

The Evolution of Morality in Margaret Drabble's *The Garrick Year*

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Abstract

Margaret Drabble's *The Garrick Year* can be profitably read as shedding light on personal identity and moral growth in the contemporary society. The protagonist Emma confront moral dilemma because of the opposition she feels between reality and illusion in her life. An ethical turn in her character comes from the struggle to get out of the solipsistic shell. Emma is dissatisfied with her married life and so she goes out for dinner with Wyndham. Though she becomes disloyal to her husband David, She recognizes her mistake at last before anything serious happens. Her ethical enhancement is evident. The good human life can be understood in terms of the development of human nature. This research paper focuses on the inherent moral development in the character Emma.

Keywords: Ethics, Good values, Moral development, Personal Identity, Reality.

Advancing in age and not in maturity, Drabble portrays twenty six year old Emma Lawrence Evans and her tale of *The Garrick Year*. It is a first-person narration of self-conscious, linear, unreliable, retrospective account of approximately one year of her family life. It unfolds twelve chapters with flashbacks of earlier periods. The heroine, Emma Evans gets married to an egocentric actor, David. She explains why she married him. She says, she did not want to settle for an easy life and so wanted something "precipitous, and with David I felt assured at least of that" (TGY 25). Although they marry in a hurry and then regret later, the birth of their daughter Flora brings a huge change in their lives.

Emma had experienced child-bearing and maternity for three years and now she feels the need for a lucrative job. She is happy because she is offered an enjoyable job. She takes a job of newsreader and announcer in a television studio. She regards herself to be an ideal candidate for the job. David informs her that they would be moving to Hereford, to play a year's season at a provincial theatre festival. Emma is not interested to move to Hereford because she is unable to relinquish the dream of her job. David

says, “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” (TGY 17). In David’s eyes, Emma’s desire to take the job seems to be in vain. Likewise Emma also has no respect for his profession. She thinks that acting is an entertainment and not an art. In her view, all actors are “a pack of megalomaniacs” (TGY 17). They both argue and Emma ends up deploring her marriage which has denied many things in her life. Though she experiences disadvantages in her married life, she does not want to give up on David. She says:

I did not want to separate the children from their father; I did not want anyone to criticize David for leaving me; I did not want David to be alone in Herford, not only because I knew that if he went without me he would never come back, but also because I knew that he too would be lonely (TGY 20).

This shows Emma’s concern for David and the morality of not leaving her husband at any situation. In *Margaret Drabble*, Joanne V. Creighton says that “Like many a nineteenth century literary heroine, and many a twentieth-century romantic one, Emma’s crisis of resolving reason and feeling is tested in her inability to respond to the natural, either inside or outside herself” (48).

At Hereford, Emma’s life seems to be on the verge of extinction. Her constant boredom with life make her feel that life has become a deserted life. Her life seems to be meaningless and is filled with eating, sleeping, shopping, drinking and feeding the children. Emma finds her life dull and so she looks forward for thrilling and exciting new experiences. She accepts Wyndham’s proposal to go out for dinner. She questions her wisdom in going out with another man alone. Emma enjoys mild flirtations and spends time with Wyndham. But she feels nervous and the idea of having an affair delights her but the actual affair does not make her happy:

The reluctance was wholly on my side, though there must have been something on his to make him put up with me: I simply could not bring myself to do it. Kissing I did not mind; in fact I soon discovered that anything above the waist, so to speak, I did not mind but that anything below was out of the question (TGY 128).

The above passage clearly depicts her morality. She followed the ethics of morality. She allows certain liberty but rejects the serious sexual advance. This shows the moral development in her character. She hesitates to make love with Wyndham and this indicates that she has good values and is morally good. When an opportunity to share the bed comes, she refuses to make love with him. Wyndham begs her not to so hard on him and tries to talk of love. But she says that, “I only know one person and that’s David, and I don’t want to know anyone else. It’s horrible, quite horrible, knowing people” (TGY 132). Wyndham loses his temper and he shouts angrily at her saying “You treat me like a fool, you eat my food, you drink my drink, you take my presents off me, and you treat me like fool...You’re child, I’m telling you, you think you can take everything and give nothing” (TGY 143). Both of their views on marriage differs

entirely. Wyndham sees marriage as a matter of convenience whereas Emma sees affair as the matter of convenience. She saw her husband David and Sophy making love. She caught them red-handed. Emma made a heartfelt apology to Wyndham because of her behaviour towards him. She says,

Wyndham, I really must apologize. I had no right, no right whatsoever, to put myself in a situation where you might think – where you might expect – where I was any way committed to go; I thought I could. I wanted too. But there are more things stopping me than I realized, and I apologize for not having recognized them earlier (TGY 160).

Emma regrets for her mistake. It reflects her state of mind. She indulges in the affair because she wants to enjoy herself. In the beginning, she is blind to her own nature. Finally, the good sense of morality prevails over her and so she apologizes to him, realizing her own mistake of having an affair. This shows moral enhancement in her character. Accidentally, Emma gets struck against the garage wall after her affair with Wyndham. She accepts this as an answer to her affair. She feels that a moral error had been committed and punished. Emma's American friend, Mike Papini visits her at Hereford. He invites her to London to stay with him. She says that she was shocked and cannot bear the separation from her children. Emma never thought of revenging her husband David though he is disloyal. Most of the time she fights with him for trivial matters. She argues with him many times but she does not hate him. Both of them have different taste and nature. Emma declares in a fight that, "You're not fit to live with, if it weren't for the children I'd leave you tomorrow" (TGY 125). Though she is angry on David, she does not take any step to walk out his life. This shows the moral nature of Emma. She has an inborn moral growth and does not want to leave her husband at any situation.

Emma also feels that there is something in her marriage which is alive and this makes her separation impossible.

Indeed, the idea of parting never crossed our minds. It was never anything but a question of his staying or of my going. This living thing, whatever it was, kept us still intertwined, so that whenever I felt myself suffocating, the more I knocked against him, each breath of his swelled against my own ribcage. We were not separate, at that point; we were part of the same thing still. (TGY 20).

She avers that, though both of them are incompatible, they are faithful to each other. Even though Emma has bad behaviour, it does not drive David to any other woman, till he meets Sophy; Although David was a womanizer before marriage. Emma, even in her darkest days of dissatisfaction, she does not invite anyone into her life. She says with confidence that. "Even at worst, I liked David and although I did not see that I owed him very much, I certainly did not owe anyone else more" (TGY 27). This shows the morality in her character. She does not leave David even at her worst situation.

When Emma faced temptation in the form of Wyndham, she goes astray for a while and realizes her mistake before it is too late. She accepts her own weakness and

hardness. David also regrets for his uncaring behaviour. Their way of life makes them feel that they have something in common. "People who get married give up the here and now for the sake of the hereafter" (TGY 161). Both of them have the inability to understand it and this creates the problem in their life. Diana cooper clark says that, "Life is absurd and chaotic, shifting and contradictory. It contains great gaps between what one wants and what one gets the ideal and the real" (6). Emma faces the gap of what she looks for and what she finds. She marries David and expects to have a life full of excitement. But in her life quest for some excitement which she misses in her married life with David, she loses what she has Creighton remarks that:

Emma's rationalizations, compromises and accommodations in her role as wife, lover and mother, together with her longings for an identity that defies existing female models, evoke sympathy and identification even from readers who see Emma shaped and limited by social and cultural forces destructive of healthy female selfhood (50).

It is purely moralistic and humanistic in heroine's art. Emma has a positive move towards her inherited self-morality which comes along with the acceptance of life.

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