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**MODE OF METAFICATION IN  
MARGARET DRABBLE'S NOVEL:  
THE WITCH OF EXMOOR**

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### MODE OF METAFICTION IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S FICTION: THE WITCH OF EXMOOR

There has been much controversy on the position of Margaret Drabble among the English novelists; she is acclaimed by some critics as "a latter-day Jane Austen and belittled by others as a women's novelist", (Sellers, 1997: X09). With the publication of *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996) the criticism has been harsher because the novel contains many of the elements that make it turn out to be a traditional one: the action revolves around a family at war and conversation between them is running as in a traditional novel about family subjects. The mother is an old, traditional sort of woman who lives in a large, Gothic Victorian mansion. Also, the novel lures the reader deeper into a dark and bottomless magical abyss with its tales of Stonehenge, of smugglers, of old England, and its presentation of omens, Frieda's dementia, and obsessions of old monarchs like Queen Christina. All this, as a reviewer, Jayne Margetts, observes, "sounds deceptively like you've tumbled head first into a traditional English mystery novel sculptured by the hand of Patricia Cornwell, and to some degree *The Witch of Exmoor* does feel like an old fashioned arsenic and lace fable, but with its philosophical connotations it is a fascinating and vivid piece of craft, and difficult to tuck into a genre", (Margetts, 2001).

On the other hand, Pamela St. Clair remarks, "Drabble's novels are more contemporary in theme and tone. They address contemporary social concerns and are not rooted...in the world of academia", (Clair, 2001). She accuses the characters of *The Witch of Exmoor* of being caricatures due to the employment of an intrusive unnamed narrator who reveals the characters' traits without permitting the reader to share their inner thoughts. However, another critic, Joanne V. Creighton considers it to be a quality of Drabble's writing technique to use omniscient narrators " turning a 19th century convention into a postmodern device, establishing the text at least in part as a metafiction", (Creighton, 2002). Drabble refutes the charge that she is a traditional novelist, saying: "some people call my work 19th century but you can't write a 19th century novel in the 20th century nor am I even attempting to" and emphasizing, "into my own is creeping an increasingly ironical postmodern not to say at times aggressive tone ",( Drabble, 2000).

This paper tries to find out that *The Witch of Exmoor* is a metafictional work and therefore, M. Drabble is a postmodernist.

Metafiction is a kind of fiction which contains self-referential elements and internal comments on its own narrative and linguistic identity. It is, literally, fiction about fiction,

(Hutcheon, 1980: 1). Although it proliferated in the 1960s, many of its elements were employed in such novels as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759). Critics have tended to become much more interested in metafiction over the last forty years, for it has established itself as one of the prominent modes of postmodernism. It is 'just one form ... and a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism, (Patricia Waugh, 1984:21, 22). She has explored certain elements of metafiction like the over-obtrusive,visibly-inventing narrator, explicit dramatization of the reader, dehumanization of character, parodic doubles, self reflexive images, critical discussions of the story within the story and use of popular genres(22). Another critic, Glorie Tebbutt, had added other elements of metafiction such as the enigmatic characterization, the issues of free will and authorial control, and examination of systems which are socially constructed for the aim of emulating old systems to match the new ones, (McBrien,1993: 47- 57). Metafiction explores all aspects of the literary construct like plot, character, language, the novelist's vision of experience and attitude to his art and reader and it lays bare the process of its own construction.

Margaret Drabble is one of those contemporary novelists who are concerned with post-modernist metafictional mode of writing whereby they express their views of the post-modern world. In a lecture entitled, 'Mimesis', in 1985, she described her metafictional mode to be 'self-doubting, self –conscious, self-questioning, ironic', (Drabble, 1987: 14). She really creates a fiction that self-consciously explores the process of its own construction and makes statements on its tradition.

Drabble is greatly influenced by her academic study and honors degree in English literature that won her a thorough acquaintance with literary tradition. Like her, most of her characters have literary inclinations or professions. For example, her first young heroine, Sarah Bennett, in *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), gets her first class honours degree in English literature. In *The Waterfall* (1969) the protagonist, Jane Gray, is writing a novel about herself to understand her passion for her cousin's husband, James. She represents the first element of metafiction when she 'intersperses her stylized, romantic fictionalization with a critical, analytical first-person commentary' (Robinson, 1995: 735), which is later replaced by a third-person narration with a narrator to comment on the narrative. Similarly, Rosamund

Stacey, the protagonist of *The Millstone* (1973), is writing a thesis on the imagery of Elizabethan poetry while her friend, Lydia Reynolds, is writing a novel whose heroine is a scholarly unmarried mother who escapes from reality through scholarship; this mother is Rosamund and the novel is her own story.

*In The Witch of Exmoor* (1996) Drabble arrives at her utmost maturity when she presents the whole life of a novelist, including her literary and non-literary works and her view of experience in the post-modern world. Frieda Haxby, the protagonist of the novel, writes her autobiography on the computer and employs a narrator to tell it in the form of the novel we are reading.

Frieda is the witch of Exmoor where she recoils from life to reflect upon it. Her character is being developed from the roles of an art historian and sociologist to that of a novelist who is concerned with classics and historical novel. She has written a historical novel, called *Queen Christina* about Sweden's seventeenth century Queen, Christina, in which fiction and history are represented. A critic, Bryan Aubrey, describes it to be 'an unreadable, overresearched historical novel that departs completely from her previous works of social history'(Wilson,

1998: 859). There has been much controversy on the novel amongst reviewers and critics who outdid each other in insults, wondering how the author of the perennial classic, called *The Matriarchy of War*, has turned to writing such an 'incoherent, overresearched baroque monstrosity', (*The Witch of Exmoor*, 1996: 29). Some of the insults have been directed to the author herself: a reviewer has written, 'Once seen as Britain's answer to Simone de Beauvoir, Frieda Haxby has revealed herself as the heir to Barbara Cartland' while another declared that 'Long a symbol of the austere and high-minded rigidity of the post-war Left, Miss Haxby's latest effort throws into doubt all that preceded it'(30). However, Frieda seems undisturbed by these insults because she doesn't intend to be forced into critical and literary battles with those who 'had been misreading her all along'(31). Frieda declares to a radio disc jockey that reviewers and critics have not observed such good qualities of the novel as her subtle subtext on the theme of powerlessness and power, her complex contrasting of the fates of Christina and her maid, the details of the Queen's life and the different roles played by Christina - 'scholar, patron of the arts, lesbian, atheist, accomplice of assassins' (31). She also declares that the idea of the novel came to her while standing by a stone cross with runes near her



ancestral home in Dry Bendish in Lincolnshire, which proves her mother's claim that she is linked by blood to Queen Christina. However, the narrator interfers, refuting Frieda's declaration by saying that she had not really thought herself to be a reincarnation of Christina, nor in any way descended from her – the Haxbys came from Denmark, not Sweden ... and anyway Christina was largely of German blood'(67).

The reason for choosing this queen as the heroine of the novel is Frieda's obsession with her character and with the culture of Sweden. Frieda is so interested in the details of Christina's private life that she describes her grave clothes:

In 1688 on the Christmas Eve before her death, Christina had tried on this new gown, watched by her last late love and protegee, the singer Angelica Giorgini. And an old wise woman who happened to be there at the same time, as wise women often are in such stories, said to her, 'Madame, you will be buried in that dress not long from now' and so it had come to pass, Christina had died next spring (68,69).

This passage from *Queen Christina* makes some reference to the literary genre of fairy story where witches and prophets can foretell the future. Frieda's mind has been shaped and entangled by the stories her sister, Hilda, was telling her about the goblins, the old men of the sea, the water maidens, and the haunted woods. The reference to literary genres is one of the elements of

metafiction. The other element here is the critical discussion of the novel, *Queen Christina*, that is running on within this novel.

The critical discussion of *Queen Christina* in the reviews has given it great fame and popularity; Claudia Cazetti, a young art-house Australian, faxes Cate Crowe, Frieda's literary agent, about his intention to turn this novel into a movie, with the preservation of the author's film rights. Cate expects that the novel will be a success like Frieda's other classics: *The Matriarchy of War*, *The Scarecrow and The Plough*, and *The Iron Coast*. She describes Frieda to be 'a sleeping investment, a quiet, steady-little-earner'(150). She wonders why Claudia has chosen this novel to make it a film, especially after the presentation of his latest film, *Dangerous Exchanges*, in the film festival in Lisbon, which is 'a philosophic fiction about time travel'(149). This comment by Crowe refers to the literary genre of time travel fiction, which is often done by the author throughout the novel, as a feature of her metafictional mode.

Crowe has not yet read the novel but read the reviews about it. So, she decides to read it to know the fact of the situation. After reading it she finds out that it is a story which has 'plenty of opportunities for feminist deconstruction of the past. Lesbianism

and espionage, rape and assassinations, art and abdications—what more could you want?... This was a cracking good story, plenty of action, glamorous settings, and strong characters' (151). It is another piece of commentary by Crowe on Frieda's *Queen Christina*, in which she refers to one of the principal elements of metafictional mode, that is, deconstruction. Feminist deconstruction used in feminist metafiction provides novelists with accurate models for understanding the experience of women in the post-modern world. It looks up to womanist experience as 'a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems', (Waugh, 1984: 9). Metafiction generally operates on the principle of oppositions like construction and deconstruction of such novelistic elements as frame, technique and illusion. It seeks to construct a fictional illusion and to lay bare it through self-conscious reflection upon its way of construction.

Through the disciplines of feminism and metafiction Drabble often seeks to redefine the history of intellectual women so as to understand social meaning as historically constituted. So, many of her heroines are academics, writers or critics. In *The Witch of Exmoor* the life and art of a great thinker and intellectual, Frieda Haxby, are represented in a metafictional mode. With its central protagonist a novelist and its central action

the conception of composing a novel, *The Witch of Exmoor* is supremely self-conscious and reflexive. And because it is an account of the development of a character to the point at which she is able to take up her pen and compose the novel we are reading, it may be thought to be 'a self-begetting novel' (Kellman, 1980:3). But, it is not, for the emphasis in self-begetting novels is on the 'modernist concern of consciousness' while in metafictional ones it is on 'the post-modernist one of fictionality', (Waugh, 1984: 14).

The fictionality of *The Witch of Exmoor* is made clear in the following analysis of its metafictional mode. The title is analogic and referential, for it refers to the fairy stories Frieda has heard and read. This literary genre has greatly affected Frieda's mind that she likens herself to a witch. She, like a witch in a fairy story, spends her last days in a hideous, uninhabitable place on the very edge of the sea, with deep ruts and great pot-holes. Her children wonder why she has chosen it, to which the narrator replies, saying:

She is here to summon her mother, her father, her sister, her husband from their graves and from their hiding places. As the Witch of Endor raised Samuel to terrify Saul, so she, the Witch of Exmoor will raise Gladys Haxby, Ernest Haxby, Hilda Haxby, Andrew Palmer. Her nice clean ambitious well-educated offspring will be appalled by their hideous ancestry (66).

For writing her memoirs Frieda prefers this lonely place, called Exmoor, and the job of a witch for restoring her dead relatives to life in order to retell their own past stories in an authentic way. Frieda intends to expose many of their appalling secrets so that her children would know what sort of ancestry they have descended from. The narrator is surprised about Frieda's aim of writing her memories, so she asks this question whose answer clarifies the fact of the situation: 'Is this desire to write her memoirs a desire for revenge, or a desire to salvage her own self?' (69). It may be a desire for revenge for the bad treatment she had had when young. For example, she reveals in the memoirs that her mother, Gladys, was lying, boasting and preferring her older sister, Hilda, to her and that Hilda tried to kill her and forced her to get married to the man Hilda had been in relation with. This man was Andrew Palmer, Frieda's husband, who deserted her after having three children. Furthermore, she aims to give her emotions a vent through writing her memoirs in spite of such problems associated with this kind of writing as 'not only libel but also the unreliability of memory, the tedium of research' (66).

In spite of the fact that young Frieda was badly treated and Frieda, the wife, was deserted, she succeeded in bringing up and educating her three children: Daniel, Gogo and Rosemary. Now, Frieda, the mother, is regarded by her children as an eccentric, enigmatic woman who alienates herself for no clear reason. So, she is described to be 'the self-elected witch of Exmoor, the daughter of the Fens'.(20) However, they can not realize the fact that Frieda, who has been maltreated and misunderstood, has the complete choice and free will to do what she pleases.

Although her children think that she has gone mad, her son- in -law, Nathan Herz, Rosemary's husband, is fond of her, for 'this, as Nathan likes to reflect, is the age of choice'(21). However, he himself has not the ability to choose or change his way of life because, he thinks, 'There is no future. There are no choices left'(20). Indeed, Nathan suffers from self-contradiction. Unlike him, David D'Anger, Gogo's husband, is so ambitious that he has had many choices throughout his career: a journalist, a diplomat and a member of parliament. He also has the free will to move from one party to another. He follows up a conviction: 'To know the good is to choose it' (48). This is why David and Frieda are on good terms and adopt the same views on such

issues as social justice. Frieda calls for the foundation of what she terms, 'The Just Society', allocating in her will a large sum of money for David to realize this aim.

Owing to this intimate relation between David and Frieda, her children suggest that David should pay a visit to Exmoor to know why and how she is living there. David, accompanied by his wife and son, Benjamin, sets off. On their way they pass a mountainous region with many caves, called Wookey Hole. On visiting one of the caves, a guide refers to a chamber, saying:

The Witch of Wookey Hole had lived there with her little dog and brought ill-luck to the land ... there she was, frozen to stone by a monk from Glastonbury, and there was her little dog, and there was her alabaster witch's ball (94).

This explanation brings into Benjamin's mind a portrait of his grandmother, living alone in a mountain region with her dog, Bounce, that follows her everywhere. He makes out 'a great bleaked witch's profile, a goblin's hunched back'(99), which proves to be wrong immediately after she receives them kindly and gently. On a postcard, sent to a friend of his and entitled, 'The Beast of Exmoor', Benjamin writes, 'Sorry, I couldn't get a snap of the Beast'(119). On the other hand, it seems that ill luck has plagued Frieda's family: Rosemary is sick of kidney dialysis

while her husband is depressed and gets drowned at sea; Gogo faces many job problems and her son falls ill; and Daniel loses his son, Simon, who, being drunk, is run over by a lorry.

It is Drabble's partial turning from the conventions of mimesis to the adoption of some post-modernist narrative techniques that makes her present such damaged characters in her work. However, other characters survive and prosper. One of the elements of her metafictional mode is the tension between 'the optimistic drive of the traditional narrative plot - everything will turn out all right - and its pessimistic contemporary undertow :characters who are in some way damaged, psychologically if not also literary amputees, as a result of the random misfortunes of contemporary life'(Schaub,1994: 139) . This partly explains Drabble's darkening vision of the post modern world, which predominates her work to the extent that a comic event will often be followed by a tragic one. For example, Benjamin is depressed and ill at the same time he is informed that he is the only heir to Frieda's property.

Drabble's metafictional mode is characterized by the use of an intrusive, self-conscious narrator who narrates Frieda's story, interfering in the scene to explain something, to add information or to comment directly on the act and art of the creation of fiction. The action is driven forward more by the narrator than by traditional linear plot. It is also pushed forward by the parties which 'serve as non-linear narrative techniques'(Spilka, 1990: 13)



and in which new characters are introduced and explanatory comments on their identities are given by the narrator.

The narrator employs third-person narration but the characters are sometimes allowed to speak in the first person in the form of soliloquies or dialogues. When asked about this shift between first and third person narration the author replies, saying:

I'm never quite sure who the third- person narrator is. But I do have a sense, sometimes in the middle of a novel, that there are things happening in the novel that the narrator doesn't know about, and the narrator sometimes comments on that. My narrator, not I, is more of an observer, who is sometimes astonished by what is going on .As indeed one is in real life(Rose,1985:29) .

Indeed, the narrator is sometimes unaware of some facts and happenings. For example, she doesn't know how Frieda is drowned. By so doing, the author can represent her point of view in a censorious, self-conscious mode. Moreover, a critic, Bryan Aubrey, points out that the author 'adopts the role of intrusive narrator, thus providing herself with a chance to explore, usually with a caustic and disparaging eye, the state of mid-1990's, post-Thatcher Britain', (Wilson,1998: 858).

The narrator is so intrusive and omniscient that she knows nearly all the protagonist's secrets and idiosyncracies, so she

often exposes her to the reader. For example, the narrator reveals that Frieda was 'a scandal in the days when scandal was less common than now. And she continued to be a scandal'(155). The narrator does not sometimes know the fact of a situation, so she asks some questions, expecting to receive answers from other characters. The narrator, for instance, gets perplexed on hearing the news of Frieda's disappearance from Exmoor -'Where was she now? Why had she come here?'(168). None of the characters, including her children, knows the answer. A private detective is sent to discover what has happened but he fails. A short time later, Frieda's body is washed up twenty miles along the coast on a rocky promontory. In the 'envoi' of the novel the protagonist herself explains what has taken place, saying:

I was walking along the coast path one evening, just beyond Hindspring Point, when I saw beneath me the orange winking of a patch of chanterelles. It was a very steep patch of moss and bracken and old tree roots... But I just couldn't resist. I had to have them. And of course, like a bloody fool, I lost my footing, slipped, and fell (277).

By the end of the novel the author provides the reader with a few first-person passages, derived from Frieda's memoirs written down on her computer, which contain the answers to the

questions unanswered by the narrator and complete what is lacking in the narrative. For instance, in the middle of the story, Gogo and Rosemary want to know what has happened to their aunt, Hilda, for their mother 'never mentioned her' and ask if 'she can still be alive?'(172), which is answered by the protagonist, in her memoirs, saying: 'She is more than thirty years dead'(245).

The narrator often addresses the reader directly, asking him to share in the reflection upon the events and commentary on the actions and identities of characters, thus giving him a role in the story. Here is a passage where the narrator asks the reader to share in discussing some of the Herzes' personal qualities:

Let us move on to Rosemary and Nathan Herz ... You might think, from the looking at this room, that either Rosemary or Nathan had a pronounced and confident liking for the modern, but you would be wrong (121-2).

In a work of metafiction the author assigns a prominent part in the action to the reader, so his role changes from 'the more passive one of reader to that of narrate', (Christensen, 1981: 28). Above all, the reader is asked to participate in the 'creation of worlds and of meaning, through language', (Hutcheon, 1980: 80). This explicit dramatization of the reader is a feature of metafiction that is clearly employed by Drabble.

Amongst the other prominent features of Drabble's metafictional mode is the heavy use of self-reflexivity and references to traditional literary texts and writers, for she believes that people should not be removed from their ancestral past and that they are part of the tradition affecting it and being affected by it. Drabble, the novelist, has been influenced and shaped by the English tradition she is trying to add something valuable to. She is often compared to Thomas Hardy owing to her acute belief in predestination and the fickleness of good fortune. For her, to imagine and to foretell an individual destiny is 'a form of hubris', (Allan, 1995: 59). When asked about the reason for her admiration for George Eliot, she explained it is because she is 'so inclusive. She does tackle a very large range of subject matter', (Rose, 1985:29). Drabble is also compared to Virginia Woolf because they share many of the similar intertextual allusions and conceptions in their texts like 'the conception of the psyche and of human personality' which both present as 'part of a deeply connected, dynamic web that links experience across both public and private levels', (Dembo, 1989: 98). In addition, both present in their fictional worlds the characters of 'women academics who seek to escape from personal relationships

through a retreat into scholarship',(McClellan, 2002:196) and handle similar feminist themes like motherhood, marriage and career. In her recent work Drabble is much more concerned with universal issues like social justice and corruption.

Drabble's characters turn to old forms of literature for comfort, guidance and comparison of similar situations. They often hold fictional analogues for the sake of analysis and comprehension of similar experience:

Drabble's attachment to older literature, however, is not a form of parasitism; rather it implies her belief that human beings cannot respond to experience in a totally free and original way. Our perceptions as well as our identities are shaped by a variety of forces, and the literature and myths of our culture constitute one of these. (Moran,1983:113).

The Witch of Exmoor abounds in such literary references as the one in which the 'Just Society' Frieda calls for is described to be 'a Brave New World'(6), a reference to Aldous Huxley's novel, Brave New World. Daniel suggests that this world should be based on fairness and justice, on which his daughter, Emily, remarks, saying, 'that is science fiction'(7).

Drabble employs intertextuality to emphasize the significance and literariness of all texts including her own. Many

novelists, dramatists, poets, and philosophers as well as the titles of books are referred to in comparable situations to emphasize the continuation of human experience. Frieda and David are, for instance, likened to Bernard Shaw when Gogo says to her husband: 'Shaw was fastidious. Like you. Like, it would seem, the reincarnate Frieda' (46). David has had a great literary background for he 'read Plato and Aristotle. They blew his mind ... He read Sir Walter Raleigh and dreamt strange dreams'(7, 8). So, there is a kind of common understanding and agreement between Frieda and David on many literary, social and political issues. However, Gogo suspects that there may be a special relation between them, pointing out that her mother 'has cast herself as his Lady Macbeth'(51). On the other hand, her son, Benjamin, is described to be the 'heir to great expectations' (50), which is a reference to Dickens's Great Expectations. In another situation where Frieda is describing a massacre of sheep in Somerset, she refers to R.D. Blackmore's Lorna Doone whose main themes are love and murder and whose heroine 'was shot by Carver Doone, near the church of Oare'(85) in Exmoor. Also, Benjamin has read Lorna Doone among other books on Exmoor in the local library to have enough information about the place of his grandmother's alienation. In addition, the librarian recommended the poems, Kubla Khan and Peter Bell to him and assured that both Coleridge and Wordsworth knew Exmoor well.

When he read the notes on Wordsworth's Peter Bell, he could see that she was right - 'He didn't think much of Peter Bell—a silly poem, about an old man and a donkey, not a patch on Kubla Khan' (89). He wanted to consult these books on Exmoor before his visit to Frieda's house there. In addition to the previous reference to Coleridge and Wordsworth, other poets like Pope, Larkin and Sylvia Plath are mentioned in the context of the story. For example, while discussing such poetic themes as racism and cultural appropriation, Philip Larkin is referred to. Philip Larkin is one of the poets who is accused of being a racist because he does not address the coloured folk in Hull in his poems. But, David defends him, saying: 'You'd hardly expect Larkin to address his poems to 0.8 percent of the population, especially the 0.8 percent that don't read poets like Larkin'(54). As for cultural appropriation, the discussion ends with Goethe's definition that it is 'cultural colonialism'(55).

Frieda sometimes recites some lines which express her point of view of a certain situation or convey her expectations of the future. For example, she recites the following lines, asking Benjamin to remember them because they express something that 'may come in handy':

Crows are green, rooks are blue,  
Crows are three and rooks are two,  
I may live for ever, and so may you. (108)

Then, she gives him some advice in some other lines:

The soul and the body rive not more in parting  
Than greatness going off.  
'T is safer playing with a lion's whelp  
Than with an old one dying (109).

At the end of the novel when Benjamin hears the news of Frieda's death, he remembers the lines, trying to understand their meaning but he can not. He asks Emily, his cousin, to explain them but she says, 'It's some kind of spell... It says she'll live for ever, that she's not dead at all. I kind of believe that, don't you?'(211) He shakes his head, not convinced of this explanation. As a result, he is sick and depressed.

Emily attempts to help Benjamin overcome his depression and psychological breakdown by bringing him some books about birds to know the difference between crows and rooks. She reads: 'Crows are green and rooks are blue. Well, sort of. They're both black; but they have a different sheen'(212). However, the meaning is not clear. So, his father calls in a poet, Saul Sinnamary, who has written some bird-poems, to elucidate the hidden meaning in these lines. Saul recommends reading Sylvia Plath who has written some bird-poems as well. After reading her Benjamin finds out she can not tell the difference between a crow



and a rook. Then, Saul suggests that Benjamin should go out to nature to feel free like birds. A short time later, he recovers. However, he feels hated by his relatives due to the large fortune his grandmother has left to him. Among Frieda's papers he finds a translated Icelandic rune, three of whose lines confirm the feeling he has:

Wealth is the source of discord among kinsmen  
And the fire of the sea  
And the path of the grave-fish. (243)

Benjamin is still insistent on knowing the significance of using crows and rooks as symbols for future incidents. He is reading more books on birds. He remembers Saul likening human beings to the goatsucker, a night bird with large eyes and cryptic plumage - 'That's us, man ... they are birds of omen and reverential dread'(234). Here, the author leaves the reader without giving him any more explanation so that he can detect it from the context. Similarly, the reader can liken some of the characters to rooks and crows as Saul has done. The reader now comes to know that Gogo, David and Benjamin are Frieda's favourites. As afore-mentioned, they paid her a visit in her alienation, which the narrator describes, saying:

now her empire was in decline, it had shrunk to this barren strand ...  
She is watched by three crows. They are a faithful three. She knows  
them well (82).

From this passage the reader can realize that the three crows are David, Gogo and Benjamin because they are the most faithful to her. Frieda expects in her verse that Benjamin will survive and flourish; she one day called him 'the divine child ... the youngest child of Israel ' (50) and that she, like any great woman, will be memorized and immortalized through her great work.

Not only does the author make references to old and modern poets like Wordsworth and Sylvia Plath but she also presents the poet character of Saul Sinnamary as typical of modern romantics who are still concerned with nature and natural elements .Saul thinks that nature has a great effect on the soul, so he suggests that Benjamin should visit such places as hills, mountains and rivers to recover from his depression. As a critic, Saul is lecturing on Caribbean poetry, myth, legend and post-colonial literature. On hearing the events of Frieda's story he gives the following critical comment, which is also a comment on the text under scrutiny:

It's one hell of an old-fashioned plot. Wills, legacies, inheritance tax, capital gains tax. A real old nineteenth-century property plot. On

the other hand, it's an archetypal exile's dream plot, a twentieth century transmigration plot. The family jewels buried in the garden of the homeland awaiting the return of the exiled prince(215).

This piece of commentary is part of the critical discussion running on throughout the novel.

In a discussion about modern romanticism between Frieda and Susan Stokes, a writer of romantic fiction, Stokes points out that all romantic fiction is a variant on two plots, 'one was Sleeping Beauty, the puberty myth. The other was Cinderella, the tale of rags to Riches'(117). Frieda describes her fiction to be 'the tale of Cinderella? From Rags to Riches had been her story'(118). On the other hand, they discuss the reason for the boredom and unfruitfulness some writers complain of at a certain stage of writing. The narrator here interferes to illustrate the reason, quoting a critical passage sent by a critic, called Schiller, to a friend of his who has complained about them in 1788 -'The ground for your complaint seems to me to lie in the constraint imposed by your reason upon your imagination' (118). So, Frieda has chosen to be alone 'to get rid of thinking and reason ... to will herself into another medium' (141). In a sense, she is turning from writing about history and sociology into fiction, from reason into imagination. As a result, she has become fruitful

enough to create this story. Frieda regards the stage of her alienation as the climax of her story at which she, like a heroine in a traditional plot, would 'discover herself to have a mortal illness, an illness which would inspire her with a new desire to survive, to triumph over the Black Ace' (143).

Frieda has recoiled from the modern life due to greed, corruption and triviality that abound in every thing including the language people speak and write. She has heard words and expressions that 'no sane society could ever coin. Offwat,offtel, offsted, offthis, offthat. Everything had gone off, like bad meat', so she wonders, 'How had these sounds globbed up from the pure well of language undefiled into the tongue that Shakespeare spoke?'(71). She has drawn herself, not wishing to enter into battles for pure English like those she has fought against the corruption of meat and burger manufacturers. In her alienation she is like 'Napoleon on Saint Helena', which is the subject of Turner's painting entitled, 'The Exile and the War'. The analogy portrays Frieda in her last days in loneliness and Napoleon 'on his last beach, against a red sunset, in exile'(136). The place where Frieda has alienated herself is linked to some ancient legends that have given it the fame of a 'place of mystery and drama, of legends in the making' (259). For example, Frieda retells a

legend, which had taken place in Exmoor, about a noble huntsman who pursued a hind across the moor, up a hill, and down through the steep hillside, towards the sea. The hind with three mighty leaps bounded down the cliff into the sea and swam to the west out of sight. The huntsman marked her three tracks and planted three stones at her hoofmarks which can still be seen to this day. The spot is now known as Hindspring Point, where Frieda has drowned. The narrator here remarks, 'In the genre of legend, all things are possible and exaggeration bears conviction' (260).

Despite this tragic end of Frieda's story, the author lets it go on to a more optimistic and hopeful ending through the recovery of Benjamin and the choice of a new young heroine, Emily, who represent the new generation of a new coming century. This ending is agreeable with Drabble's remark, 'I like fairly optimistic endings', (Rose, 1985:20). David will also prosper so that he might fulfill Frieda's hope of the Just Society. The ending is somewhat optimistic in spite of such tragic events as the death of Frieda, Nathan and Simon which elaborate Drabble's pessimistic view of contemporary life with its physically and psychologically damaged victims of crime, drugs, and corruption.

In conclusion, it is precisely her heavy use of literary and non-literary allusions, her belief in the referentiality of fictional language, her ability to tell the truth about a self-aware, complex, fragmented society, her employment of over-obtrusive narrator, her dramatization of reader as narratee, her use of analogy and parody of previous genres, her presentation of the protagonist as an enigmatic character and her statement of many critical discussions in the text that characterize her novel as metafictional

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### Notes

- 1- Linda Hutcheon ,Narcissistic Narrative ,Waterloo : Wilfrid Laurier University press ,1980,p.1.

The term 'metafiction' itself seems to have been coined in an essay by the American critic and self-conscious novelist William H. Gass (1970) where he refers to the works of Borges, Barth and O'Brien ,which are called anti-novels, as 'metafictions'.(See : Inger Christensen, The Meaning of Metafiction, Bergen : Universite Tsforlaget,1981,p.9.). She points out that this kind of literature was prominent in 17th century Spain and was represented in the works of such writers as Lope de Vega and Cervantes. So ,it is an old tradition but the term itself is fairly recent. The term has been developed and connected to other genres and disciplines. For instance, Linda Hutcheon calls the novel genre that incorporates both fiction and history 'historiographic metafiction'. This genre is 'both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay(s) claim to historical events and personages'.(See :Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, New York : Routledge , 1988, p.5.)

In the 1990s metafiction has been connected to another form of fiction, called 'cybernetic fiction'. David Porush notes that self-referentiality is the paramount characteristic of this form. In the early 1980s, 'cyberpunk' emerged from the subgenre of

- science fiction but Porush used the label 'cybernetic fiction' to describe many of the novels that were known to be metafiction. (See : Takayuki Tatsumi, 'Comparative metafiction : somewhere between ideology and rhetoric', Critique, Fall 97, vol.39, issue1., pp.2-18.).
- 2- Patricia Waugh, Metafiction , London : Methuen, 1984, pp. 21, 22.
  - 3- Ibid .
  - 4- Glorie Tebbutt, 'Reading and Righting : Metafiction and Metaphysics' in W. Golding's Darkness Visible', Twentieth-Century Literature, ed. William McBrien, vol.39, no.1, 1993,pp. 47-57.
  - 5- Margaret Drabble,'Mimesis : The representation of reality in the post-war British novel', Mosaic, 20, 1987, p.14.
  - 6- Lillian S. Robinson ,ed., Modern Women Writers, New York : A Frederick Ungar Book, vol.1, 1995, p.735.
  - 7- Bryan Aubrey, 'The Witch of Exmoor', in Magill's Literary Annual, ed. John D. Wilson, California : Salem press, vol.2, 1998, p. 859.
  - 8- Margaret Drabble, The Witch of Exmoor, New York : Harcourt Brace & co., 1996, p.29. (The numbers of the pages from which the quotations are taken are written after each quotation between parentheses).

- 9 - Patricia Waugh, *Ibid.*, p.9.
- 10- Steven G. Kellman ,*The Self-Begetting Novel*, New York : Columbia University press, 1980, p.3.
- 11- Patricia Waugh, *Ibid.* , p.14.
- 12- Roberta Rubenstein, 'Fragmented Bodies / Selves / Narratives : Margaret Drabble's post-modern turn', *Contemporary literature*, ed. Thomas Schaub, University of Wisconsin press, vol.35,no.1, 1994, p.139.
- 13- Pamela S.Bromberg, 'Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* : Feminist Metafiction', *Novel : A Forum on Fiction* ,ed. Mark Spilka, Brown University Publishing, vol. 24, no.1, 1990, p.13.
- 14- Diana Cooper-Clark, 'Margaret Drabble: Cautious Feminist', *Critical Essays on Margaret Drabble*, ed. Ellen Cronan Rose, Boston : G.K. Hall & co., 1985, p. 29.
- 15- Bryan Aubrey, *Ibid.*, p. 858.
- 16- Inger Christensen, *Ibid.* , p. 28.
- 17- Linda Hutcheon, *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 18- Tuzline Jita Allan, *Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics*, Athens : Ohio University press, 1995, p.59.
- 19- Diana Cooper-Clark, *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 20- Roberta Rubenstein, 'Sexuality and intersexuality: Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way*', *Contemporary literature*, ed.L.S.

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- 21- Ann Kristyn Mc Clellan, Mind Over Mother: Gender, Education and Culture in Twentieth Century British Women's Fiction, University of Cincinnati, DAI,A. 63 / 01, 2002, P. 196.
- 22- Mary Hurley Moran, Margaret Drabble : Existing Within Structures, Carbondale and Edwardsville : Southern Illinois University press, 1983, p.113.
- 23- A) In a prefatory note to 'Kubla Khan' (1798), Coleridge gave the following background : 'In the summer of the year 1797, the author ,then, in ill health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire... he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchase's Pilgrimage : "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built" .The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines'. (See :Alexander W. Allison and others, eds. The Norton Anthology of Poetry, New York : W.W. Norton &co.,1975,p.614.note 4). It seems that Exmoor is a source of inspiration for writers, so Frieda alienates

herself there to write her memoirs. In some lines of Kubla Khan there is some reference to magic that is thought to be existed in such savage places as the one Frieda has chosen :

A savage place as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

By woman wailing for her demon lover!

B)'Peter Bell' (1798) is a long poem that derives its plot from legends and classical mythology. It is a narrative poem that relates the journey of Peter Bell ,the potter, through valleys, caves, mountains and rivers. The end of the narrative shows that the journey through nature has reclaimed him. After reading it Benjamin has learnt the lesson that nature has a great effect on the soul :

And now is Peter taught to feel

That man's heart is a holy thing;

And nature, through a world of death,

Breathes into him a second breath.

More searching than the breath of spring

(See : Selected Poems of William Wordsworth, London :  
Oxford University press, 1975, pp. 238 -40).

24- Among Sylvia Plath's bird poems there is one entitled, 'Black rook in rainy

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weather' in which the poet describes the rook to be black :

On the stiff twig up there

Hunches a wet black rook

Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain.

I do not expect miracle

Or an accident

(See : Alexander W. Allison and others,eds., The Norton Anthology of Poetry, New York : W.W. Norton & co. ,1975,p. 1286.)

25- Diana Cooper - Clark , Ibid., p.20.

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**MODE OF METAFICTION IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S  
FICTION: THE WITCH OF EXMOOR**

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**Abstract:**

This paper aims to find out that Margaret Drabble is a postmodern novelist through the analysis of her novel, *The Witch of Exmoor*, in which she employs metafiction, one of the prominent modes of postmodernism. Many critics call her a traditional novelist because she tackles some themes very like those in Jane Austen's novels. In *The Witch of Exmoor* the action goes round a family at war and the setting is depicted as in a traditional novel.

It is shown that the novelist uses many of the elements that make her worthy of being called "postmodernist": the use of literary and non-literary allusions, the depiction of a self-aware, complex, fragmented society, the employment of all-omniscient narrator, the dramatization of reader as narratee; the analogy and parody of previous genres, the referentiality of her fictional language, the depiction of her protagonist as an enigmatic character and the statement of long critical discussions throughout the action of the novel, showing the self-referentiality and self-reflexivity of the text. The metafictional nature of the text is clearly represented by the novelist character of the protagonist who writes historical and social novels exposing the truth of the modern life.

# الأسلوب الميتافiksi في قصص مارجريت درابل : ساحرة اكسمور

د / صبري سعد شعيشع \*

## ملخص البحث:

هدف البحث: يحاول الباحث أن يثبت أن الرواية البريطانية المعاصرة مارجريت درابل تتبع أسلوب " ما بعد الحدائفة " في كتاباتها، وذلك بعد أن أطلق عليها كثير من النقاد لقب كاتبة النساء و شهبوها بالكتاب القدامى أمثال جين أوستن و صفوا رواياتها بالقصص القديمة لأنها تختار موضوعات و شخصيات أشبه بروايات عصر فيكتوريا و خاصة رواية " ساحره اكسمور" التي تلقت كثيرا من هجوم النقاد لان موضوعها يدور حول صراع أسري والحوار حول شئون أسرية، والبطله تعيش في منزل ريفي قديم أشبه بمنازل الريف في عصر فيكتوريا. ولكن الرواية بما جوانب أخرى تتقد الحياة المعاصرة وتكشف حقيقة المجتمع المعاصر و تستخدم اساليب و فنيات (ما بعد الحدائفة Post-modernism) في كتابة الرواية مثل الاسلوب (الميتافiksi Metafiction) الذي يعتبر سمة بارزه في كتابة رواية ما بعد الحدائفة .

طريقة البحث: عن طريق التحليل الوصفي لهذه الرواية وتطبيق السمات و العناصر المميزه لرواية (ما بعد الحدائفة) وعلي هذه الرواية يمكن ان نثبت إن مارجريت درابل ليست كاتبة تقليديه ولكنها معاصرة ويمكن تصنيفها واحده من روائي (ما بعد الحدائفة).

نتيجة البحث: بعد قراءة وتحليل النص وجد أن الرواية تستخدم كثيرا من أساليب (ما بعد الحدائفة) في كتابة الرواية: مثل التصوير الصادق للمجتمع المعاصر المعقد المفتت، وأسلوب "الميتافiksi" الذي يحلل الرواية داخل الرواية نفسها مع مناقشات نقديه اديه بالاضافه لكون بطله الرواية كاتبة روائيه تكشف في رواياتها فساد العالم المعاصر وتقوم بعمل مقارنات بين ألوان الأدب المعاصر و القديم، مثل استخدام راوي للقصه يعرف كل اسرار الشخصيات و يعلق عليها، ويطلب من القارئ مشاركة التعليق علي الأحداث، فالبطله سجلت هذه الرواية علي الكمبيوتر واستخدمت راويا موثوقا به ليكتبها. استخدمت الرواية كثيرا من ملامح الحياة المعاصرة وناقشت كثيرا من قضاياها، فهي بحق كاتبة من كاتبات (ما بعد الحدائفة).