

ENCOUNTERING EXPERIENCES IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S *A SUMMER CAGE-BIRD*.

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Abstract:

Margaret Drabble is a representative of postmodern fiction. Her British voice reflects the evolution of human beings, their quest for meaning in life in the postmodern society. The research paper focuses on the construction of "meaning" through the British Writer Margaret Drabble's *A Summer Cage-Bird* proving with the theory of meaning proposed by Viktor Frankl. This paper examines how meaning could be constructive through the encounter of persons and experience of love and how love is a means of salvation and fulfilment. It explores how Drabble revolves her fiction around real life experiences in the novel. This also discusses that love leads to liberation of the individual. Drabble uses the experience of love as a vehicle to express the development of the inner unity, self-awareness, and commitment that are within the potential of humanity in general.

Key words: meaning, experience, love, Logotherapy, encounter, transcendence

Margaret Drabble is considered as one of the outstanding contemporary British writers who deal with the rare phenomena of the present times, the concept of love, its experience and repercussions in British urban, middle class society. Her work is praised for its fine criticism of contemporary English society especially for the sympathetic portrayal of life like love, suffering, reconciliation, career and marriage. She focuses her attention on the concept of loving, the complexities of ethical choices, and the perception of reality within this ambience. Life takes on a depth of meaning when man realises the meaning of love. She explores the ultimate relationship between the individual and her society. According to Drabble the risks involved in love are worth encountering, because those who love successfully will find themselves strongly connected with the human world, while the less fortunate will obtain a clearer sense of their vulnerabilities.

Drabble differs from many 20th century writers as her search for the transformed self is at the individual, interpersonal, social, psychological and spiritual levels and this makes her unique in contemporary fiction. As an affirmative writer she accepts the fact that human beings cannot exist in a vacuum. Her major concern is with the affirmation of life and submission to its bonds and thus delves to find meaning. Her protagonists initially rebel against their nature, and come to discovery or recognition and acceptance of what it is to be a human being. Her protagonists undergo a psychological and spiritual voyage and achieve a true sense of self by realizing the individual's responsibility not only to oneself but to others as well. For Drabble reality means the outcome of countless connections between the individual and the outer world, which lends a wider perspective to understand the concept of love.

Drabble is considered as an artist of integrity, vision, and a deepening humanism. As Virginia K. Beards suggests, the humanism of Drabble's non-didactic or non-doctrinaire approach and the traditional social role of the English novel make her a more effective proponent. Her vision has a depth that comes from an intimate knowledge and a sharp perception of the machinations of society and the dilemma of the individual in it, and her existential position is a natural outgrowth of her exploration of the human condition and the humanism toward which that exploration leads her. Drabble uses the experience of love as a vehicle to express the development of the inner unity, self-awareness, and commitment that are within the potential of humanity in general. This paper propels Drabble's portrayal of her characters experience of love through the quest for individuation and self transcendence and the resulting self awareness and self discovery which are the prerequisites for a progressive transcendence of the self.

Viktor Frankl's theory explicates the three necessary conditions for meaning in life. According to his Logotherapy, human beings —discover this meaning in life in three different ways and one way is —by experiencing something or encountering someone (Frankl 115). Frankl has mentioned that belief in a supra meaning is founded on the power of love, for which an individual has an inner predisposition. Searching for meaning with a person in an existentially frustrated situation means looking for buried remembrances of being, those remembrances in which life had personal meaning. Frankl contributes to history's richest definitions of love:

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true. (Frankl 116)

Love is an important essential aspect of life. It is not possible to live a meaningful life without a genuine loving relationship with another person. —Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire (Frankl 49), — Life without love would be nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3). In examining the intensification of inner life Frankl shares his experiences that helped prisoners stay alive. He values the transcendental power of love and states: —Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in ones spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not ones is actually present, whether or not one is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importancel. (Frankl 49 - 50)

His personal experience in the concentration camps gave him a sense of meaning and hope:

We were at work in a trench.... I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious —Yes! in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose.... and the light shineth in the darkness.... The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there. (MSM 51)

Frankl places this notion of everyday choice at the epicentre of the human experience to enhance the ray of hope. Through his work he establishes the functional need for a relationship that offers opportunity to make a decision which determines the need to realise the inner self and inner freedom. He also shows how the realisation could make one to become aware of his victim position and make a choice by renouncing freedom and dignity to transcend.

Existence both physical and psychological is strengthened by the sensory or psychological domain. It is reflected in the novels of Margaret Drabble. Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy propounds love as one of the psychological cognitive domains which make life meaningful. The researcher has chosen *A Summer Cage- Bird* as material to prove the scope of love from the postmodern, feminist perspective. Love is the ability to extend one's presence by experiencing the world through the eyes of another. As for Drabble the range of the meaning of love widens through the eyes or experience of another and broadens one's own perceptions. The paper deals with love in situational love relationships in the life of Drabble's characters.

The researcher analyses how Drabble exposes in *A Summer Cage- Bird*, the social, political and spiritual paucity of middle class individual self fulfilment, with great moral insight, which is the very tissue and structure of the characters' lives. The novel *A Summer Bird Cage* (1963), lays down the kind of style and situation that characterise her early novels. Sarah Bennett is a candid, breezy, confessional, humorous first-person narrator. She initially draws readers into a rapport and then lulls them into intimacy. She is a young woman blessed with intelligence, good looks, articulateness and humour. Her sense of expectation, aspiration, and promise is coupled with a disturbing lassitude. That is an inability to know what to do as a person and the search for meaning is vivid.

Sarah in *A Summer Bird-Cage* has just graduated with a first from Oxford, but goes off to Paris to do some tutoring with what she sees as her — lovely, shiny, useless new degree, in a *faute de mieux* middle-class way, to fill in time (1). She does not know what she is filling in time, but she does feel the need for meaning in her life and marches towards it. Sarah expects a life of moral and aesthetic beauty, friendship, love, and equality and is impatient to leave her secure surroundings. Little does she guess the rude awakening of the real world that is in store for her. Sarah cannot think of any job she wants to do, but she does not want to solve the problem in the same way as her sister Louise by marrying. Her conflict, however, goes beyond the problem of marriage and finding a suitable job and involves more deeply her feelings of security and definition with regard to herself and others. As Ellen Cronan Rose puts it, she is searching for a definition of womanhood, and a search for meaning within the structure.

As a representative of English society in the early 1960s Sarah is not supposed to be upset by the lack of job offers. She is engaged to Francis whom she expects to marry on his return from the United States where he is spending the year on a fellowship at Harvard University. Sarah is Drabble's youngest protagonist and she is intellectually and emotionally intensely alive and desires to experience everything, —to bear leaves and flowers and fruit and —the whole world (77). Neither marriage without career nor vice versa seem satisfying to her. Having carried on a sublime, idealistic relationship with Francis at Oxford, Sarah regards marriage as a perfect union of two compatible people. This is one of the preconceived notions Sarah is forced to shed rather painfully. Sarah comprehends the true meaning of accepting reality, by an awareness of the realisation of the ideal verses the real.

Stephen treats his wife as a valuable addition to his precious collection of artefacts, and Louise symbolizes —beauty, popularity, and notoriety (155). As long as Louise plays the role of an ideal helpmate who entertains his literary friends and fulfils her social obligations, Stephen is willing to overlook his wife's fondness for John. Louise is a sophisticated young lady from a good family and enhances Stephen's prestige and is proud to display her charm and her Oxford degree as one of his trophies. Any union of two people can be forced —into a mould of one's own, while still preserving the name of marriage (195). Louise intends to play yet another role above and beyond the roles of dutiful daughter and perfect wife. In her relationship with John, she reverses the male-female roles by —taking the man's part, calling at the theatre instead of being called for (195). Louise's reversal of tradition seems admirable to Sarah because she thinks that her sister is striking a blow at civilization in her behaviour, and not —for anarchy (195).

Although the narrative consists of Louise's story, it focuses on Sarah's response to Louise. Until the closing scene, Louise is seen entirely through Sarah's point of view. Sarah is fascinated and repulsed, but always obsessed and tries to understand Louise's apparently amoral behaviour. Like opposites, the sisters behave differently. Louise chooses the easy way by marrying a wealthy writer. Although Sarah thinks this can only lead to grief, she is swayed by Louise's frankness and openness. When Louise consciously decides to marry Stephen for his money, she comments:

It was like suddenly realizing that the Americans might wipe out Russia, and then one would have no more worries about war. That would be immoral, and tragic, but it would be safe. Have you ever thought of that? That they might one night just wipe the whole lot out, and we would live in our lifetimes. And it was the same with money. I suddenly realized that if I married Stephen I need never think about need or want again. (196)

Sarah recognizes that her behaviour is more conventional than Louise's and wonders if this is an asset or a hindrance. Comparing their differing attitudes toward the things they want, Sarah says, —I feel I must have them, but I tell myself I'm wrong for feeling that way. Didn't you feel you were being wicked? (178) in marrying for money. Louise's answer to the question points out the inadequacies of the conventional standards which the sisters had been taught, as Louise's confused response shows her tendency to equate morality with sexual standards: —Wrong. Wicked. I don't know, I really don't. All those books I used to read, and I could never work out the simplest thing from them, like whether it was better to be a virgin or not (196). Drabble delicately points to the limitation of equating moral issues with sexual strictures.

The narrative subsequently undercuts Sarah's assumption that Louise's behaviour was willed. After establishing the contrast between the two sisters, Drabble makes inadequate the interpretations of Louise which Sarah had so carefully constructed. In a long confessional that becomes a psychological profile, Louise reveals more complex origins of her behaviour: the choices which seemed to be based on ambition and indolence were more deeply rooted in fear and the inability to trust. Louise had reacted impulsively to the fate of her friends, who seemed imprisoned in an ugly suburban house with children and no money. Sarah, who in this scene still provides the interpreting voice, isolates Louise's destructive habit of mind. She generalizes too hastily on too little evidence and this caused her to marry. She reacts to a friend thus:

I saw for her what I could never see for myself—that this impulse to seize on one moment as the whole, one aspect as the total view, one attitude as a revelation is the impulse that confounds both her and me, that confounds and impels us. (206)

At the end of this scene, the two sisters become reconciled through the encountering experience. Sarah is no longer intimidated by her sister. It is through love that the sisters gain mutual understanding and meaning in the encounter and also bring out transformation in Louise. She does so by bringing unconscious psychic content to the surface. Sarah still interprets this process for the reader. When Louise says she is —through with all that, Sarah explains, —... I realized that what she was saying was that all these childish idols of truth and honesty were real (201). By filtering Louise's words through Sarah's consciousness and by the language of the passage, Drabble undercuts a moralistic tone caused by more direct statement. The final diagnosis of Louise also occurs through Sarah's analysis. When Louise goes to live with the actor she had been afraid to marry, Sarah attributes this final victory to trust: —She may even marry him in the end, if she can ever face the fact that he really is fond of her! (208). Sarah visualizes a life of meaning for her sister Louise through her choice, a decision to live with John her lover. Louise's behaviour, which initially seemed to originate in the conscious mind, in elements of will, is now shown to have more complex origins in the unconscious. This origin of behaviour recalls Wilhelm Meister —co-active and co-operative whole, which alone is found out, understood and carried out by the mind (78). Although Drabble does not allow Sarah to simplify behaviour into a matter of will, she does not go over to the camp of intuition. Once Louise's unconscious motivations are made conscious, however,

the need for immoral conduct weakens. Sarah's right path is based on individual psychology as well as on conventional standards of truth and honesty, is likely to be the healthiest one. This view is reminiscent of Wilhelm Meister's belief that inward harmony promotes meaning within oneself and toward others.

In Louise's room after the wedding, Sarah looks at herself in the mirror and thinks:

I looked horrifyingly pregnable, somehow, at that moment: I looked at myself in fascination, thinking how unfair it was, to be born with so little defence, like a soft snail without a shell. Men are all right, they are defined and enclosed, but we in order to live must be open and raw to all comers. What happens otherwise is worse than what happens normally, the embroidery and the children and the sagging mind. I felt doomed to defeat. I felt all women were doomed. Louise thought she wasn't but she was. It would get her in the end, some version of it, simply because she was born to defend and depend instead of to attack. (25)

The search for meaning is revealed through her feeling of vulnerability and insecurity which is emphasized by her academic achievement and the gap she senses between that and herself as a woman. Having lunch with some graduate school friends of Francis, her fiancé, she feels out of place:

It made me feel curiously passé, and I felt the impulse to tell everyone that I had got a degree too, as good as any of theirs, which is always a danger signal. I resisted it, but it was sad to feel that way at all. . . I felt as though everyone else was leading a marvellous, progressive life except me, and that I had been subtly left behind. (102)

At the same time, she cannot pursue an academic career as a don because she senses an inherent conflict between such a career and her sexuality. In response to Louise's query as to why she did not stay on at Oxford, she asks:

Did you ever take a look at all the people who did stay on and do research and so forth? Because they're my reason. I like the place and I like the work but I don't like the people. I wouldn't like to be one of those. It's the same with teaching. . . . I used to fancy myself as one (a don). But I'll tell you what's wrong with that. It's sex. You can't be a sexy don. It's all right for men, being learned and attractive, but for a woman it's a mistake. It detracts from the essential seriousness of the business. It's all very well sitting in a large library and exuding sex and upsetting everyone every time your gown slips off your bare shoulders, but you can't do that for a living. You'd soon find yourself having to play it down instead of up if you wanted to get to the top, and when you've only got one life that seems a pity. (166 - 67)

Such a conflict serves to underscore the feeling of displacement in Sarah, as an educated woman. The example Sarah sees around her of the paths of others make her realise that any action may lead to disaster. Daphne, her plain, prim school-teacher is perceived by Sarah as —a threat to my existence. Whenever I see her, I feel weighted down to earth. I feel the future narrowing before me like a tunnel, and everyone else is high up and laughing! (105).

Sarah's second eye-opener comes from Gillian, her roommate, who has just flown out the cage by walking out on her painter-husband Tony. Theirs is a marriage of love which does not withstand the hardships caused by poverty. It was fun to be in love while both Gill and Tony were undergraduates at Oxford. But now that Gill has to be wife, model, and domestic all in one, she resents her status and finds Tony's demands unreasonable. To prove her point, Gill relates how Tony insisted that she abandon her reading and put —the kettle on! (35). When she objects to take care of a menial job he could perform himself, he is so flabbergasted that he has to relieve his displeasure by shouting. Gill is unhappy of being treated as an incompetent child in some things and a capable helpmate in

others. At that moment she forgets that, as a human being, she is conditioned to accept a role. Tony, her egocentric husband, does his utmost to discourage —her latent abilities, talent, and any shreds of skill... until she becomes, in fact, truly incapacitated and feels so useless (84) and insecure that she wilfully terminates the unwanted pregnancy by an abortion. Being a loyal friend, Sarah blames Gill's actions on her separation from Tony.

Louise's marriage is another warning to Sarah. Marrying for money, Louise attempts —to force marriage into a mould of one's own, while preserving the nature of marriage. (164) As Sarah sees it, Louise —was in the tradition, but she had reversed it, (164) and the result is catastrophic even though —it was braver than to abandon the game completely (164). For Sarah will marry Francis her lover once he returns from United States. She believes in meaningful living and in a marriage that is totally satisfactory. Sarah's parents have lived for years in grudging submission to the status quo, and even the one seemingly compatible relationship between Michael and Stephanie is only accomplished, as Sarah suspects, by losing —that tiny exhilarating possibility of one day miraculously gaining the whole lot —in order to settle for —nearly everything (78). And Sarah wants to —have one's cake and eat it (55).

Louise and Gill give Sarah the opportunity to observe the intricacies of married life with all its ups and downs, joys and sorrows. Her cousin Daphne, and her friend Simone are examples of single women. Rather plain and dowdy in her physical appearance, Daphne has little hope of attracting a suitable husband. As a realist, Daphne sublimates an unmarried woman's feelings of envy and frustration to a meaningful career. To be a don who teaches history gives her the fulfilment she craves and makes her self-sufficient and content with her life. Yet, to Sarah, there seems to be something very wrong with a world where in she has been given so many physical and intellectual gifts, while her cousin's share is so meagre. Comparing herself with Daphne, Sarah becomes obsessed by the blatantly unequal distribution of life's goods without realizing that her cousin is far better equipped to deal with life than Louise, the beauty. Daphne may not look as good as Louise or Sarah but she has greater strength of character, more stamina and far more confidence in her abilities than both of her pretty cousins put together. It is very obvious that Sarah's encounter with Louise, Gill and Daphne promotes understanding and provides a way to dragnet meaning in her life.

The situation that surrounds Sarah is one in which the expectations that have been created in women are doomed to non-fulfilment. They seek new relationships with men who have not themselves reached the point of being able to go beyond traditional relationships. At the same time, however, the women also are both incapable of breaking away from tradition and unable to accept it. They want to achieve a meaningful existence, but at the same time they are unable to accept responsibility for their own lives. They exist in a state of limbo, unable to act, and, in Sarah's case, clinging to a defunct romantic ideal that never had a basis in reality. Sarah's search for meaning is so vibrant that she cries —I should like to bear leaves and flowers and fruit, I should like the whole world, I should like (64) is an echo of Lily Briscoe's —to want and not to have-to want and want (TL 266), and both cries reflect the deep frustration which leads to the process of finding meaning in life.

For Drabble's women, as for Virginia Woolf, the Angel in the Home is a *bête noire* that must be exorcised. Drabble's angels however have fallen from grace and have lost the intuitive awareness and sensitivity. Like Woolf's women who either relinquished the feminine principle or drowned in their roles, losing all identity (Peggy Pargiter, old Mrs. Pargiter, Lady Bradshaw, Sally Seton, Lily Briscoe, etc.), the mothers of Drabble's protagonists have no sense of authentic selfhood; as a result they frequently radiate bitterness, are incapable of warmth and intimacy, or camouflage their unhappiness behind a cloying kindness and possessiveness. Sarah's mother, for example, —doesn't think it's weak to like being looked after, she thinks it's natural (13), because her only purpose in life is to look after others. But this kind of care is suffocating to the adult Sarah and makes her dislike being at home. Sarah pities her mother who, the night before Louise's wedding:

suddenly and unexpectedly turned sentimental, reminiscing about her own honeymoon in a solitary unsupported monologue. I felt sorry for her as my father wouldn't co-operate at all: poor brave twittering Mama, pretending everything had always been so lovely, ignoring the facts because they were the only ones she knew. My father is a bit of a brute and that phrase really fits him; at such times he rudely and abruptly disassociates himself from everything Mama says, and she has no retreat except repellent Louise and soft, dishonest, indulgent me. So I asked the right questions and listened to the right stories, which would have been charming if true, and went to bed feeling sick with myself and sick with the whole idea of marriage and sickest of all with Louise, who didn't even seem to realize the courage and desperation of Mama that underlaid the nonsense and fuss and chirruping. (18)

The mother's cloying kindness turns into bitter possessiveness, however, in the exchange that went along those well oiled grooves that Sarah has with her about moving to London. She denies ever trying to keep her daughters at home and claims the move sounds a very good idea, but she proceeds to enumerate her complaints. She feels she is going to —lose all her little ones at one fell swoop and that Sarah is —very eager to be off (57). She reminds Sarah that education was only for boys and that she pushed for her daughters' education against their father. Envyng them the opportunities she never had, she complains about being nothing but a servant, a household drudge, and contrasts the respect she had for her own mother with the lack of consideration her daughters have for her. Her victory is gained when, through her own tears, she reduces Sarah to tears too and into an agreement to stay home. However, she recovers, and asserts that —it would be much better for you to go. So let's have no more nonsense, shall we? (56 - 59) she pities her mother and understands her dilemma now that her sole purpose in life is gone and she is left with only a meaningless relationship with a taciturn husband. Sarah's relationship with her mother awakens her identity and transforms her from being a separate person into simply her mother's daughter. In comparison with the later novels, *A Summer Bird-Cage* seems lightweight, a somewhat typical first novel. But as a forecast of Drabble's later preoccupations, it is not without interest. Its structure, which is so obviously and directly based on seeking meaning in life, anticipates the centrality of such concerns in Drabble's work.

Greatly influenced by Simone de Beauvoir in general and her work^[1] *The Second Sex* in particular, Drabble endowed Sarah's friend Simone with some of the characteristics the French writer discusses in her book. Combining a strong —sense of tradition with an equally strong —sense of freedom (56), Simone is the protagonist's alter ego who possesses the qualities Sarah is striving for. With a will of her own, Simone rejects being categorized and enjoys a continual change. Full of admiration for her friend's unique individuality and free spirit, Sarah exclaims that Simone —doesn't belong anywhere or perhaps she belongs everywhere (56). Sarah likes everything about her friend: her handwriting, her clothing, her choice of flowers, and her indifference towards the distinctions between men and women and so Simone is able to steer the protagonist into the right direction toward self-realization. From the fact the Gill —always has in her room vast masses of green leaves... chopped off hedges (64) Sarah interprets her friend's drives as positive whereas she sees the dried grasses which —Stephen and Louise have in long Swedish vases (77) as symbols of doom. If Simone is —the flower without the foliage, then Gill is —the foliage without the flower (77). Both are necessary to the conclusion that she wants to have the cake and to eat it too, that is to say; she aims at being wife and career woman.

It is not unusual for sisters to compete with each other in a state of sibling rivalry. This is especially the case if one sister is as successful as Louise who wins regardless of —whatever she does (201). Judging from Louise's ability to weather life's many upheavals and to discard everything that is unpleasant, Sarah concludes that she loses because she has —too much wit and too little beauty (201). The tragedy of Stella Conroy who, having married for love, has been abandoned by her spouse and is now forced to fend for her children in utter poverty, convinced Louise that to marry for love —does terrible things to people (219). To avoid this pitfall, Louise lets monetary

consideration rule her decision to enter into a marriage of convenience with a much older man. Due to Stephen's rather depraved inclinations, the marriage eventually collapses and Louise, the accomplished young woman, turns to Sarah, her naive and inexperienced sister, for help. Disaster makes it possible for the two sisters to relate with each other on an equal footing. In trying to solve their problems, Louise depends as much on Sarah as the younger sister needs the support of the older. No sooner have the two sisters closed ranks than Sarah rejects Simone as a model. Instead of seeing Louise's predicament as a proof in favour of celibacy, Sarah disagrees with Simone and thinks that her friend has achieved autonomy and transcendence as desirable goals for women.

The blissfulness of married life is demonstrated to Sarah by her cousin Michael and his wife Stephanie who are an ideal couple. As compatible as two individuals can be, Michael and Stephanie are in tune with each other and enjoy a successful marriage based on love, trust, respect and understanding. Unlike Gill and Tony for whom a baby spells disaster, Michael and Stephanie enjoy having children. All in all, they draw such a glowing picture of marriage that Sarah feels greatly encouraged to give matrimony a try as soon as Francis returns from America. Yet, she is made aware of her absent partner and of her being —a high powered girl (88) when she meets an old friend at a social gathering. Asked by her friend whether she is going to be a don's wife, she calmly replies that she is —going to marry a don (149). The distinction between being a don's wife and marrying a don is fine, but succinct is her answer, —I will be what I become, to the question, —what will you be? (149). Relieved that —the days are over, thank God, when a woman justifies her existence by marrying (68), Sarah looks forward to sharing her life with Francis. Though a rewarding career is in the offing, Sarah is determined to accept it and combine being a professional with being a wife. She retains her identity without merging and thus understands that life can be more meaningful.

Although Sarah is a modern young woman and has come a long way from her Austen or Bronte forerunners, she sympathizes with them as far as school-marring is concerned. Teaching would be acceptable to her if she could be a don. But in order —to get to the top (199) Sarah would have to play down the fact that she is as intelligent as she is beautiful. Men are allowed to be learned and attractive whereas —for a woman it's a mistake and —detracts from the essential seriousness of the business (198) since she has only one life, Sarah thinks it a pity to suppress her femininity. Sarah's continual efforts to achieve genuine relationships with other people and with the world about her are very impressively high-lighted in the contrasting account of the failure of her beautiful and predatory elder sister's marriage. In her strife for self-sufficient independence, intellectual recognition and equality, Sarah is the mouthpiece of Margaret Drabble who explains that to become a dull housewife was a common fear for young women in that period, in the late 1950's and early 60's in Britain when there wasn't really a generation of educated women who were having careers. Sarah found it a depressing prospect; that means one's life is virtually over. With an open ending, the novel leaves it to the readers to picture Sarah as having achieved her aim of being a successful career woman, ideal wife and loving mother. For the title of her first novel, Drabble received her inspiration from John Webster's *The White Devil* and the lovely simile which he coined by saying: —Tis just like a summer bird cage in a garden/the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair/ and are in a consumption of fear they shall never get out (1).

In a nutshell Webster sums up the themes of freedom and entrapment and offers a rough sketch of Sarah's quandary whether or not she should venture forth into the bird cage. Evidently the novel is an exploration of the bird cage of female identity played out for circumspect Sarah in the lives of the over-educated women lacking a sense of vocation. The themes of sexual conflict and domestic entrapment are developed in relation to several other birds as well as Sarah.

Drabble's early novels centre on crises of identity undergone by the main characters. Drabble describes the quest for meaning as a process of coming to terms with one's past as well as finding a balance between one's need for personal integrity and a sense of responsibility for others.

Drabble revolves her fiction around real life experiences, as felt by humans. She believes that meaning in life is attained by encountering experiences filled with love. After her first few novels she adopts the strategy of writing which explores and describes the altered life styles of contemporary women with a sense of responsibility presenting more positive images of women and their line of life.

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