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A first-class degree graduate in English Literature at Newnham, young Margaret Drabble soon attracted the attention of readers and critics with the publication of her first prose works in the 1960s. Besides her interests in writing, she had developed a strong fascination with the stage, into which she had made incursions earlier in her life both as a graduate student and as an actress playing small parts with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford. Her ventures into the theatre industry as an actress and as the wife of the actor Clive Swift inevitably prompted her to practice her literary style as a playwright. Those were the years in which she was commissioned the two plays -*Laura* (1964) and *Bird of Paradise* (1969) -, which are the object of the volume under review in this article. With a renowned career as a writer of fiction, the publication of the only two plays written by Drabble over fifty years after their first performance is motivated, Fernández claims, by two main concerns: “the consideration of Drabble as the social writer par excellence of her generation and the presence in her work of an artistic impulse that has always been open to evolution and transformation” (2018: 1). And indeed, the two texts are real gems to understand the growth of the style of an essential author of her generation, but also to testify to the social changes of the Great Britain of the 1960s, when politics and social movements were clamoring for a reevaluation of the traditional roles of women. It is not difficult understand, therefore, Drabble’s command that the two plays were included in an academic edition when she was first approached with this project (Fernández, 2018: 5).

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Laura and *Bird of Paradise* were written by commission, when Drabble had already built a name as a novelist (Fernández, 2018: 81) and could, therefore, afford to experiment with the dramatic form to explore some of the terrains she was familiar with in fiction. *Laura* was directed by Claude Whatham and broadcast on 11 September 1964 as episode 2 of the series of plays *It's a Woman's World* produced by Granada TV. Inspired by events in Drabble's own life, the play revolves around the thoughts of a young graduate wife who broods over her boring routine as a mother and housewife (Edmund, 1964: 12). *It's a Woman's World* followed Granada's habit of presenting its plays for television in a series format, and featured four plays named after their central female characters: all women in a particular age-group between adolescence and the forties who presented the audiences their own anxieties and tribulations. Contemporary reviewers, nonetheless, wondered at the fact that only one of the four plays of the series, Drabble's *Laura*, was written by a woman, the other three falling into stereotypical portrayals of women as seen by their male pens (Amos, 1964: 2): *Virginia* written by Dennis Woolf, *Julie* by Anthony Linter and *Jean* by Norman Crisp (episodes 1, 3 and 4 respectively). Drabble became, then, the voice of the silenced women of her generation.

With another woman at the center of the play, *Bird of Paradise* was performed between 11 February and 1 March 1969 at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre in London as part of the National Theatre Company experimental workshop season. The season was celebrated by contemporary critics as being “among the most important events in our theatre in the last half century” as it evidenced the need of a young and experimental National company with a “theatre of its own” (Marriott, 1969: 8). Together with Drabble's *Bird of Paradise*, the audiences at the Jeanetta Cochrane were delighted with a season that included *Macrune's Guevara* by John Spurling; *Nurse Macateer* by Shena Mackay; *Pursuit* by Gillian Freeman, *Rites* by Maureen Duffy and a “dialogue and mime satirical revue, ‘Scrabble’, devised by Claude Chagrin and written with Oliver Cotton and Richard Mangan” (Marriott, 1969: 8). In *Bird of Paradise*, Drabble digs into the trendy world of fashion in the London of the 1960s through the character of Sophia West to uncover the dilemmas, once again, of a suffocating womanhood within the strictures of marriage and sexuality.

The two characters, Laura and Sophia, represent the anxieties, aspirations and fears of two women at an eventful decade in the history of women's emancipation. A unique piece in its own, Fernández's academic edition of *Laura* and *Bird of Paradise* makes the plight of the two women available for the first time. The structure and contents of the book meet the requirements of the two objectives set by the editor in the introduction to the volume. Divided into two main parts, each of the two major sections of the book directly address to the said objectives: the first provides the modern edition of the two unabridged plays, and the second a collection of critical essays that, emulating the classic Norton editions, offers readers detailed contextual information to understand the two texts within the complex network of social and personal referents in the literary works by Drabble. The volume is aptly complemented with a

timeline of the main events in the life of the author and a list of essential secondary bibliography on her life and works. Photographs of Drabble rehearsing at Cambridge in 1959, one of which is featured in the book cover, widen our view of the author's connections with the theatre business.

The plays are acutely edited, although readers interested in genetic criticism might have welcome more details on the source texts for the two plays. The comprehensive collection of critical essays is a most valuable contribution to the volume as it not only provides insights into the play's socio-historical contexts but also into Drabble's own fiction. Discussions, therefore, range from contemporary politics and legislation to the socio-cultural advances that Mary Quant's fashion designs offered women in the 1960s. The topics selected for the essays are well balanced: after a thorough analysis of the presence of theatre in the life of Margaret Drabble by the editor of the volume, two chapters by Fernández and Navarro provide broader historical contexts for the two plays under discussion. The two authors also relate a well accounted history of the production of the two plays, which is essential to understand their corresponding performances as two unique theatrical events.

The fourth chapter in this second part is devoted to a critical analysis of the various points of intersection that connect the two plays with Drabble's earliest fiction. Mainly rooted in an all-prevailing gynocentric narrative, Drabble's novels of the 1960s, Rivera Izquierdo argues, share "the thematic scope of her two plays [...] The protagonists [...] are usually middle-class, university-educated women, whose concerns reflect those of the author at the time (Fernández, 2018: 119)". The two plays deepen into these thematic preoccupations and reflect, for example, upon "domestic entrapment" and what Cunningham refers to as the "brains and breasts dichotomy" (1982: 121). The section concludes with two final chapters in which *Laura* and *Bird of Paradise* are set against the British Drama and television industry of the late 1950s and 1960s. Asensio's forays into the history of British theatre of the 1950s and 1960s reveal significant, though not unexpected, influences in Drabble's dramatic writing. For example, Asensio thoroughly argues how Drabble assimilated much of the new tendencies set by the English Stage Company and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and underscores Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) and Arnold Wesker's *Roots* (1958) as two titles of a particular relevance for Drabble (Fernández, 2018: 137) –as they were for many actors and playwrights of her generation. Membrive, on her side, digs into the production history of *Bird of Paradise* understood against the backdrop of the patterned productions of Granada TV of the 1960s with "a naturalistic style [...] (and) recognizable characters [...] in ordinary situations" (Fernández, 2018: 152). The author contends how Drabble's *Laura* excelled among the rest of the plays in the series as it was the only one to depict a true-to-life female character.

On the whole, the book appeals both to the general public and fans interested in the life and works by Drabble, as well as to theatre historians, critics of contemporary theatre and fiction and specialists in English and Women's Studies. The book has no similar competence in the market yet it serves as complement to the books published in other established dramatic

series which aim to uncover texts by pre-eminent, emerging and well-established authors; namely, Nick Hern Books or Aurora Metro Books. As such, one of the greatest achievements of the book is that it puts dramatic writing within the map of literary genres written by Drabble, forcing academics to revise the existing literature written on the novelist. Fernández's well-researched and well-written critical edition of the plays of Margaret Drabble is an essential contribution to various fields of research as it succeeds in providing fruitful material to bridge the gap between British society of the 1960s, Drabble's life and her own literary universe.

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