything I'd ever had before, really exciting. And I thought London must be even more exciting and indeed, I remember the first curry I had in London which was in a restaurant just by Leicester Square, and that was wonderful. A taste of a new world. That was just not the way we were in Sheffield when I was a child. So it was a much narrower world which is what some of the characters are trying to escape from. But now that world itself has opened up very well. In any northern city now you will find Indian, Chinese, Thai restaurants, Mexican restaurants. The whole attitude has changed. It's a great improvement on life. English restaurant cooking is terrible. There was very little food when I was a child. You didn't starve, but there was very little choice of food. So to me the North represented something that lacked variety, lacked choice and it's no longer true. One of the things I wanted to suggest in writing A Natural Curiosity is that the North itself had changed out of all recognition. That now you could shop, you could have parties, meet all sorts of interesting people.

RU: And this wasn't the case earlier?

MD: No, it really wasn't. It was very much a self contained society. And I think there are a lot of reasons for this. Transport was difficult. Nobody had a car. There was no petrol. You had to go everywhere by public transport which was expensive. The ethnic restaurants did not exist. Overseas students didn't come to Britain in those days. Everything was much of a much. And that's completely altered now for the better.

RU: The atmosphere is much more casual in Hull and Leeds than in London...

MD: But again that wasn't true when I was young. People were more respectable. Class distinctions were stronger. They were stronger than they are now. You either went to a private school and wore a uniform or you went to the school without the uniform and you were considered a bit rough or common. And now none of that exists. It's all completely open at school. I mean, I can't tell a difference between a university student and somebody who works at a shop, by dress it's very hard to tell. You could easily tell in those days. So I think that has been a big change.

RU: In The Trilogy, Liz looks at North with a different eye and so does Alix. In fact she does not regret going back.

MD: Alix likes it better. I mean Alix has come to feel, I think as a lot of people feel about London. London itself has become very sordid, shabby, potentially violent. You feel much safer in Sheffield, Hull or Leeds. You could walk down the streets at night. You feel on the whole much safer.

RU: Comparatively?

MD: You don't feel hundred percent safe anywhere. I was talking about this to David Lodge who lives in Birmingham. We were having a discussion about the 1980's and he made the point that he thought that the quality of life in Birmingham had improved very dramatically in the last four or five years whereas in London it had possibly gone down. And I thought that was a very interesting point. He felt that affluence had spread to the North. Restaurant and travelling facilities. Choice had reached the North whereas London had begun to strangle itself. There is too much traffic there. There is a sort of bad temper, simply the overloading. The whole thing is like a parody of itself. It's lost a certain reality. And also there are certain things that happen in London which I was trying to catch with the bit about the murderer and the Horror of Harrow road. There is a sort of feeling of underlying menace in London which isn't necessarily anything to do with anything real - just an atmosphere. To me this is reflected very much in travelling on the underground. There is no exit. All the people cramped together. And then one or two terrible tragedies like the King's Cross fire. It just makes the whole thing seem worse. And I think David Lodge is right that life is more civilized now up North. It used to be less civilized and is now more civilized. But we put up commuting conditions. I mean who would be a commuter standing on one of those trains in and out of London everyday of their lives.

As I observe Sheffield - the transport system is much better. The distances are not so great and the same is probably true of Hull. Therefore you can travel more comfortably. Whereas here, because this huge commercial machine is there, people are crowding in and crowding out. I went to Paddington the other day to catch a train to Oxford and it took me about an hour and half to get to Paddington because there were two trains, one broke down and one had a bomb scare. If I had gone there by car I would have been there before I got off the underground at Paddington and I could have driven to Oxford within an hour. And the whole thing seems to be counter-productive as well. As we all know we shouldn't be driving because it is anti-social to drive everywhere. But at the same time, if it takes you so long on public transport, the temptation to drive is overwhelming. One of the things that Alix feels is that what a joy it is to get in your car and go and get out in twenty minutes - is wonderful.

RU: And Shirley does the same...

MD: Yes, you can just escape.

RU: I found her character very interesting. Isn't it true that through her eyes you were exploring the key notions of the North versus the South, the good versus evil, lust or desire versus repression, provincial versus the other life?

MD: Yes, yes.

RU: Shirley thinks she's missed out on life. But when she looks at the world outside, that is, on her way to Dover, the sight of the cafe puts her off. She marvels at the state of contemporary society.

MD: It's worse, it's worse than what she has run away from.

RU: Do you worry a great deal about the contemporary state of Britain?

MD: I sometimes do. But now, it depends where I am. There are some days when everything is just fine and then there are other days when you're on your way to Paddington on the tube where it is tiring, and the IRA are bombing the station, and you really feel - what if... But this morning when the sun was shining when I went off to Hampstead Garden for the view, I thought it was all very beautiful. So it's very relative, but one of the good things about writing a novel is you can explore people's relative feelings and say and suggest reasons why. Shirley sees things in particularly a black way is because she's just had a shocking experience. It's not a balanced judgement of herself, it's partly her response to shock.

RU: You don't think it's a balanced judgement?

MD: Not wholly. I think that if she had been feeling better she wouldn't have noticed it.

RU: So you do agree that you've come to accept a change in the landscape of the North, and rather positively.

MD: Yes, very much so.

RU: On the whole your women have a very deep sense of place, do you think that it's very important for the writer to situate characters within a specific landscape?

MD: For me it's very important. I'm not sure that it is as important for all writers, but to me it is and this may be because of my own earlier experiences. I feel it's important to show where my characters come from but other writers don't seem to feel this need and I don't know why I feel so particularly strong about it.

RU: Do you feel you are able to relate to other aspects of life through the means of landscape?

MD: Yes, I feel that. In my twenty's, I was much influenced by Wordsworth and by the idea that writing springs out of place and we're created by the places we live in. And I think that continues to mean a great deal to me. The association of place is very formative in the character and I don't know whether people who move around a lot, may be would lose their sense of place. Therefore they look for roots in something different, in family ancestors.

RU: But is it a process of looking back - when you've left a place - that you love to recreate and reconstruct?

MD: No. But I think to a certain degree, most writers do this, they're constantly looking in their childhood for what made them what they are today. They're looking for explanations in their childhood of how they're responding as adults which is a perfectly sensible thing to do, because we are

all the child of our past. Some writers look in families but I also look in places. Yes, I'm trying to reconstruct certain feelings about place and I feel if only I could completely revisit or reconstruct something in the past it would be a clue to a lot of what I feel or care about now because you can't necessarily reconstruct, you can't even revisit some of the places because it's been destroyed.

RU: The family seems very important within the landscape, perhaps it affects the way you look at it?

MD: Yes, I'm sure it does.

RU: Someone like Clara feels choked by her family and wishes to move away as soon as possible. Liz feels the same about her past and is still seeking something of her future in the past...

MD: Clara is very similar in that respect, she feels she's been trapped... Clara and Liz have a lot of similarities, they both want to run away from this suburban place that seems to them to be very threatening but my view about them both is, they can't really do that until they understand what it is they are running away from. And I'm undecided whether that is necessary or not, some people are better than others at moving away, and writers in particular. I think there is a parallel here with psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, that one is particularly interested in the past. I mean some people never think about the past at all, they just don't bother. I think writers are in particular curious about the past.

RU: You said that Liz is asking what is it that she's running away from, even Frances says what for, what's all this for? Is this discontent a sign of disillusionment with their current state of existence?

MD: But then again, that seems to be completely natural state and I think to be content, to be in a state of permanent content is unnatural. I think it's much more productive to feel discontent, to be wanting to move on, to search one self, to be seeking the next thing onward. I think particularly in terms of writing a novel, you don't want to write about people who have come to the end of their quest in life. You've got nothing to say then, so I think they are searching still. I think the peculiar feature, that you are quite right to point out is that they look for the future in their past. They feel that the clue to their future lies in the past.

RU: Which is not absolutely true?

MD: It's not absolutely true. The dissatisfaction is perfectly reasonable, so long as one doesn't become bitter with it. It's a perfectly normal response to life. And what I try to do is to show you can be both dissatisfied and happy at the same time. You can be dissatisfied one day and perfectly happy in the next. It's perfectly natural process.

RU: Do you see it as a natural human condition?

MD: Yes. This is precisely what I like to do in my novels, explore and show how characters go in and out of moods without any one of them being the final statement about the characters or a way of life.

RU: A Natural Curiosity ends on a note of reconciliation. The characters say that it's not so easy to come to an end of a solution.

MD: And it doesn't matter very much. They'll just carry on the next stage... and even when you're dead it doesn't come to an end because the children and the people you influence and all the rest of it is just carrying on, so you never see the end.

I think I don't ever come to any final conclusion and it seems to me - you think you've sorted out one set of queries about life - and then a whole new set presents itself. I think that writing novels to me is a continuous process. Each one leads to the next set of enquiries and you don't come to an end. You may change the form but you don't come to the end. I don't necessarily think that Alix would stay in the North, for example, forever. I don't think her life has come to a complete circle, there is possibly another stage, and another landscape that will attract her beyond that. And I don't see life or fiction in terms of final answers.

RU: It's a means of probing...

MD: It's a means of looking and you may find another way of doing it, or another area to look at.

RU: So you would agree that your women have matured. They have achieved a certain sense of maturity in their outlook towards life?

MD: I hope so, yes.

RU: On one hand you say that landscape affects the character, and on the other can we say that it's the characters which determine the landscape?

MD: The characters will determine the landscape, where they can choose which landscape they live in, they can affect the choices in that sense and people are certainly creating environment. I think that one person can't change a landscape, on the other hand, but I think it's absolutely true that one person can see a landscape differently depending whether there are people in despair, ill, well or whatever. To me there's a continual interchange between person and landscape that is not as static. We are all affected by landscape and are also reading it differently and putting different things back into it.

RU: So it's also the eye that affects the I?

MD: Very much so, there is a wonderful line in Wordsworth that I can't remember correctly, something about the eye that half creates what it perceives. I think I put that slightly wrong, but it's a line any Wordsworthian would know. [Half create what you perceive.] I think it's right, but it is very much the concept that you half create what you see.

RU: "For the eye that half creates is the eye that half perceives".

MD: That is true, you find what you look for, but it's also true on a very simple practical level that you go and look for landscapes that nourish you as a person. I mean that is why people on a very basic level choose to go on holidays in certain kinds of landscapes because they find it spiritually restoring. I love walking in the countryside. Some people find it very boring but I just love walking an hour or two and I find this very restoring indeed. But that means that I have made the effort to go and look for the landscape, it hasn't come to me. I chose to go and look for it.

RU: That reminds me of a current phenomena in your novels your women do tend to go for walks.

MD: They love going for walks. Yes, they like going for walks, this just reflects my own way of working. I mean I tend to think while I'm walking and my ideal day is when I write in the morning and then walk in the afternoon thinking of the next day's work. And while I'm walking, I will actually, and it could be that the thing I'm working on is in no way related to the landscape I'm walking in, but is set in some other part of the world but while I'm walking, there is something about the act of walking through nature, I prefer naturalized setting although I quite like walking in London as well, that the act of walking would actually solve my plot problems. It would clear my mind, give some plot to me, which doesn't happen if you're just sitting.

RU: It's very refreshing.

MD: Do you like walking?

RU: Yes, I do. I find it interesting that either your women would give a party which is again a landscape created indoors, or they would go for a picnic.

MD: Absolutely right, again, you're absolutely right. I hadn't thought of it. It's something I've never thought about, like giving a party is creating an inner scene or designing your own landscape of people, tables and drinks. You're designing it.

RU: You have a sense of control over it.

MD: Yes, it's a sort, whereas when you're walking, the landscape has more control over you. You can choose which walk you go, but once you have chosen it, it will affect you. And I have walked quite a lot of the west country now and there are various walks that I really love and in the evenings or the afternoon, I will decide which to go and sometimes I feel like going to the high wood field walks and sometimes I particularly love the deep valley walks which my husband doesn't like - to be overshadowed by trees - but I love those deep walks and I find them very good for thinking, whereas I know some people may find it claustrophobic.

RU: Don't you feel threatened by it?

MD: I feel very safe in it. It's very interesting some people feel threatened by deep woodland and some people feel very safe. I tend to feel very safe in a very enclosed landscape but I enjoy open landscapes as well but it is all to do, or a lot of it is to do with childhood experience or all formative experience. For example, my husband doesn't like open moorland, like some of the Yorkshire moors or Exmoor and Dartmoor because he did his military service and it always reminds him of all these terrible military exercises. I quite like that sort of landscapes, but I can see that for him it has very powerful, unpleasant associations and I think this is something interesting. The house I described in A Natural Curiosity, with all the dogs which is in a very beautiful Yorkshire valley, and that was a very strange bit of landscape that I went to, with my youngest son. We were looking for a house to buy. He and I drove off together. It was somewhere in Gloucestershire. And as soon as we saw this house, this terribly sinister feeling came out, although it was a very attractive house but it was a landscape that was so full of menace.

RU: So Angela's house is real?

MD: It was a real place. It was full of dogs. Well, most of the dogs had gone, but there were still some there.

And in fact I took so much of that from life. That was a very uncanny experience, going through this very attractive, peaceful rural landscape and you find what looks like a beautiful, harmonious house and then you realise there was something really wrong. It had a sinister feel to it.

RU: Yes, it was really shocking when Alix goes in and sees all those dogs.

MD: Well, I didn't see anything as bad as that. I got that bit out of a newspaper cutting about dog breeders in Wales.

RU: You seem to be rather fond of Alix?

MD: Yes, I like Alix.

RU: She is very good to all. She has this sense of being kind and gentle even towards the outcasts. This reminds me of the notion of karma in the Hindu philosophy and how destiny is shaped by one's karma. Would you be able to see any connection between the two?

MD: I think somebody told me Alix has a Buddhist past. I don't know what she is but I think that she is somebody who in another context would have been religious or would have had a more religious concept of life than she allows herself to have in this post-industrial British society where I don't think Christianity is particularly helpful, at least not in its institutional forms. So maybe something more Oriental is nearer to her attitude. I think she finds institutional Christianity unacceptable partly because of the state, well it's an institution and it doesn't practice what it preaches to others, so therefore, she is much more likely to find something more spiritual which I think where Buddhism and Hinduism are attractive. But I don't know much about it...

RU: In Hinduism, we don't have this concept of evil coming from outside nor the notion of Original sin...

MD: Ah! That's very much to Alix's taste as well. Alix doesn't like the idea of natural evil sort of invading you. It doesn't make sense to her and Original sin again I've always thought strange. I think it's one of the most unacceptable parts of Judaic tradition. I find monotheism strange. It seems to me, Alix also verges on pantheism. She sees a good in every tree and river. I mean and I feel life is full of multiple influences which presumably Hindu religion also admits; that there are multiple powers rather than just one monolithic power which I've never found plausible, the big bang god. It seems more like powers of influences. I think it's a big mistake really to look for one answer. The only answer to everything which is what monotheism and some western philosophers are trying to do is to reduce everything to one logical position. It seems to me a mistaken adventure. Also, this search for the sort of the ultimate philosophical answer is very reductive because it just means your impressions get smaller and smaller as you try and reduce all truth to one sentence, that you'll never find it, I think once you can accept there is no one sentence that is the truth, then life becomes much more acceptable, much less painful. But I can see some temperaments they are just forced to search for that one answer.

RU: Talking about evil, does the question of evil bother you?

MD: No, it doesn't really bother me. I don't in a way believe in it. I think that evil is error and we often act badly by mistake or we can act badly through pathology. I mean for example, Paul Whitmore. Something terrible can go wrong like a baby can be born with some terrible birth defect and so you can be born with a psychological birth defect but to call it evil seems to me to be inventing a word when you don't need it. I think there can be such a thing as a bad act, bad in its consequences or bad in its intentions, but I don't think evil as an abstract exists nor could.

RU: Lately you seem to be questioning the nature of evil?

MD: Yes, I do. I hate it when you hear judges or politicians saying he's an evil man, how do they know. I feel even if you were a Christian, which I can't claim I am, you wouldn't say that, you would say God understands and forgives and Christ may forgive but it's not for man to judge, so I don't like it when they say people (were) are evil. It just upsets me, they've used the word very glibly. Remember when they were going about Saddam Hussein being evil, I found that unhelpful as a word. I mean there are a lot of things you can say about him but it's a word that takes us into a different realm, that gets you nowhere. I mean aggressive, dangerous, all these words are fine, but if you say evil, it implies you're good and he's evil and I can't see that.

RU: This passing of judgement on man - is unchristian?

MD: I think so, and that is why I feel, I mean I just find it ridiculous when everybody claims their lot are good, but of course Saddam Hussein told his chaps they were good. I always found it not a useful way of talking. I mean, I think you can talk about our political system being better, more fair and more democratic, more egalitarian, we use less terror therefore we're a better society, I understand that sort of argument... Every society says they're good and other societies are evil, but it just doesn't progress, doesn't advance civilization in anyway to use those words in that way... that's possibly because they're misused so much.

RU: I was wondering what Charles was heading for when he picked up the Koran?

MD: Well, I mean, he was in my view behaving better than a lot of people who say Islam is wicked, never even open the book. I mean I am sick of hearing people say Muslims are wicked and Islam is a wicked religion when they've never even looked inside the Koran. And similarly, I am sure that a lot of Muslims say that Salman Rushdie is wicked or Christianity is wicked and that all Israelis are wicked without having read a single word of The Old Testament or a single word of The Satanic Verses. So I mean, I just wanted to show that Charles at least tried a little bit, he didn't get very far but he tried. He made an effort and it was humbling to him. He realised he wasn't going to sum up about the life of other people, and it also gave him a reassuring need to go home. I mean he then decided to go home to be a better father.

RU: After his experience?

MD: But not because of reading the Koran, because of the failure of his mission to discover anything in particular and his sense of cowardism and failure. He realised it was a personal hang up of his that had taken him out there. There was nothing he could do, and so in a way his reading of the Koran and his reading of the Bible were a revelation to him and his roots

really being back home. So he goes back and listens to his children, and that seems to me a perfectly valid conclusion. It's not a very religious conclusion, but in human terms it's better for him.

RU: I believe he turned out a better person.

MD: Yes, correct. A better father and a better person.

RU: Do you agree that man is basically born good and it's society that makes him evil? What about someone like Whitmore?

MD: I don't know. I think that is one of the biggest questions ever asked. I think that man is born good. I don't believe that a little baby is born evil. I think a little baby can be born with a defect as a baby can be born mentally handicapped, so it's possibly a psychological handicap, that I do believe. But to say that a child was evil doesn't mean anything. That's partly why I wrote that character, because I am fascinated about why it is that certain people commit what are obviously, one hesitates to use the word evil or wicked, but acts that are what you might call unfair to other people like murder. What it is that makes a person, and on a bigger scale, what it is that makes a person a Hitler, Polpot or a Saddam Hussein with a regime that does torture, that licenses the use of torture and deaths and so on? And I'm interested in that, but I find it more interesting to try and trace how it began rather than just say this is evil. It is interesting to work out why. And I'm interested in quite a lot of interesting histories of Hitler, to find out his background and what it was that made him behave in this obsessional way, in particular about the Jews. I find that more interesting than just saying he was evil. So in a way, Paul Whitmore is my little model of this.

RU: Is he a little theorem?

MD: Yes, a little theorem.

RU: Alix admits that from the beginning he was my theorem and I had to prove him.

MD: That's right, and of course, you see her very anxious to prove her point through him which is that evil does not exist. One of the weakness in her case which Esther pointed out at the end of the book was if he had been a different kind of murderer she wouldn't have been sympathetic to him or interested in him. It was only because of the kind of chap that he is that she's been able to maintain a relationship with him. If he had been a different kind of murderer she would have lost sympathy very quickly.

RU: Yes, he is a different kind of murderer because he is very sentimental about the things he is reading. He is a kind of modern savage. Alix says he must read Swinburne, and I found that very humorous, very funny.

MD: Yes, exactly.

RU: Is it true then that in a way we try to give our own answers to the questions we ask?

MD: Yes, any question we ask, we are bound to give our own answers. Except occasionally when brought up shockingly against evidence that doesn't fit our theorem then we have to reshape our proposition. I had a letter the other day from a woman who had read A Natural Curiosity and she

said she was particularly interested in the bit, there was one sentence where the poet Beaver has written a letter to one of the newspapers about the execution of a Jamaican... She wrote to me saying that she was in correspondence with a murderer on death-row in Jamaica. And she said the case was very similar to the one I described in the novel, and had I any suggestions about how to get him off death row because I have absolutely none at all. I wrote back and I said you've done it. She'd written to Amnesty International. She'd done all the sensible things. It was a very intelligent letter. I knew she had done everything she could. She had written to the privy counsel. I wrote back and I said you have done everything you can, and I wish I had some more suggestions. Then I said can you tell me how you got in touch with your murderer, and she wrote back, and said I got in touch with him through Amnesty International. And I have to say he is not a very nice murderer. He actually is out for himself all the time. He thinks he didn't have a fair trial and she is against capital punishment (just as a fact)but she did say that he wasn't particularly sensitive or poetic murderer. He was just sort of... just as well he didn't write a good letter but nevertheless... She was obviously an Alix character... she was carrying on like this. She is still writing. You can be in death row for years.

RU: Has she met him?

MD: No, she hasn't and probably never will. They are just pen pals and he must have applied for a pen pal through Amnesty, and in a way you might say the very fact that he wanted a pen pal, means that he was looking for some way of contact. And she is willing to provide this with very little reward for herself. I found that very touching. She gets nothing back from these rather illiterate letters, but that he does appreciate... her writing. It's not particularly rewarding, writing letters to somebody like that. I find that very touching, that she'd bothered to do it.

In Christianity you're supposed to believe in evil but a lot of Christians naturally dislike the concept, so they try and shy away from it and talk as little about hell and Satan as they possibly can. And I was certainly brought up myself in a Quaker school which very much dislike the idea of Satan and Original sin. I remember being told by our teacher of scriptures that she didn't like the idea herself, which I suppose, is technical heresy. Quakers were very broad minded.

RU: Is to understand all is to forgive all?

MD: That is another Christian point of view.

RU: When I read The Needle's Eye, I felt there was something of a Quaker in Rose. Is it so?

MD: Yes, there is. I was brought up, I mean the school I went to was very influential, although there were some bits that I rejected, some people I thought were very self-righteous, but nevertheless the ethos was tolerant...

RU: But isn't the notion of goodness also tied in with the notion of possession in Rose?

MD: No, possession or lack of possession?

RU: As a child, when her father's house was burgled she says that - I will not possess something that will not belong to me permanently - I shall not have it. I shall not grieve for it.

MD: Yes, that's interesting. I had forgotten the text.

RU: Is moral perspective in a character a narrow perspective?

MD: Yes. I think as one gets older one becomes increasingly relativist to one's position, because the older you get, the more people you meet who have been brought up in a totally different moral or ethical tradition who nevertheless do show your own deeper views, so you can no longer see a particular ethical position as being the product of one religion only. And I think in a way the world is moving this way and with some exception like fundamentalists in Christianity and in the Muslim world...

RU: Even in Hinduism...

MD: That's absolutely true, so there is a sort of constant strife between fundamentalism which is trying to take people back to first principles and the advancing tolerance and relativity in which we can see we're all part of the same world which is much more sympathetic to me. The idea that each religion is a reflection of the same human pilgrimage if you like, rather than they are exclusive. And I think when they think they are exclusive they start to look back... Society - yours, ours and everywhere - is full of such extraordinary undercurrents that break up in psychotic way.

RU: In what sense would there be a tragic vision in the modern world?

MD: I don't know, oh dear.

RU: Or is there such a thing as tragic vision?

MD: Is there such a thing as a tragic vision? I honestly don't know and I suppose I see us now as living at the end of a historical cycle and we can't quite see the beginning of the next one. And I have a feeling that the great, you know if you can put it in terms of the great ages of religion were succeeded by the enlightenment, which was succeeded by the industrial revolution and now we're in the technological revolution and now we can't quite see what the next stage will be. And this is in a way a tragic predicament. Because your consciousness is seeking the next and there is no way you can see it. Because you're finite and you will only live another x number of years and you'll never know the answer to these things and that is a tragic condition but...

RU: Very daunting.

MD: Yes it is. I think the frustrating thing about human condition is that you can never come to the end of the story. And at the moment, we are sort of on the edge of discovering the next phase, I feel. And we haven't found it yet. We have so much unanswered and this is a vision of man's limitation if you like. The possibilities seem enormous and yet we only have our own life to explore it...

RU: But as a writer you feel that one has a slight edge over the others and one can explore it?

MD: You can explore it. You can lead more lives than one. Yes, I think that's absolutely true. But I have this theory that (at the moment) the human brain can only take in one set of events at once but gradually we're evolving

towards a process of taking in more and more and more simultaneous information. And that we will sort of transcend some of the limitations we have. And that writers can glimpse and nuclear physicists and various categories of people can live beyond the shortness of our time into a longer period...

RU: Is it a kind of leap?

MD: An evolutionary sort, always an evolutionary leap. And if we look at the history of man, I mean one of the things we've learnt over the last hundred years was how infinitesimally small humanity is in terms of the clock of the universe and they say that man was born on the stroke to midnight on the clock of time. And when you think that in that case in five minutes, what might have happened to the evolution of human consciousness, if you like, human physique and this is the sort of comparison that people couldn't make in the seventeenth century. There was no idea, knowledge of time, of the physical age of the universe, and we may discover that the whole thing is an illusion. And that all these nuclear physics is just not true. It could be that we'll move into outer space, at least mentally if not physically. We will take evolutionary jump.

RU: At least we can imagine it.

MD: I remember as a child being fascinated by the idea of where space ended and what was beyond the solar system, beyond the universe... All these things can be answered, perhaps eventually, we may start venturing out.

RU: Do you feel that sometimes you imagine a landscape and it's there?

MD: Yes, I do.

RU: Do you feel that there is some relationship between you and Frances?

MD: Yes, absolutely. I think archaeology is a very good metaphor for writing fiction. You are building structures and they sort of correspond to something in the outer world if you're lucky. If you're unlucky you make something nonsensical, but if you're lucky you dig something worthwhile. Similarly, in writing a novel you're creating a sort of pattern and other people would see the pattern you're interpreting. That's exciting.

RU: But when you write do you have the reader in mind?

MD: No, not very consciously. But I do have by now, because I've written a few novels and have had a certain amount of feedback. I do now have the confidence to know that there are readers out there who will be interested in certain of my own obsessions that I might have thought private obsessions, but I just know that there will be x number of people who if I'm interested in it, so will they be. And that's a very companionable feeling to know that people are interested to know what happens to so and so, who identify with and say I've seen them in her or him, and that's a good feeling. It is not as if you're writing for them, you know, you're better at journeying along a similar kind of journey...

RU: No anxiety of reader?

MD: Not really. I have some confidence in the readers and I think readers are quite good, readers are quite patient and perceptive. I feel that they do know

what we're getting at. Sometimes you can be shocked when you talk to some people about their thoughts...

RU: Do they bring your text upside down?

MD: Absolutely and that's quite shocking. And then you think, well, if they saw that then maybe I did put that in. You have to ask yourself whether their view is as valid as yours.

RU: What would you say in defense of authorial intrusion in your later novels?

MD: My view is that the reader can disagree. The reader can say to the author, look you've got this wrong, and in a way that's what some of my authorial intrusions are. One or two of them do actually say to the reader what do you think, I have given you the evidence. If you come to a different conclusion as a member of the jury of the readers, that's fine. So my authorial intrusion is really a kind of... I mean some people have called it domineering. I think in a way it is the reverse. It's sort of saying that's how I see it how do you see it...

RU: Or is it a way of bringing in comic vision into the text?

MD: Yes, absolutely. It is a sort of comic vision. It's a way of saying - I don't know maybe you know.

It is partly a joke, a sort of game. It's not meant to be telling people what to think. It's asking what they think, and it's sort of saying it's only a novel. I think that my view is that readers are very quick these days, they understand that sort of thing. They are not shocked to be addressed. It's part of the relationship between the reader and the writer, some people object and some people don't.

RU: Does that mean that when you're writing, you aim to entertain and to instruct?

MD: Yes, absolutely. And partly I want to find out what other people think and that is a perfectly genuine desire on my part. So when as author, I say what do you think? I know a reader can't ring up and tell me but I can. You do get a sense of what people think, when you write a book. You do get quite a lot of feedback. I mean, not only from people like yourself, but from people who write to you from reviews. So you get a sense of how people respond and that's very interesting. Then in the next book you can use it, in fact Shirley in A Natural Curiosity, is partly a response to a very interesting letter I had from somebody. A reader wrote me a very interesting letter and I thought that's absolutely fair, a point about the difference between Liz's life and Shirley's life. And I thought, I'd deal with that so there is more on Shirley...

RU: As a writer do you find it useful to get feedback?

MD: Yes. I now do like to think I'm not sort of throwing words out into nowhere, and also they are not solid blocks that are completely impenetrable. They are part of a structure which is a part of other people's lives and interests, those are sort of intertextual...

RU: And is that the reason why you have many more characters in your later novels?

MD: I think it is partly. Yes, I mean my first novels were much more inward looking, they were self-absorbed in the way young people tend to be. You'd have to solve your own problems then you can start to be interested in other people's. I think as you get older you can handle a larger cast of figures and you're more interested in what other people are like and how they actually fit together in society...

RU: Female friendship is an important aspect of your novels. Do you consider it important in life?

MD: Female friendships are very important and also fashionable at the moment. Earlier female rivalry was the main subject. I think women are very good at being friends. I think people now behave less as water tight compartments. They are now much more open. Now women are much more energetic about preserving their friendships and I like that.

RU: I'm also looking at the novels of Anita Desai. I think that landscape is very important for her. Have you read her?

MD: I read her first book and I've read several of her later ones. We met each other in Delhi and I've seen her since. Very very nice person and a very interesting writer, because she lives between two cultures. She is creating a completely different landscape.

RU: I want to see how two writers from two different cultures specifically focus on women and how their women react to landscape?

MD: I think it's a very good, very valued subject.

Appendix B: Interview with Anita Desai

RU: How would you explain the use of landscape in your writings?

AD: I suppose if you've read the books you will realize it is a very important element in my books may be because it's important to me. I do react to places. I find through a description of a landscape one can convey so much about character, society, history and time.

RU: Do you see a difference between landscape in a painting and one in literature?

AD: In a painting it can be an end in itself. I don't think it can in literature. Literature has many more dimensions - in which landscape can be one, can be important or unimportant but it cannot be a whole.

RU: Does the character determine landscape or vice versa?

AD: I don't think there is any one dominant feature. When you are writing a book you put different features together.

RU: Your women show a great dissatisfaction with the material and the social world. What is it that they seek in a landscape?

AD: I suppose they find in landscape a strong sense of pattern, harmony, which they want in their lives and they lack. And when they cannot have it in society and relationships they turn to landscape.

RU: Even mediation is not satisfying?

AD: I don't think one is under constraint to end a book happily, under perfect conditions. I am not looking for a happy solution, rather some kind of resolution which may only be a reiteration of thoughts and experiences. It doesn't always entail happiness.

RU: Quite a few of your books are very sad and violent. Why is it so?

AD: I don't think books can possibly have happy endings, in the same way, just as lives do not have happy endings in modern times.

RU: In Where Shall We Go This Summer Sita chooses to reconcile to her situation. Is it a forced reconciliation?

AD: It's hardly a reconciliation, it's simply an acceptance, after tiredness and fatigue. An acceptance of life which she cannot change.

RU: Would you say Bim is a similar case?

AD: Bim has a different understanding. She is much more understanding towards it. She sees it, studies it and tries to understand it.

RU: Is Bim a "new" woman?

AD: After all she is an older woman. She is sorting out her life which is not entirely isolated. She has responsibilities, commitments. In her acceptance I don't see anything new about her. Women have been committed to responsibilities for centuries. I can think of a great many older women in the past generation who were very courageous and strong, had great achievements. But I don't think one can simplify characters by putting labels on them.

RU: She doesn't fit as a "new" woman?

AD: No, she doesn't. I never thought of writing about new woman. Somebody from a later generation might.

RU: But she does say to her sister that she is trying to train her students "to be a new kind of woman from you or me..." (CL 125)

AD: She is certainly not contented with her own life, desperately dissatisfied with it. She doesn't quite cut herself off from society. She was irritated with her sister for controlling her daughters lives.

RU: What do you feel about women in the past?

AD: Women nowadays have greater opportunities, greater possibilities than in the past generations. In the past generation opportunities didn't exist for women. It doesn't mean that they were less gifted or less creative in any way.

RU: Is there a tradition of women's writing in India?

AD: There is indeed a very strong tradition in regional languages. There are many women who wrote, for example in Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi. Less so in English - but there have been many women writers.

RU: Do you find it hard to reconcile to disparate views of your women? Western readership sees their predicament as specifically Indian whilst the Indian reader says your woman is westernised.

AD: If my writing is westernised there is a whole section of Indian society that is westernised. Whole range of people brought up in urban areas have been exposed to western ideas through literature. I find it a curious denial of history to keep claiming India is something pure. India has always been exposed to foreign influences. Before the English were the Muslims. It would be denial of history which has never been a pure tradition. I don't see a society within India where the tradition was pure. It has been so mixed. Our society is a very mixed one. And I find it very interesting to write about it.

RU: For some Indian men at a seminar character of Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer was inconceivable.

AD: I think that is probably a lack of understanding. That doesn't really show much sensitivity to life and the issue of giving birth to a child in the world. If you listen to all this criticism it would stop you from writing or make you write a different book not follow your own way... Perhaps they are so content, that they refuse to believe women can face discontent, dissatisfaction.

AD: Do you think Indian men live with stereotypes?

AD: I am sure it must be comfortable to live with stereotypes.

RU: Do you feel that is being questioned?

AD: Oh yes! Within Indian society questions are being raised and changes made.

RU: Do you see yourself as a feminist?

AD: One begins to feel is this a party meeting where you are supposed to subscribe. I am not a card holder. But of course, my books are about women. It's only because I understand them better. Being a woman writer I certainly am interested in women, but not exclusively. I don't want to narrow my writing down.

RU: Is that why you chose to write about different issues in your later novels?

AD: I certainly do not want to write again and again about the same people.

RU: Is Baumgartner's Bombay an attempt to move out, to explore differently?

AD: I had to write about him for different reasons. Certainly it was a liberation of different sorts to write about him. His case was thoroughly restricted by one's character for one and also by the historic movement. I wanted to show at least he survived. Many don't.

RU: Do you believe that life is pre-ordained?

AD: No. Because that would lead you into who is planning it, and where, and who has ordained it. I don't think we are anywhere near to answering that question. There are so many things which design one's life. One isn't in control as one would like to think... Most constraints are forced by society/history, time which you are born in...

RU: Would you call yourself a religious person?

AD: No. Because I don't observe any orthodox tradition...

RU: Could you tell me something about your parents?

AD: We were brought up as outsiders. My father was from Bengal and mother from Germany. They came to live in Delhi. In a sense they were both outsiders in Delhi. They did not live in either Bengali or German societies.

RU: Could you tell me more about your mother?

AD: My mother was in her thirties when she came to live in India. Germany was at war and she was getting no news or information of her family. Well, it was a very difficult time for her. She was very cut off from her roots. And when Germany was defeated and war was over she never returned. We used to urge her to go back and she said this is home, where my children are. She seemed utterly content to be just there - with her home. It must have been hard. Delhi is not an easy city to live in.

RU: Did your father ever go back to Bengal?

AD: In the same way my father used to get very nostalgic about Bengal. There again history intervened and East Bengal became a part of Pakistan and later Bangla Desh. There was nothing to return to. We knew that our past existed in some way elsewhere. But one didn't have any links with it. And I don't

think I feel attached to it in the same way. It has changed so much.

RU: Do you think constant reference to past is valid for human progress?

AD: It is. You cannot possibly know what sort of world you want, where you are going unless you are aware of what your past is. We are constantly building tracks - searching ways to escape.

RU: Is that why your characters return to the past? Some of your characters seem to live in the past.

AD: It's more for Indians even more than westerners. I can't see how you can write about Indian society without reference to past. There is a greater sense of tradition about what is accepted and what is not than in the West. In India we have hesitation about change. It can be a very rich experience for some and stifling for others...

RU: For someone like Maya past becomes a trap. Why did you make her write her own story?

AD: It seemed inevitable. Caught up in the tradition, social background, she was terribly isolated. Considering the character she was nothing really matters as much as her own consciousness. It wasn't possible to convey it through other voices. Although right at the end of the book other voices do come in... In those days it interested me more to see the character right to the very end.

RU: Do you see characters contact with oneself as an anomaly?

AD: No. I think it is absolutely essential to have some contact with oneself, to have truthful consciousness of oneself, one's character or nature...

RU: Using Anne Brontë's words do you see yourself as a woman with "her feet on the floor"?

AD: Well, yes. One writes in order to face them on the floor, try and find them...

RU: Do you have the consciousness of the reader

AD: No.

RU: Have you ever felt like writing an autobiography?

AD: There are so many constraints. It would be restricting to write about oneself... it's very difficult to write truthfully... In a novel you can give equal importance to other characters...

RU: Is it the character that determines landscape or vice versa?

AD: I don't think there is any one point that you can make... Also I think we haven't really sorted out in our minds whether traditions within certain landscapes are something to be retained or not.

RU: When you talk of tradition - is it social cultural or religious?

AD: In our society it is certainly religious, social and cultural. How many of us are actually willing to explore new ideas and concepts? How many families do you know when it comes to marriage and children's education are willing to explore, experiment with new ideas? There are so many constraints over there.

RU: Do you find living abroad relaxing, that is, as a woman having less constraints?

AD: Yes of course, that is so in this society. There aren't quite so many constraints over here. Delhi is a dreadful city to live in. You have a sense of people's eyes on you, waiting and watching.

RU: Why are we so curious?

AD: Suspicious. I think because we lack a sense of respect for individual privacy.

RU: Is it equally true for both men and women?

AD: It's an answer I really couldn't give so easily. Of course it is easy to say that women are more constrained but men might face similar constraints. They have their enormous commitments too.

RU: But I would say it is easier for men to lead double lives.

AD: But you can't be free unless your mind is free.

RU: How would you interpret the act of setting the forest on fire by Raka now? Were you aware that it could possibly be a subversion of the patriarchal system where Ila Das, Nanda Kaul and Raka exist as outsiders, as marginalized figures?

AD: When I was writing I had no idea what I was going to write, as I wrote it, it became inevitable. Violence is there within

Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and even in the child. Violence is there from the beginning. It is a denial of what they had been led to believe. As for Raka she certainly comes into her own in the land of Kasauli. The child was able to make the gesture of denial. Adults are much constrained.

RU: One wonders what sort of a woman she will be?

AD: Certainly not a very conventional woman. I don't bring in the rest of her life at all.

RU: What do you think of characters like Maya, Sita, Nanda Kaul and Monisha? Using Northrop Frye's words is there "an absence of something or a presence of nothingness" in their lives?

AD: You are trying to say it could be one or it could be other [or both]... A profoundly philosophical question whether nothingness is an absence or presence. Artists are those people who very much feel presence of nothingness and yet out of nothingness one creates something. It adds to the substance of life rather than detract. I suppose characters must have some sense of what the writer feels... I think they are immature characters. They seem unable to break out of the trap they are in. It's just that I have finished with the subject. Having said so, I must admit that I keep on writing about them. As one grows older it's irony rather than melodrama.

RU: Do you put yourself parallel to your women?

AD: Well, yes, of course. With my books I have to acknowledge them. But whereas one is oneself in a fluid state the book has to remain static and I suppose that is why writers lose interest. You have gone beyond them to other books. In case of some it can be a mistake... But on the whole if writing is your way of life you keep writing...

AD: Do you feel Women today don't feel such constraints they are free to change their lives?

RU: Not all, very few...

RU: Do you still feel the urge to keep on writing?

AD: Oh yes! It becomes a way of life, a way of thinking. It's a way of functioning. It changes as one grows older. One doesn't write the same book one wrote ten, fifteen years ago...

RU: As a writer do you see yourself belonging to any particular tradition?

AD: But traditions have lost their identity just as much as countries have. Tradition that I belong to is that of literature - literature that carries, that travels. It is not strictly regional. After all I too have borrowed my tradition from several literatures... My work must have taken from them.

RU: Was the major influence from English literature?

AD: Well, English literature was a major influence. It's historically a fact - that this is how we were taught and brought up. In addition to what I studied in school and college I found Russian and European writers particularly fascinating. Writers like Rilke, Dostoevsky, Sartre, and Camus. I find Russian literature very powerful. It has many levels - it tends to have deeper psychology, philosophy, mysticism - that's particularly revealing to an Indian writer. It can be read as social history.

RU: Indian literature?

AD: As for Indian literature we were taught very little of our own literature. We had to discover it on our own. Nowadays I teach Indian literature.

RU: What is most worrying to you in the contemporary landscape - especially in India?

AD: All kinds of worries, especially about India. There is no time in the world's history when you were entirely free and I don't think we have been terribly good in sorting things out...

RU: Does the question of evil bother you?

AD: It certainly does. As I say I am not a Christian. I don't believe in evil in a Christian sense.

RU: What is so fascinating about Rilke?

AD: I was able to read him in German - the language of my mother. Language didn't come in-between. And he works to make a poem succeed...

RU: In your introduction to Anne Grey you mention that the Brontë sisters managed to "transform the imaginary into real". Thus there is a notion of "seeing" that goes with their landscape.

AD: Whether they created it or it existed. Of course it exists. But it has more significance for a poet or a writer who sees it and realizes it...

RU: Would you call your novels poems in prose?

AD: No, I don't think they are like poetry. They are full of different meanings... A novel has many more dimensions. For a novelist you have to present them through different characters and situations...

RU: Do you imagine and create a landscape?

AD: One meets it halfway by recognizing it through language. My book Fire on the Mountain started just with the landscape - I put the figures later. In a way landscape made their lives, created whole drama. I am sure that's how it was for the Brontës. It was there - they could have written different books - about social gatherings, church goers, but their eyes were turned to landscape, they chose to create a landscape. A new world.

RU: In your essay "*Fengsui* - the spirit of place" you talk about the notion of *feng sui*, it seems to appeal to you.

AD: It's a term I just stumbled across, not something I studied... I came across it in Robert Grave and thought that's what writer is trying to do - to take a situation and a character - and try to give some order. You start off with the term landscape and move on to inscape. I prefer Hopkin's use of inscape... You can use exterior landscape to portray the inner world - through images. Either the reader or writer follows those images and makes something out of them...

RU: Several critics have referred to you as an exile. Would you call yourself an exile in your own country?

AD: It's something which I have never been conscious of. People have actually made me conscious of such a thing. I am left with very little. On my own I don't have a sense of exile because on one's own one searches for those elements in that landscape which one can make one's own and those which one can reject within a landscape, or in society. Such questions make me very self-conscious.

RU: Do you feel at home abroad?

AD: It's too large a generalization to say one is at home here and not so in India. Wherever I go I am quite aware that I am creating my own landscape... There is a great deal you reject and you feel is not your own. Even in the West there are certain elements I accept and some that I reject.

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