

CHAPTER III

THE GARRICK YEAR

Margaret Drabble's second novel The Garrick Year (1964) is the narration by Emma Evans of what happened within the period of a year - nine months to be precise - of the theatre in her life which is inevitably related to her family members and to the theatre as her husband is the actor. Emma and David together with their two children - Flora and Joseph - come to stay for the year in Hereford - a small town. The new theatre is started there and David, being an actor signed the contract for one year.

Emma does not like nature and life in villages. She is also not going to get any suitable job in Hereford. So she was not willing to go there in the beginning, but ultimately she goes. But there she is bored a lot. She has nothing interesting to do - except the duties of a housewife and a mother. David is busy completely day and night in acting and the world of theatre. He has not much time for the family. In the course of time Emma gets involved in Wyndham Farrar by accident. It was the need of herself. But she could manage to save herself from drowning into it. It was her sense of responsibility as a mother that keeps their marriage away from breaking off. There is also a deep-rooted sense of morality that prevents her from the actual physical sin of infidelity.

Emma Evans, the protagonist of The Garrick Year, says,

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Mother, may I go out to swim,
O yes, my darling daughter,
O yes, you may go out to swim,
But don't go near the water.
O mother may I go out to swim,
O yes my darling daughter,
But mind the boys don't see you get in
Keep right under the water.

I could not very well sing it, but it seemed
appropriate to something to marriage, perhaps,
or the emancipation of women.¹

Her self is trying to swim without getting drowned. She is not away from the water, but quite into it. Throughout the novel we find her conscious of her identity. But at the same time she is also conscious that this identity has no scope to grow. It is suffocating. Marriage and maternity become the obstacles for her. What 'she' wants 'she' can not do. 'She' is a woman and her 'self' has two sides - psychological and physical. 'She' has to suffer from both the sides - mainly because of her motherhood. She was not much attached to David - her husband.

....If it weren't for the children I'd leave
you tomorrow.²

She is not happy with her marriage. She says,

We married in haste and repented at leisure.

Still she wants to live with him, and one of the reasons she gives is her love for her children.

" I did not want to separate the children from their father."

" He said that he would go to Hereford, and I, self-willed, distinct, determined Emma Evans, I said that I would go too."

She connects love with children.

It's just that I connect love - well, lying on beds and so forth -. I connect that with babies.

" Oh,Christ,' said Wyndham, ' do you have to bring that lot with you wherever you go?'

' What do you mean?' I said. 'They are my children, I want them with me, I love them.'

We find Emma's identity crushed under her motherhood, and she accepts that willingly. She had to sacrifice her 'self' and many other things due to her marriage and motherhood.

I thought of David, and Flora, and Joseph, and myself, and with each step I realised more clearly that for the last months, for the last year, personally, I myself, the part of me that

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was not a function and a smile and a mother,
had been curled up and rotten with grief and
patience and pain.⁷

While playing her role as a housewife and as a mother she keeps on contemplating and finds her position, compared with other men- Wyndham Farrar and David - and women like Sophy Brent, - frustrating.

" I felt that if for Wyndham there was any question of choice between her and me, she would win.

What was wrong with me, I wondered, what had happened to me, that I, who had seemed cut out for some extremity or other, should be here now bending over a washing machine to pick out a button or two and some bits of soggy wet cotton? What chances were there now for the once - famous Emma, whose name had been in certain small exclusive circles the cause for so much discussion and prediction ? They would not think much of me now, I
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thought,.....

Because of David's will she had "to submit to unlimited boredom and fresh air, and, as he might have foreseen, to infidelity."⁹ On the other hand David is free to

do anything as he wishes.

Who went before nor who shall follow me. No,
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at myself I will begin and end.

This freedom is not for Emma.

But I have other things to do. I am not free. I
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would be loving you, if I could manage it.

David had fully busy life with his acting and actors. Emma had no social life of her at all. The first and only one attempt that she made in this direction was also a failure. They invited David's Welsh friend Hugh on one evening. The evening was fixed, and then they had to cancel it as David remembered his appointment with Wyndham which he had forgotten.

'Oh well, never mind, he can come again some other time,' David said, and just as I was trying to work up the energy to think of some cold remark like 'And what am I expected to do for the evening?'.....I spent the rest of the day wondering whether I was annoyed or not, and whether his forgetfulness had or had not been a serious matrimonial offence: I decided finally..... that I was not annoyed at all. I did not except him to remember, and I did not blame him when he forgot. What I did

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feel was envy. A more serious affair than annoyance, though not perhaps so much to my discredit..... After this I made no artificial attempts to keep any kind of social life of my own going. I fell back heavily and silently on my dignity and my resources.¹²

While speaking with Wyndham also on one occasion, Emma refers to dignity which she feels is lacking in the treatment to her by others.

'You behave like a child. How do you expect to be treated?'

'With a little human dignity,' I said.¹³

Thus from the beginning of the novel, we find Emma wishing to establish her 'self' as an individual, different, capable human being. She was an educated daughter of Cambridge Don, confident and having many distinctions which maintain her 'difference' from others. But as she herself says,

One is at hopeless disadvantage with a baby on one's knee.....

I often think that motherhood, in its physical aspects, is like one of those prying disorders such as hay fever or asthma, which receive verbal sympathy but no real consideration, in view of their lack of fatality: and which,

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after years of attribution, can sour and
pervert the character beyond all recovery.¹⁴

In the beginning of the novel only Emma has made her situation quite clear while explaining why she was not ready to go to Hereford. She got a very convenient job as a newsreader and announcer in a television company.

" After three years of child-bearing and modelling maternity clothes, I felt in serious need of a good, steady, lucrative job."¹⁵

" It would have kept me happy, and I would not have had to leave the babies for more than fifteen hours a week of their waking lives...." It was "so, adequate a chance of satisfying my conflicting responsibilities."¹⁶

So naturally Emma didn't want to lose this job.

But David is not at all in a position to understand her need. He speaks just as a typical man in this man-dominated society, and in him we find the same age-old patriarchal attitude towards women. He is dominating, wants to do, whatever he wants to do, gives importance to only his own career, behaves selfishly and on top of it calls her selfish and expects from her the same roles that have been expected from women, and as Simone de Beauvoir says, keeps her in a passive, dependent position and accuses her for being there.

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' You could look after the children.'

.....' Those children will be seen to all right, and it will be me that sees to them, so don't you bring them into any of our discussions.'

' I can't think,' he said....,' Why you want to do that job in the first place. A bloody silly way of spending your time,if you ask me. Just your vanity I suppose, it's not enough for me to tell you that you are beautiful, you want the whole bloody nation to stare at you every night. Your vanity will kill you one of these days, you'll drop dead from selfishness if you don't watch it.' ' You are not in a position to complain,' he said. 'It's my lovely self that paid for those chops and that television and that dress you're wearing and that roof over your head.'

' Ah well,' said I,getting to my feet,

' perhaps that's why I'm so keen on getting myself an independent income, so I can throw all this rubbish back in your charming face.'

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As she does't have the job she has to depend on David

for money. When she buys the marble pillar, which David dislikes, he says,

" And whose money did you pay for that with ?
the house-keeping ? Do you really think I'm
going to slave away night and day so that you
can go out and buy useless, hideous objects at
prices that suggest that you ought to have
your head seen to ? '

'I'll pay you back.'

'Oh will you, what out of ? '

'My next job. If we hadn't come here at your
request I'd have been earning more pounds a
week now than you are here, and don't you
forget it.'

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The double standard that we find used in the society very conveniently by men against women, is also used against Emma. When she accepts his decision, and goes to Hereford though she doesn't like theatre-world and rural life, her life becomes full of boredom. She has nothing to interest her there. She keeps herself busy in nursing the baby, looking after the children, cooking and washing clothes - this naturally is the paralysed condition of her identity. It appears as if she is caged in that small world of Hereford and her house. We know from the interview with the novelist

Margaret Drabble, that she was very much impressed by 'The second Sex.' In The Novels of Margaret Drabble.: Equivocal Figures. Ellen Cronan Rose refers to her interview in the first chapter.

" This (The Second Sex) seemed to me to be wonderful material and so important to me as a person. It was material that nobody had used and I could use and nobody had ever used as far as I would use it."¹⁹

According to Rose, "..... Margaret Drabble seems in her early novels to be exploring some of the practical implications of The ~~second~~ ~~Sex.~~"²⁰ and really we find Emma Evans in the predicament which Simone de Beauvoir discusses in relation to woman. According to the traditional norms in the man - dominated society Emma has everything and she should be happy. But she is not, as she has no chance of fulfilment. Beauvoir explains this idea very well when she says,

In particular those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness consists in being at rest There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, there

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is a degradation of existence into.....the brutish life of subjection to given conditions - and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual, concerned to justify his existence, feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) - who always regards the self as the essential - and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfilment ? What roads are open to her ? Which are blocked ? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency ? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome?²¹ These are the fundamental questions

Emma also faces the same questions. For her also the

transcendence is not possible as her roads are blocked by marriage and motherhood. For the transcendence of David - her husband she is pushed back in immanence! David has already a good job and is rolling in money.

' You told me last week you were rolling in money. And I thought you'd signed to do that television next month.'

' It isn't a question of money,' he said,....., 'it's a question of my career.'

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'And what about me?'

But David is not satisfied with what he has. He wants more, without caring for Emma at all. Emma has nothing, and when she got the chance of getting a little, she had to lose that also ! She just said in the discussion, without success, "But let me have my bit, eh, let me get on with my little bit."
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According to David there was nothing for which she should complain! She should have been happy as she gets food to eat and clothes to wear because of him. But being a sensitive and educated woman, she was not satisfied with food and clothes. She thought of the princess and the pea, and that old myth about the sensitive skins of the world's aristocrats. Her affair with Wyndham was the outcome of this dissatisfaction. But it also couldn't go for long and

seriously, and this also because of her motherhood. She could have left David very easily, but not the children! She just cannot forget them. She was reluctant in the affair, as she herself says it.

" Our liaison took on a certain regularity But although it took on regularity, it did not exactly progress.....

The reluctance was wholly on my side."²⁴

She did not yield to Wyndham physically, though she loved him, because she always connected love with babies.

' I connect that (love) with babies.'²⁵

Besides motherhood the archetypal values also came in the way of their affair. Somewhere in her mind she seems to be conscious of the 'sin' involved in this affair.

" When we drew up for dinner I was feeling both nervous and mean. I did not even like him. so thoroughly does passion
obscure one's sense of identity."²⁶

At the end of the novel also when the family goes for the picnic she saw the real snake which symbolises the sin in her heart.

' I saw curled up and clutching at the sheep's belly a real snake One can say, the
Garden of Eden was crawling with them too.'²⁷

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But she did not allow this snake to bite her, just as she was not going to drown herself in the water - for the sake of her children, of course !

'One just has to keep on and to pretend, for
the sake of the children, not to notice.'²⁸

Finally she gets reconciled with David, leaving Wyndham, and when she did this she is conscious of her loss and gain. She did this willingly. The mother in her takes over everything else in her personality.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Margaret Drabble, The Garrick Year, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1966), p. 154.
- 2 Ibid, p. 125.
- 3 Ibid, p. 26.
- 4 Ibid, p. 20.
- 5 Ibid, p. 131.
- 6 Ibid, p. 151.
- 7 Ibid, p. 90.
- 8 Ibid, p. 108.
- 9 Ibid, p. 109.
- 10 Ibid, p. 109.
- 11 Ibid, p. 131.
- 12 Ibid, p. 72.
- 13 Ibid, p. 143.
- 14 Ibid, pp. 9 - 10.
- 15 Ibid, p. 10.
- 16 Ibid, p. 14.
- 17 Ibid, p. 17.
- 18 Ibid, p. 125.
- 19 " Margaret Drabble", in The Writer's Place : Interviews on the Literary Situation in Contemporary Britain, ed. Peter Firchow, (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1974), pp. 102 - 121.

- 20 E. C. Rose, The Novels of Margaret Drabble : Equivocal Figures, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1980), p.2.
- 21 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, (Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1972), p. 29.
- 22 Margaret Drabble, The Garrick Year, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1966), p. 8.
- 23 Ibid, p. 17.
- 24 Ibid, p. 127.
- 25 Ibid, p. 131.
- 26 Ibid, p. 112.
- 27 Ibid, p. 172.
- 28 Ibid, p. 172.