The Waterfall by Margaret Drabble

Dr. Ranu Uniyal
Professor and Head
Department of English and Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow
Lucknow

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Re-writing the myth: Romantic love in Margaret Drabble's The Waterfall

RANU UNIYAL

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 she does this 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).*

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 "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 personage" (W 84), welcomes James, "the Holy Ghost". And it is "through him…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, or 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 catch-phrase 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 childbirth 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 course" 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 movement from 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 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. What had earlier been a state of indifference is now marked with a state of expectation. The changes in her physical circumstances signify 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 Bronte, 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 place" (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…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 Bronte, who uses the external landscape imagery to accommodate her violent and intrusive emotions, we see the body itself becoming a landscape of 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 Bronte'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 Bronte 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 Bronte. Its versions are being repeated and restructured in twentieth-century fiction. Daphne du Maurier'sRebecca is one such writing. 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. The twentieth-century romance story retains the "classic" romance 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 dispute. 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 word does not have power-over[sic], 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. 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 transition. Seemingly the tenancy of love is without a bargain. It is by mutual consent.

The feminization of its male protagonist 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 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 landscape. 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 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). 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 is a note of urgency. 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).*

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 forces 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 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 price to 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 thrombosis 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 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, situation and names. Drabble is paying tribute to the mother of the story, Charlotte Bronte. 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… (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 figure 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 unbounded ness 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 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 Bronte:

> *Which was Charlotte 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 Bronte 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 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 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 Bronte'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 is 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 grace or a coup d`e`tat. 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, 1982: 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" (Michell, 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 my poem 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 her enforced confinement and enabled her to welcome both poetry and children, cleanliness and a circle of literary friends in 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 voice has 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 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 multiple narratives shows a constant shift from “lyrical romanticism to caustic cynicism” (Creighton, 1985: 56).

Drabble’s use of multiple voice 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

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 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:

> *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, one agrees 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 limitation and Drabble’s narrative is plotted within this category.

The Following abbreviations have been used for the major texts

W: The Waterfall
LL: A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature

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