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Gender and Political Issues in the novel *The Radiant Way* by Margaret
Drabble

Bachelor thesis

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ANNOTATION

This paper is focused on the gender and political issues in 1980s' Britain in the novel *The Radiant Way* by Margaret Drabble. The theoretical part is aimed at gender issues and the position of women and at political issues and the consequences of 1980s' politics. The practical part is an analysis of the novel based on the issues explained in the theoretical part.

KEY WORDS

Political issues, Margaret Thatcher, Gender issues, 1980s', *The Radiant Way*

NÁZEV

Genderová a politická témata v románu *The Radiant Way* od Margaret Drabble

SOUHRN

Tato práce se zaměřuje na genderová a politická témata 80. let 20. století v Británii v románu *The Radiant Way* od Margaret Drabble. Teoretická část je zaměřena na genderovou problematiku a pozici žen a politickou problematiku 80. let a její následky. Praktická část je analýza románu založená na problematice, která je vysvětlena v teoretické části.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Politická problematika, Margaret Thatcher, Genderová problematika, 80. léta 20. století, *The Radiant Way*

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1. Introduction

The main themes of this Bachelor Paper are gender and political issues of 1980s' Britain in the novel *The Radiant Way* by Margaret Drabble. Margaret Drabble, born in 1939, is a British writer, novelist, biographer and also critic. She graduated from Cambridge in the 1960s'. The key themes which she develops in her writings are the failure of love, the fear of self-abnegation, and the conflict between an educated and directionless life. In the 1980s' she published a trilogy of novels which follows the fortunes of three female friends – Alix, a teacher of literature and conscience, Liz, a psychiatrist, and Esther, an art historian – through the social and political changes of 1980s' Britain. (Literature Online Biography [online]) *The Radiant Way* is the first novel of this trilogy.

“*The Radiant Way* can be considered a feminist novel in its critique of the patriarchal and social forces of Tory-led Britain. It is a bleak, omniscient account of lost hope in the Thatcher years as experienced by three middle aged women whose lives move from communal dreams to isolate sorrows.” (Mickaray, 2003, p. 136)

Because *The Radiant Way* is aimed at 1980s' gender and political issues and their impact on the lives of the main characters, the first part of this Paper, the theoretical part, explains these issues. The theoretical part is divided into two parts.

The first part is focused on gender issues. It describes the position of women in patriarchal Britain which is influenced by a typical gender stereotypes – men are the rulers and bread winners whereas women are mothers and housewives. It also explains the effort of feminists to change these stereotypes. In this first part I am also trying to explain the opportunities which women had during the eighties, especially their employment opportunities.

The second part of the theoretical part of this Paper is aimed at the political issues of 1980s' Britain. It shows the British two-party political system and its politics. The eighties were the time of a reign of the Conservative party; the time of the end of consensus with the Trade unions and the Welfare state. It describes the reign of Margaret Thatcher, the first woman Prime Minister, who was a powerful and strict ruler. Her politics were later known simply by the term Thatcherism. This part is also focused on the changes and consequences caused by Thatcherism.

The practical part of this Bachelor Paper is focused on the analysis of the novel *The Radiant Way*. Firstly, I describe the three women characters; Liz, Alix and Esther and how they represent the various types of women. Secondly, I concentrate on the changes in their lives during the eighties. This chapter examines the impact of 1980s' issues on the lives of the three main characters. I also describe how Margaret Drabble managed to link serious political issues with the everyday lives of the main characters of the novel. At the end of the whole paper there is a conclusion which summarizes all the main points of my Bachelor Thesis and concludes my findings.

2. Gender and Political issues in Britain in the 1980s'

Gender issues were highly discussed in Britain in the 1980s'. Britain was always a patriarchal society which means that men had more stable and powerful position than women had. Concerning both the political and also personal sphere, men were in a higher position than women. Women, of course, wanted equality.

In the late 1970s'and 1980s' some feminist movements were established. The first and biggest one was the Women's Liberal Movement which I depict in a later chapter. The whole idea of feminism was not without its difficulties. Every woman is different, encounters different experience, and perceives equality differently. "If the experiences and concerns of women differ so widely, then feminists must ask whether women have enough in common to engage feminist politics or feminist theory." (Laybourn, 2003, p. 224)

The main idea of feminist politics was that the "personalization of politics was an important contribution to the democratic process"(Laybourn, 2003, p. 218) Feminists wanted to reach equality through this process. Still, at the beginning of the 1980s'there were only a few women occupying positions in the government so it was difficult for feminists to reach their objectives through the government. As a result of that, there were many campaigns led by feminists. These campaigns supported many issues; however, they had the same aim – the equality of opportunities, jobs, wages, care... But we cannot say that these campaigns were not political. "Where they are attended to, they clearly must count as political in the conventional sense – they are public interventions

in the competition for the power to govern. (Laybourn, 2003, p. 218) For feminists is valid “that the personal is political.” (Laybourn, 2003, p. 215) On account of that, they were also engaged in the political sphere, in both the main political parties, Labour and Conservative.

1980s’ Britain was influenced by politics – public and private lives, friendships, careers, hopes... Everything was touched by politics. In the novel *The Radiant Way* there are many passages discussing politics, mostly not as a topic itself but as a part of relationships, as a background of things. It is “difficult to avoid politics”. (Drabble 1987, p. 376)

As I have already mentioned, there were two major political parties in the 1980s’. They were Labour and the Conservative party. I describe their ideologies into detail in the chapter called The Political situation. The economic situation in 1970s’ Britain was not stable. Inflation was getting higher and the government was supposed to do something about it.

After the election in 1979, won by the Conservative party with its leader Margaret Thatcher, things started to change. These changes were not painless. For the majority of people were rather painful. The end of Consensus arose. The consensus was a deal between the government and the Trade unions. This means that there was no longer the governmental support for the Trade unionists. Many large companies were bailed-out and unemployment rose rapidly. Nevertheless, inflation went slowly down.

Another part of the Conservative programme, later known simply as Thatcherism, was privatization and the free market. Margaret Thatcher believed that people should care about themselves within families, not to be dependent on the state help. These changes led to the phenomenon of so called “open scissors”. The rich became even richer while the poor stayed poor or became even poorer. “The less fit get less and less fit, and are washed up on the shore. (Drabble 1987, p.172) The situation of the 1980s’ was far from the Welfare state because of budget cuts.

It might seem that with a woman leader, Margaret Thatcher, the position of women must have been improving. Nevertheless, things were not so simple. Thatcher, a powerful woman, supported the picture of a classical family structure. This means that

women should take care of their children, home and husband. Being a housewife was not an advantage for women because “domestic work is undertaken as a personal service to a male head of household”. (Laybourn, 2003, p. 221) But Margaret Thatcher was not as stable about this issue as she always was about other ones. This is explained in the chapter concerning Thatcherism and Margaret Thatcher herself.

On the other hand, there were some advantages for women which were caused by Thatcher’s politics. There started to appear more part-time vacancies which were mostly occupied by women. This was a kind of a paradox. Unemployment was getting higher but the amount of economically active women was higher than it used to be.

To sum up, the 1980s’ were full of changes. As I have already mentioned these changes were mostly harmful. Everybody was engaged in politics because politics started to influence the life of every person. Nobody was neutral; each person had his or her political opinion. Looking back on the 1980s, it was a time during which things changed and we are able to see it more obviously in retrospect.

In the following chapters of the theoretical part I explain the gender and political issues of the 1980s’ in more detail.

2.1 Gender Issues

Gender is unavoidably linked to the sex of a person but the difference between these two expressions cannot be omitted even if some people evaluate these two things as the same one. What is the main difference between gender and sex? According to Margaret Mead feminist studies made a distinction between sex, regarded as biological, and gender, which is culturally constructed. Thus, one is born male or female according to chromosomal make up and secondary sexual characteristics. One is socialized into masculine or femaleness roles through culture. (Bowie, 2005, p. 3400) In other words, sex is something what we are born with and, on the other hand, gender roles are acquired during our lives.

There are strict gender stereotypes throughout society. These stereotypes have very strong roots in history and continue into the present. The most remarkable stereotype is

that males are to make a living, and to protect and rule the world; however, females are to serve, care for, and follow the males. But these stereotypes have been slowly changing during time. Of course, these changes caused and still cause many problems or disagreements in society. While the male role has stayed more or less the same, the female role has changed a lot. Women are no longer just wives and mothers; they are also workers, voters and rulers.

The Position of women in Britain changed a lot during the 1980s'. It was rather a long and difficult process which had started a decade earlier. According to Jane Pilcher, women were largely invisible, other than as wives and mothers within families before the 1970s' or thereabouts. On the whole, differences between women and men tended not to be regarded as problematic, or as something sociology should concern itself with. (Pilcher, 1999, p. 1)

Most women were not satisfied with the position as only wives and mothers and with the male underestimation. As a result of these gender stereotypes the new women's movements were set. Sometimes these movements are called feminist. There could be a problem with this term because it could be explained by more than one definition.

The dictionary definition of the term feminism is simple – the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes or the organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. (Webster's online Dictionary [online]) Karen Offen defines feminism as a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men.(Offen, 2012, p.123) No matter what definition I have read, there are always the words equality and woman. I would define feminism as women's efforts to reach equality with the men's world, to reach the equality of the genders. In the book *Contemporary feminist politics* by Joni Lovenduski it is mentioned that some women "refused to call themselves feminist because this term was often caricatured. Feminists were considered as unattractive, humourless women who hated men." (Lovenduski, 1993, p.2)

The most powerful movement was called The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). "At the end of the 1960s', and during the 1970s' the WLM transformed British

feminism, giving it a radical edge and energy that have been absent for several decades.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 3) At first, the WLM influenced women’s organizations within Britain. Even the women who were not the part of this movement could have fought for their rights.

It did not take long until an internal conflict appeared in the WLM. This conflict was caused by the difference in the main theme of British feminist argument.

“At first it was the issue in argument about equality between men and women. At the same time as some feminists claimed equality with men in all areas of social life, others argued that equality was not an appropriate goal for feminists, because inescapable differences between men and women meant that justice required that they should receive different treatment.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 39)

These differences in opinions led to the fragmentation of the WLM. The three strongest voices were of the Radical feminists, Liberal feminists and Socialist feminists.

Radical feminists were characterized by being absolutely radical in their viewpoints. They wanted 100% equality between men and women. “Race, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, ability, and other identities were simply asserted to be secondary to gender.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 78) Radical feminist were interested only in the equality of gender and many of them claimed that they did not need any men. It means that most of the Radical feminists were lesbians.

“Heterosexuality was imposed on women for men’s benefit, and thus lesbianism is synonymous with feminism. Not all lesbians or Radical feminists accepted this argument and not all of those who did were comfortable with the fierceness and moral certitude with which it was expressed. But gradually it became apparent that political lesbianism was central to the logic of Radical feminist politics... Only lesbians were truly women-centered.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 70)

Radical feminist believed that their main enemy was patriarchy which means male supremacy.

Liberal feminists wanted equal rights with men and “believed that individuals should be treated according to their talent, effort etc. as opposed to the characteristics of their sex.” (Sociology.org [online]) They wanted to remove any prejudice and have the same opportunity as men have.

“Liberal feminists, including many women in the Labour party, in the professions, and in mainstream women organizations, believed that liberation (a term that they did not actually use)

was a matter of removing obstacles to equality between sexes. Once institutional and legal barriers to equality were gone, women could if they wanted to, take up the same social roles as men.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 65)

Socialist feminists believed that the social class was the main factor which affected women’s chances. They believed that if they were financially independent they should have the same opportunities as men have. “Socialist feminists or Marxist feminists, as they are sometimes called, struggled to develop theories and strategies that integrated differences of class and gender.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 65)

By this division the WLM lost its unity and the definitions lost their clearness. All of these feminists were still fighting for equality between women and men but each group had its own way and definition of equality.

”There has been a demanding fragmentation of the WLM, a decline in its organizations that was accompanied by “burn-out” by many former activists who have not been replaced in sufficient numbers by a following generation of younger women. Deradicalization has occurred, dimming the shine of the liberation ethos of feminists’ activity and goals. When issues were successfully propelled into the political main stream, feminists lost control of their definitions, because policy-makers and administrators inevitably muted the impact of radically conceived reforms.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p.353)

2.2 Feminist politics

Despite the fragmentation of the WLM the feminists were not unsuccessful. The WLM lost its power and solicited but, according to Joni Lovenduski, the integration of feminists into state and political institutions necessarily removes them from the grass-roots movements. The popular absorption of some feminist values and the recycling of feminist ideas in a variety of contexts, almost by definition mean their delusion. “Such developments are partly, but not completely, a product of a natural life cycle of a successful social movement” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 353)

Feminists were not only involved in the public organizations and campaigns which were supporting women’s rights and position in society. They were also involved in the

political sphere. “After 1979 many British feminists became active in the traditional institutions of political competition – parties, unions, and local government, all these were influenced by a new influx of women who had been politicized by the WLM. (Lovenduski, 1993, p.133) Their main aim was to change mainstream politics.

They were involved in both of the main British political parties – Labour and the Conservative Party. They managed to influence the parties’ politics but there were still just a few women in the top positions. “There is disagreement about whether to support only feminist candidates, whether to support only feminist candidates against anti-feminist women candidates.”(Lovenduski, 1993, p.144)

This was not the only difficulty for women involved in the political sphere. There was a strong stereotype of a powerful politician – the upper class white man. Also the whole politic sphere was male and inhospitable for women. Another problem was a “gender gap” – “women’s innate distaste for politics” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 155), “women are more concerned about social issues than men.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 157)

Despite these difficulties women became involved in politics more and more. You can see it on this table. There is a comparison of the number of women voters, candidates and MPs in Labour and the Conservative party from 1979 to 1992.

	Voters %	Candidates %	MPs %
Conservative Party			
1979	48	5.0	2.3
1983	45	6.3	3.3
1987	44	7.3	4.5
1992	43	9.8	6.0
Labour Party			
1979	38	8.3	4.1
1983	33	12.3	4.8
1987	31	14.5	9.2
1992	38	21.3	13.0

(Duncan, 2010, p. 428)

Women's involvement in the political sphere brought females closer to equality with males. As we can see on the table from the book *Women in temporary Britain* by Jane Pilcher women started to occupy powerful positions and achieve great success during the late 1970s and 1980s.

1975

International Women's Year

First woman to lead a major British political party, Margaret Thatcher

Sex Discrimination Act makes sex discrimination unlawful in employment, training and related matters and in the supply of goods, facilities and services

Equal Pay Act comes into force, providing for equal pay for men and women

1978

World's first test tube baby (a girl) born in Oldham

1979

First woman Prime minister, Margaret Thatcher

1980

Equality of entitlement to most social security benefits

1981

First woman leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Young

1984

First woman general secretary of a major union, Brenda Dean

Equal pay for work of equal value

1987

First woman editor of a major national newspaper

First woman court of appeal Judge

(Pilcher, 1999, p. 15)

Even though women appeared in powerful positions, the career possibilities for ordinary women remained nearly the same. Patriarchy was still lingering. "Patriarchy can be defined as a system of social structures, and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." (Duncan, 2010, p. 432) This was visible on the division of labour. Working positions were divided according to gender.

There was not equality in the opportunity to get a job between females and males. This inequality was caused by the typical gender roles. A man is a breadwinner while a woman should be a housewife.

According to Simon Duncan's research from 1981 most adult men had a full-time paid job, whereas most women were housewives, which means economically inactive. Some of these housewives and mothers had a part-time paid job, which was not very well-paid, and they usually worked with other women. This is, for example, the case of Alix, one of the main characters of *The Radiant Way*. She works part-timely in a women's prison because there are not many opportunities to find a full-time job. Esther, another main character of *The Radiant Way*, also works part-timely as a history teacher. In contrast, very few men had part-time work. Of course, more money means more power. "As a general rule the more money a woman earns independently in the labour market, the more power in the household and in local social groups like political parties she has." (Duncan, 2010, p. 424)

Most women got typically married when they were young because this was the stereotype and they were expected to do it. In *The Radiant Way* the two main characters also got married just after finishing university, they were Liz and Alix. Marriage had its advantages and disadvantages.

"In a household women work to reproduce the labour of men, but have little control over what has been created, men exchange their labour in the capitalist market for a wage but women do to typically receive a proportion of that wage equivalent to the value or the time of their work, still less do they control its allocation. Partly, this results from the embodiment of patriarchal power in the institution of marriage. But also this is where the interaction between households and work places is crucial. Patriarchal practices in work places deny many women secure high status or high income and it is usually not possible to combine career development with dependent care. Hence to gain access to resources women must marry or live with man. (Duncan, 2010, p. 433)

To sum up, it was not easy for women to earn a living in the patriarchal world but it was slowly getting better as women came to more powerful positions in the public sphere.

2.3 The Political Situation

Post-war British politics were the politics of Consensus and the Welfare state. Consensus means "a general agreement or a group solidarity in sentiment and belief."

(Webster's online dictionary [online]) In political practice it means that the Prime Minister and his or her cabinet and parliament cooperated with the Trade Unions. The real situation was that the government supported the Trade unionists. The state subsidized companies and factories and prevented them from the bail-out. The government wanted to maintain nearly 100% employment. The result was that Britain was full of factories and companies which did not make any profit; what is more, they were not able to keep their employees. So this was a chain problem. The companies did not earn money so the state subsidized them – this made state economics poorer and poorer.

What does the term Welfare state mean? According to the dictionary the Welfare state means “a social system based on the assumption by a political state of primary responsibility for the individual and social welfare of its citizens.” (Webster's online dictionary [online]) This is closely linked to the politics of consensus. In other words, the state has a key role in the lives of the citizens. The state provides the citizens with economic and social stability. This politics of the Welfare state should have brought to British citizens equal opportunities and protection against poverty. Part of it was the idea of 100% employment and a free health service and other social benefits.

Whereas, this kind of British politics was comfortable for the citizens and, especially, for the Trade unionists, it was a tragedy for the British economy. The state made more and more money to support the Trade unionist and the citizens. This led to the inflation of the currency which was getting higher. Inflation means that the value of currency is lower and the price of goods and services is higher. Inflation influences the state economy a lot. British politicians knew that rising inflation could lead to economical bankruptcy. They had to find a way out of this problem but it was not an easy task. It was much easier for them to sustain the politics of Consensus and the Welfare state.

The first attempt to change the economy and social politics appeared at the beginning of the 1970s'. The Conservative party tried to change the situation but the Trade unions were unsatisfied, so they continued with the politics of Consensus. The change arose at the beginning of the 1980s' when Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister.

Great Britain is a constitutional monarchy and the head of the state is a ruler, the Queen. But the Queen is just a symbolical head of state. The true ruler is the Prime Minister and his or her cabinet made of ministers. There are two main political parties and the one which wins the election has a majority of seats in the parliament and its premier becomes The Prime Minister and the cabinet is made of the members of the winning party. In other words, the winning party rules state politics.

There were always two major political parties in Britain. The Labour party and The Conservative Party also called the Tory party. The Labour party is based on individual membership. "The Labour Party is a federation of trade unions, Cooperative Societies, and party branches based on individual membership." (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 137) Because of the connection between The Labour party and the Trade unions the Labour party was always the supporter of Consensus politics. They were supporters of a socialist system where the state supports its citizens. There was not just one tendency in the party. "There has always been a split between Labour's Left and Right, but during 1970s', divisions became more complicated. The old guard Right continued, but the Left split into two distinctive tendencies: the soft Left and the hard Left." (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 137) The right wing of the Labour party was more traditionalistic in their opinions while the left wing was more liberal. Later, part of Labour's left divided and set up a new party called Social Democratic party where they could clearly express their political opinions.

The Conservative party was more stable in its political opinions throughout the party, or, at least for the external observers. The main idealism of the party is conservatism.

"Conservatism is a preference for the historically inherited rather than the abstract and ideal. This preference has traditionally rested on an organic conception of society – that is, on the belief that society is not merely a loose collection of individuals but a living organism comprising closely connected, interdependent members. Conservatives thus favour institutions and practices that have evolved gradually and are manifestations of continuity and stability. Government's responsibility is to be the servant, not the master, of existing ways of life, and politicians must therefore resist the temptation to transform society and politics." (Encyclopaedia Britannica [online])

Members of the Conservative party wanted to cut down interventions by the government on society. The idea of a free economy is that everybody is self-sufficient, thus the government is above society not involved. The main difference between these

two parties' politics in the 1970s' and 1980s' was actually Labour's nationalized economy and the Conservatives free economy.

2.3.1 Margaret Thatcher

The first real change in British politics appeared with Margaret Thatcher. [She was] "a dominant figure in British politics in the 1980s'." (Kavanagh, 1987, p. 246) She was the daughter of a British merchant. Thatcher grew up in a strong political environment and her character was formed according to that. She was strongly influenced by her father.

"The answer for the question how her father influenced her was his conviction that some things are bad and some good. His belief that the quality of the life is linked to the character and character is what we do of ourselves. You have to work to earn the money and survive but the hard work is the most important thing for forming our character. You have to learn how to stand on your own legs – this was what he highlighted. Standing on your own legs." (translation 1, Rovná, 1991, p. 21)

There was not any doubt that her life would be full of politics from the very beginning.

In 1975 she became the leader of the Conservative party. This was quite a surprise for many of its members. She was rather an outsider and was elected rather by chance. "The votes for Margaret Thatcher were not so likely to be for her but against Heath and the politics of Consensus. It is easy to understand why it is alleged that Margaret Thatcher became a leader by chance." (Translation 2, Rovná, 1991, p. 53)

Nevertheless, Margaret Thatcher led the Conservative party and in the 1979 the Conservative party won the election and Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister. She was the first woman in this position. "Her victory made her unique not only in the history of Britain but also in the history of the western world." (Translation 3, Rovná, 1991, p. 82) At first, it seemed that the fact that she was a woman could be a disadvantage but later she discovered that it is actually an advantage because men were used to dealing with women like gentlemen do. It meant that they did not openly argue with her.

From the very beginning of her reign it was absolutely obvious that she was really dominant and strong-willed.

“Her way of coping with people was absolutely sovereign, she did not allow arguments. The effort of the new Prime Minister became to make a team of loyal politicians and persuade them that she was the real leader. Her style brought her supporters but also resisters but nobody stayed neutral. At this time the slogan One of Us was invented.” (Translation 4, Rovná, 1991, p.83)

She made the cabinet of the members of the Conservative party. It was used to consulting the opinions of the Prime Minister with the cabinet, but Margaret Thatcher did not want to waste time with discussions. She did what she found the best on her own. She was strongly against the politics of Consensus and she wanted to cut the power of the Trade unions and inflation; these were her biggest aims.

“The Thatcherites considered the consensus bad from the very beginning. The Prime Minister herself labelled the situation like that – we were not far from, what I called, a permanent socialist society, where independence was trampled.” (Translation 5, Rovná, 1991, p. 87)

“Margaret Thatcher sought to undo the system created by the Welfare state and social democracy and to return Britain to an economic, political, and social regime characteristic of the Victorian period. She abhorred what she saw as the socialism of the 1950s’, 1960s’ and 1970s’ seeking to replace it with an economy in which market forces of supply and demand, private ownership of industries, and laissez-faire prevailed. Politics, she declared, would no longer be a matter of consensus but of conviction. (Kingsley, 1999, p. 346)

She started to do what she had found the best. Budget consolidation and low financial support for companies revealed its consequences soon. Unemployment rapidly grew. Despite high unemployment and the disagreement of the Trade union, the Conservative party won the elections again in 1983. This was mainly because of Thatcher’s international politics and her decisions during the Falklands War.

Margaret Thatcher continued to fulfil her aims – the free market and a state which stands on its own two feet. During the second reign of Thatcher many nationalised factories were sold to the public sphere in so called privatization. She believed that when the owner of the factory was not the state there was a stronger will to make a profit. Shareholders were mostly the employees of the companies and they really wanted to make a profit. There were many strikes organized by the Trade unions. However, these strikes were not very successful – they forced people to strike and used violence. This even made Margaret Thatcher more popular within the working class.

The economy of the state started to improve but unemployment was still getting higher. It broadened the differences between rich and poor people. “Margaret Thatcher’s policies made the rich much richer” (Thomas, 1992) As a result of making some people richer the Conservative party gained new voters and the Conservative party won another election and Margaret Thatcher could have continued in her politics, later known by the term Thatcherism.

Margaret Thatcher was a very strong politician and she never changed her mind. Here are some of her most popular beliefs:

“The state should be strong enough to perform its primary tasks of ensuring adequate defence and law and order; people should solve their own problems rather than turning to the government; government intervention may be counter-productive in terms of slowing down society’s ability to adapt in a changing world.” (Kavanagh, 1987, p. 11)

The time of the reign of Margaret Thatcher, the 1980s’, was full of changes. Today we called her style of leadership Thatcherism. From my point of view, this term is not just about political issues but also about her attitude to things. She was strict and inflexible in her opinions. It must be admitted that she managed a lot during her reign even if the changes were almost all harmful ones. She was not popular but reputable.

2.3.2 What Thatcherism brought to women

It would be easy to say that a woman ruler made women’s situation better. However, it was not as simple as that. During the reign of Margaret Thatcher there was a strong will to cut down the power of local government and other local political organizations. Feminists were mostly involved in such local political organizations, thus it was not very pleasant to the feminist politicians. The government under Mrs Thatcher did not cooperate much with any organizations.

“British Feminists have had to contend with a particular type of bureaucratic culture, where for instance, it would be extremely difficult to form the kinds of networks between women inside government and feminist groups outside.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 19)

On the other hand, there were more possibilities for women to get paid work even if unemployment rose. Because of using new technologies and cuts in production of

factories there were more positions for part-time workers. Part-time workers were usually women so this caused more women to be involved in the working process. Women were working to gain more independence but sometimes they were working simply for economic survival, especially single mothers. State benefits were cut so they had to work to keep themselves and their children.

Did involvement in the working process bring women more equality with men?

“Esther Breiten made a useful distinction between equality and autonomy. Equality refers to women access to opportunities and resources, as compared with men’s. Autonomy focuses on the individual woman’s freedom within personal relationships, for instance control over her own fertility, and access to housing in her own name. (Pilcher, 1999, p. 24)

Even if a woman worked in the same position as a man her wage were not the same.

“Women’s average hourly pay has continued to lag behind men’s. Following the implementation of the Equal Pay Act in 1975, the gap had closed very slightly by 1977, when women’s average hourly pay was 75% of men’s, but by 1986 it was still only 75.1%.” (Pilcher, 1999, p. 48)

It shows that “during the 1980s women in Britain (have) gained greater autonomy, though not greater equality.” (Pilcher, 1999, p. 24)

What was the Margaret Thatcher’s opinion about the position of women? Although she was strict and inflexible in her opinions concerning economics etc., she was not stable on the question of the position of women in society.

“Mrs Thatcher herself has hardly been consistent. It is true, as Combell points out, that, as Prime Minister, she was forever talking about the family as the centre of women’s lives, and tended only to refer to women’s common experience in their capacity as housewives. In a recent interview with Jenni Murray on Women’s Hour, she warned against the danger of a generation of crèche children. Yet, earlier in her career she had voiced views almost diametrically opposed to this. It is worth quoting here at length from an article she wrote in 1954 for the Conservative publication *On Ward*: For a short while after our twins were born I was without help and had to do everything myself including three-hourly feed day and night, so I know how exhausting children and housework can be. As well as being exhausted, however, I felt nothing more than a drudge... I had little to talk about when my husband came home In the evening and all the time I was consciously looking forward to what I called getting back to work – namely, to using some of mental resources which I had been expressly trained to use for years.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 43)

There appears a kind of a paradox. Margaret Thatcher could not have imagined herself as a housewife but she always claimed that there should be a traditional family and the role of women linked to that.

Margaret Thatcher’s attitude towards the position of women is quite unclear. She did not do anything to support feminism but she also did not do anything against it. Of

course, she was not against improving the position of women but her effort was not strong.

“At any rate, the Equal Opportunities commission was not abolished, although its budget and staff were cut. And although it is now a cliché that Mrs Thatcher only ever included one other woman in her cabinet, Baroness Young, briefly present as Leader of the House of Lords, she did apparently encourage the promotion of women in the civil service.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 46)

Even if she did not do much for other women Margaret Thatcher herself was of course an inspiration for many of them; The symbol of a powerful strong woman.

”Mrs Thatcher did very little for other women, but did she offer some kind of inspiration? Surely, the very fact of her occupation of the supreme political office, and of the confidence and authority with which she carried out its duties had some effects. She must have made it seem more possible for women to be powerful, to succeed in a men’s world.” (Lovenduski, 1993, p. 53)

There is no simple answer if the reign of Margaret Thatcher was of benefit to women or not. Her government made little effort to realize feminist aims but on the other hand it was not anti-feministic. “Under Thatcher, women did not lose ground in their demands for rights, but they did not advance either, they were on unstable ground.”(CeliaM.Wallhead, p.104)

3. Margaret Drabble

Margaret Drabble is a British writer, novelist, biographer and also a critic. She was born in 1939 in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England. Her older sister is the well-known author A.S. Byatt. Margaret Drabble attended the Mouth School, York, and a Quaker boarding-school and was awarded a major scholarship to Newham Collage, Cambridge, where she read English and received double honours. (Redmoon [online])

Margaret Drabble could be considered a feminist because of the issues dealt with in her novels. Most of her novels are focused on feminist issues and problems pertaining to women. “The novels incisively diagnose female complaints. She explores the various options of women of today. The convention of the sexual protest into novels is what makes her work interesting. [...] Bungled and achieved female self-definitions are consistent themes of her novels. Actually her women out to pay homage to patriarchy’s clearest forms.” (G. Suchitra)

The trilogy of novels written in the 1980s’ is no exception. In all these three books; *The Radiant Way*, *The Natural Curiosity* and *The Gates of Ivory*, Margaret Drabble deals with the questions of women’s lives. “The inevitable problems of the mid-twentieth century, women provide the specific plot complications in all Drabble’s novels. Both female and male character is revealed and developed in relation to familiar feminist issues of education, sexuality, marriage, motherhood, and economic dependence.” (G. Suchitra)

However, Margaret Drabble could be considered more than just a feminist writer. In her novels she concentrates on the everyday problems of British people, especially women. She portrays a picture of routine British life and its political and social background. We can easily say that Margaret Drabble is also a kind of a chronicle writer.

“There appears to be a consensual assumption among critics which regards her novels, especially those from the 1970’s and 1980’s, as some kind of documentation of the times. Accordingly, Drabble has been called “the chronicler of contemporary Britain“ and “a central chronicler of contemporary urban middle-class life.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 35)

There are other writers who consider Margaret Drabble to be a chronicler. “Joyce Carol Quates has recommended one should read Margaret Drabble to find out what London and England are like. Phylis Rose goes even further and suggests that Margaret Drabble is the novelist people will turn to a hundred years from now to find out how things were.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 35-36)

From my viewpoint, Margaret Drabble is neither a feminist nor a chronicler. She is a woman writing about the era in which she lives. In her novels she tried to describe the way people, particularly women, live. Margaret Drabble herself claims that some of her works were “closer to sociology than to so-called creative fiction and about the way we live now. [...] We realize that the novel can be more truthful than the instant news media which are always telling you a story for a particular political purpose.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 36)

Margaret Drabble deals with serious feminist and political issues in her novels and enables us to find out what the lives of ordinary middle class people were like. In the next chapter I am going to analyse her novel *The Radiant Way* which is a „radiant“ example of her artistry.

4. The Radiant Way

The Radiant Way is Margaret Drabble’s “powerful novel for the eighties”. *The Radiant Way* was the first novel of a trilogy. The names of the two following novels are *Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991). This trilogy is “an evaluation of the state of Thatcherite Britain and reflects the way of life in 1980s’ Britain. Drabble shows us an England in decline.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 99)

The name of the novel, *The Radiant Way*, has a hint of sarcasm and irony in itself because the quality of life during the 1980s in Britain was not “radiant” at all. This title is even mentioned several times in the novel itself. Firstly, *The Radiant Way* is the name of a children’s reading primer which Liz Headlean, one of the main characters of this novel, found in her old bookcase. “Liz held it in her hand, regarded it with a mild astonishment. *The Radiant Way*.” (Drabble 1987, p. 385) Secondly, *The Radiant Way* is

the title of Charles Headlean's TV programme, "a series that demonstrated, eloquently, movingly, the evils that flow from a divisive class system from early selection, from Britain's unfortunate heritage of public schools and philistinism. The Radiant Way was its ironic title, taken from the primer from which Charles had learned at the age of four to read at his mother's knee. (Drabble 1987, p. 174)

The novel *The Radiant Way* reflects 1980s' issues. As I have already written Margaret Drabble was also considered by several critics as a chronicler. Even some parts of this novel rather describe what was happening during these times.

"During these years, war continued to rage between Iraq and Iran, but the West did not pay much attention. Every week seemed to carry a headline which read, fighting breaks out again in Beirut. [...] The heir to the throne of England married a kindergarten assistant and she bought a lot of new clothes. Much attention was paid to these new clothes by the media of the Western world, to the derision, bewilderment, envy, curiosity or ignorance of various non-Western nations. [...] Meanwhile, on the home front, the new political party, which was called the Social Democratic Party, forged an Alliance with the Liberal Party and spent a great deal of time studying opinion polls." (Drabble 1987, p. 229)

The Radiant Way is a kind of a chronicle piece of writing for the 1980's seen from a woman's viewpoint. This is clearly visible from the very beginning to the end of the novel. This novel starts with a party on New Year's Eve in 1979. This is not an usual New Year's Eve party it is "the end of a decade. A portentous moment, for those who pay attention to portents." (Drabble 1987, p. 1) Liz Headlean's guests seem to pay attention to portents. People evaluate the old decade and discussing their expectations for the new one. "Conventional, unconventional; in the last half-hour of 1979 several of Liz and Charles Headlean's guests attempted to formulate what, for them, seemed to be the conventions of an eclectic, fragmented, purposeless decade; some attended to prophesy for the next." (Drabble 1987, p. 32) The guest list was precisely planned. For Liz it was vitally important who attended her party. It brings something what is called social status. "The house was full of trend-spotters." (Drabble 1987, p. 32) It is visible that social role and position was important. We can notice that something similar to class division still existed in the eighties.

As the party was approaching, the guests discussed various topics. Most of these topics had a political background.

“In other corners and other rooms, dozens of topics floated gaily on the lively, slightly choppy waters, their pennants bobbing and fluttering in the end of year, the terminal breeze: the approaching steel strike, the brave new era of threatened privatization, the abuse of North Sea oil resources [...]“ (Drabble 1987, p. 26)

People did not discuss only political issues; it also seems that everyone had his or her own political opinion. Politics was a part of everyday life and it highly influenced people’s lives and relationships. This is visible in several parts of this novel, even at the New Year’s Eve party; “Left was speaking to Right.” (Drabble 1987, p. 26)

The opening of the novel *The Radiant Way* the New Year’s Eve party 1979 represents mostly the uncertainty which the new decade brings, the vagueness which is coming into the characters’ lives. The end of unity and stability.

“The conventions were changing, assumptions were changing, though not everybody was to enjoy or to survive the metamorphosis, the plunge, the leap into water or air; change is painful, transition is painful, and the social world had not yet reached a stage which could have greeted as conventional, precisely, even at a much-mixed, smart, Bohemian-flavoured cosmopolitan New Year’s Eve party. “(Drabble 1987, p. 33)

Margaret Drabble included several issues in the novel *The Radiant Way*. Another theme is the difference between the rich and poor. London represents the richer place whereas Northam the poorer one. It can be seen from the beginning of the novel when the author moves us from Liz’s party in Harley Street to Shirley’s family dinner in Northam. The people are completely different here; not highly educated, not of an important origin. These are just family members – Shirley, Liz’s sister, a typical housewife, her husband Cliff, who is trying to run his own small enterprise but not very successfully, his parents who are already retired, and some other family members. They also discuss political issues but not in a “philosophical“ way; they just talk about ordinary people and the problems caused by politics. “On they went, the men, talking men’s talk of rates and the threatened steel strike and the Marxist lunatics at the Town Hall, of the closure of the Timperley works, of three hundred made redundant at Brook and Patredge.” (Drabble 1987, p. 52) That was the only connection between these two different worlds – the poor and rich; everybody was influenced by political issues in the eighties.

Margaret Drabble tried to reveal the remarkable difference between these two dissimilar worlds. She makes the reader think about poverty. "Poverty, therefore, was comparative. One measured it on a sliding scale. One was always poor in terms of those who were richer. Do others get poorer, if some get richer? Do the rich need the poor? Will the poor be always with us?" (Drabble 1987, p. 103)

Above all, *The Radiant Way* is concentrated on the lives of the three main characters; three middle-aged women; Liz, Alix and Esther. These three women have one thing in common. They represent middle-class women who were given the opportunity to study at University. "Liz, Alix and Esther were among the most brilliant of their generation. To these three gifted and ambitious young women, fresh from Cambridge in the 1950s, the world offered its riches." (Drabble 1987, back page)

We follow their lives during the first half of the 1980s and Margaret Drabble also reveals the important parts of their past. "All three, coming from a background of disadvantage, represented post-war hope of a wider and more generous evolution of Britain's fenced society. (Eder Richard [online]) Margaret Drabble describes how their lives have changed during the 1980s and in what way these three major characters are influenced by 1980s' issues. In further chapters I analyse the impact of the eighties on the lives of these three women.

4.1 The Main Characters

The Radiant way is concentrated on the lives of the three middle-aged and middle-class women; Liz, Alix and Esther. These women are quite different from each other but they are friends, there is something which draws them together. In this chapter I introduce each of them.

Liz Headlean is a quite well-situated psychotherapist. However, it was not always so. She grew up in Northam with her sister and mother. She wanted to change her life and

study at Cambridge University, which was not easy to attain for her. “The number of girls who had achieved Cambridge places from Battersly Girls’ Grammar in the last ten years could be counted on the fingers of one hand.” (Drabble 1987, p. 59) However, Liz grabbed the chance and managed it. She was slowly improving her position and she finally moved from Northam to Harley Street in London. She liked her position and was not keen on looking back at her past.

“Liz still, after all these years, found satisfaction in giving her address. Each time a shop assistant or a clerk or a tradesman wrote down Dr E. Headlean, Harley Street, the same thrill of self-affirmation, of self-definition would be re-enacted. Liz Ablewhite of Abecorn Avenue had become Liz Headlean of Harley Street, London W1.” (Drabble 1987, p. 18)

This advance made her feel self-confident. She likes to have a power over things. Liz is used to using her reason a lot. She wants to understand the things, “to make sense of things; to understand.” (Drabble 1987, p. 85) She is able to understand all the problems of her patients and other people but she seems not to be able to understand her own problems. “I know that I do not understand my own problems, when I know that I don’t know.” (Drabble 1987, p.137) Liz is really afraid of immersing herself into her own mind, she is afraid of losing her own power. This uncertainty springs from her childhood and, on account of that, she does not want to keep in touch with her mother. Later in the novel Liz finds out what made her so uncertain about herself and about her feelings. She allows herself to open the old trauma. Liz finally remembers being sexually abused by her father. “Now was the day of reckoning. A lifetime of memory in a day. How can one know and not know, simultaneously? [...] Repression. Trauma. The skeleton in the cupboard. Gaze at the past, she would no more question her own wicked heart.” (Drabble 1987, p. 388-389)

This is Liz; always reasonable, she likes having power over the things, she hates to lose her ground – this is the worst thing for her; when something is not easy to solve by reason. She really believes in her style of life and thinks that it is the best way.

Alix Bowen is a part-time worker. She works as a teacher of literature for women offenders at the Garfield Centre. She also works three days a week in White Hall. Alix is not very successful in her career; it is just somehow glued together and she does not earn a lot.

“And what on earth was she herself playing at, crossing the urban wastes so regularly, to teach a bunch of delinquent girls, a bunch of criminals. For £15.60 a night? It hardly covered the petrol. It probably didn't cover the petrol, if she sat down to work it out, which she didn't. What an ill-organized, hotchpotch, casually assembled, patchwork life. Everything seemed to have happened by accident.” (Drabble 1987, p. 71)

Alix is not such a reasonable person as Liz. She is rather suspicious of things. Alix, a lifelong Liberal, is a very kind and optimistic woman. She wants “to change things” (Drabble 1987, p. 85) Alix is very thrifty. “Thrift does not often leave her side.” (Drabble 1987, p. 2) This springs from her youth when she stayed alone with her baby and had to cope with a shortage of everything. She had to work really hard and she “made herself ordinary by hard work.” (Drabble 1987, p. 106) This is Alix; an ordinary woman who seems to be too busy to change anything in her life, always optimistic and kind. However, this is only one side of her personality. Alix can also be a very self-efficient and strong woman.

Esther Breuer is the most extraordinary of the three. She is an art historian and does some researches and writes chapters for some books. She is also a part-time teacher but not like Alix. She teaches just what she wants in her own way. Esther likes making herself extraordinary and mysterious. “She lived very modestly, never taking a taxi, never eating and expensive meal out, yet nevertheless maintaining the halo of mysterious privilege that she had worn at university.” (Drabble 1987, p. 106)

Esther's childhood was not very happy. She came from Germany, actually she and her family escaped from there. “They were both lucky to be alive (Esther and her brother). They had huddled together, small exiles, refugees, in a boarding-house in Manchester, while their mother looked for work and their father hung on in Berlin trying to assemble his papers.” (Drabble 1987, p. 93)

She is visually remembered for her appearance. Esther is also very strict and accurate. “I prefer precision, Esther would say.” (Drabble 1987, p. 83) She is interested in arts and her work is her whole life. Esther stays single. It is part of her mysterious life. She has had some relationships but none of them were serious except the one with Claudio, an Italian writer who is married. She lives in a small but very comfortable flat in London

with her niece or with “a young woman she says is her niece.” (Drabble 1987, p. 87) “Both Alix and Liz are of the opinion that Esther’s relationship with her niece, with whom she shares her flat, is very odd indeed.” (Drabble 1987, p. 81) And this is Esther; a very clever and a little eccentric woman who likes being distinctive from others. Her life’s passion is “to acquire interesting information.” (*The Radiant Way*, 1987, p. 85)

It could seem that Liz, Alix and Esther have not much in common and actually it is true but they maintain their friendship from the first time they meet each other.

“Esther, Liz and Alix, who in Jane Austen’s day would never meet at all, met in Cambridge in 1952. Just before Christmas, when they were up for interview from their respective schools. Alix was applying to read English Literature, Liz to read Natural Sciences and Esther to read Modern Languages. This should have safely prevented any rapport between them, but did not.” (Drabble 1987, p. 84)

Their friendship is not an ordinary one. They do not meet every day. During the time they have known each other there have been some pauses when they have not met at all. But they always have somehow found the way to each other. “They found each another interesting.” (Drabble 1987, p. 90) They have a really special intimate relationship which is not visible from the first sight. They do not kiss and hug each other when they meet. They usually meet each other indoors but now and then they go out for a walk to have a picnic. On one of these occasions a photograph was taken which, in my view, explains their relationship.

“It shows the three of them crouching under a hedge, in the roots of hawthorns, in driving rain, eating a wet sandwich. None of them is looking at the camera: they are looking in different directions, wetly, miserably. Liz has her back to Alix; Esther is sitting some way away staring at the ground. They are very fond of this dismal photograph. The essence of English landscape, Esther dentures. The essence of togetherness.” (*The Radiant Way*, 1987, p. 110)

This photo reveals how different they are but how closely they are tied together.

On the other hand, these three women could be compared concerning at least some parts of their lives. They were all educated at Cambridge and all of them live in London. They matched their lives within the friendship.

“In their mid-forties, after more than half a lifetime of association, they share characteristic, impressions, memories, even speech patterns: they have common stock knowledge, they have entered through one another, worlds that they would not otherwise have known.” (*The Radiant Way*, 1987, p. 108)

From my viewpoint, Margaret Drabble managed to explain this unusual relationship between these three women very precisely. However, this is not the only relationship

explained in this novel; it is full of relationships and friendships which are changing during time. “A sublime example of Miss Drabble’s mastery in unraveling the intricacies of intimate relationships.” (*The Times*, Drabble 1987, back page)

4.1.1 The Impact of 1980s’ Issues

The Radiant Way covers the first half of the 1980s with all its issues and shows us their impact and involvement in the lives of the three main characters – Liz, Alix and Esther. “On New Year’s Eve 1979 they reunite. What does the future now hold for Liz, assured Harley Street psychotherapist, wife, mother and stepmother; for relentlessly well-intentioned Alix, teaching English literature to young offenders; and for Esther, eccentric connoisseur of art, and resolutely single.” (Drabble 1987, back page) These three women are an example of middle class and middle aged women who grew up in changing times. All of them came from a working class background. However, each of them grabbed the opportunity and changed her life through education.

“Liz, Alix and Esther were not princesses. They were not beautiful, they were not rich. But they were young, and they had considerable wit. Their fate should, therefore, be in some sense at least exemplary: opportunity was certainly offered to them, they had choices, at eighteen the world opened for them and displayed its riches, the brave new world of Welfare state and country scholarship, of equality for women, they were the élite, the chosen, the garlanded, of the great social dream. Adventure and possibility lay before them.” (Drabble 1987, p. 88)

Accordingly, Liz, Alix and Esther are the examples of modern women – educated, self-efficient. On the other hand, they are also mothers and wives. They are not the only examples of women in this novel. Margaret Drabble wanted to reveal the various types of women and the differences among them. The most obvious distinction is between Liz and Shirley, between two sisters. They grew up in the same environment but they have nothing in common. Whereas Liz studied at University “she devoted all her energy to success at school, to escape through University” (Drabble 1987, p. 141), Shirley was more interested in boys. Liz now lives in London while Shirley stayed in Northam. Liz is a full-time worker, whereas, Shirley is a housewife. Shirley might seem to be quite satisfied with the way she lives and her role as a housewife but it is not so. “Sex and small children had provided a brief purpose, the energy they generated had made sense

of the world for a while, had forged a pattern, a community: clinics, playgrounds, parks, nursery groups, mothers waiting at the school gate: and now, nothing. An idle flutter of garbage over an empty pavement. Coldness, nothingness, grips Shirley as she stands in her kitchen.” (Drabble 1987, p. 200)

Another instance of a totally distinct woman is Lady Henrietta. It is not clearly explained who she exactly is but she is surely an upper class woman. She is neither a worker nor a housewife. She inherited her wealth. She is always invited to parties and other occasions but nobody knows why. “Is it just because everyone else does, because she is the kind of person that people ask to parties, because her name inscribes itself in automatic writing on the guest list?” (Drabble 1987, p. 31) She is a real upper class woman and her position gives her independence and self-confidence. It is interesting to compare Lady Henrietta to Liz. Both of them are in a similar position, nevertheless, there is still a huge gap between them. This is obvious from the feelings which Liz has when speaking to Henrietta. Liz does not feel as confident as Henrietta and she does not know why, maybe because of the environment where she grew up.

“Oh, yes. Said Henrietta, smiling meaninglessly, confirming Liz’s view that she never listened to a word that Liz said to her. Silence fell, during which Liz inspected Henrietta’s blue dress: it was poutily, bold cut, made of the kind of shot, stiff shiny non-absorbent kind of fabric that Liz herself avoided, for it made her sweat. She was given to sweat. Henrietta clearly not. Perhaps the upper classes did not sweat? She was herself, biologically, a peasant, but was rarely made to feel this to be an eccentricity as she now felt.” (Drabble 1987, p. 30)

These distinctions between women show us the fact that even if the women gained more equality with men there is still a huge gap between the women themselves.

The most notable women characters in *The Radiant Way*; Liz, Alix and Esther went through many changes during these first years of the eighties. These changes affected both their public and private lives. They lost one thing, but gained something new, they changed their opinions. These transformations in their lives were mostly caused by 1980s’ issues, I could even say that these changes represent eighties issues.

Liz went through the most visible and harmful changes during these years. She had to worry about her most precious thing; about her arduously built position. The first shock came to her no sooner than the first day of the new decade. “In the early hours, in the first hours of 1980, gossip spread.” (Drabble 1987, p. 37) Charles, her husband, wanted

to end their long-lasting marriage, he wanted to divorce her. Liz did not expect this to happen.

“A modern marriage, and some of its twenty-one years had been more modern than others. Maybe, Liz reflected (for this is what she contemplated, through the oval mirror), maybe this is why they decided to have such a party, this year, at the end of this decade; as a sign that they had weathered so much, and were now entering a new phase? A phase of tranquillity and knowledge, of acceptance and harmony, when jealousies and rivalries would drop away from them like dead leaves? Well, why not? After twenty-one years, one is allowed a celebration.” (Drabble 1987, p. 6)

Her position was clearly given when she was married to Charles but now she was not sure about it. What is more, Charles decided to leave her for lady Henrietta, the woman who makes her feel like a peasant. Liz lost control. The divorce came at the very beginning of the novel and represents significant change. “The marriage and household are microcosmic and their dissolution at the beginning of the novel and the beginning of the eighties marks the end of a dream of unity, of transcending barriers, not only for individuals, but for England.” (Ruth Witlinger, p. 102)

Not only the loss of her husband frightened her. Liz did not know if she had some rights to their house. “What I’m supposed to do? Move to fucking Kentish town?” (Drabble 1987, p. 142) For Liz the house and what it represents are really important; living in Harley Street means a lot to her. “She reached too high, travelled too far, from Abecorn Avenue.” (Drabble 1987, p. 121) “She had been too confident, too knowing, too rich: she had assumed privileges, she lived in her own charmed world, has despised those who had been less certain, less secure. Let her taste confusion!” (Drabble 1987, p. 126)

Liz survived this change quite harmlessly. However, it cannot be said that the divorce did not hurt her at all but she solved it as a psychotherapist; always reasonable and calm. “She detected the symptoms early, checks them, controls them, but they continue to recur, in a mild but persistent form, and she as mildly and persistently continues to dismiss them.” (Drabble 1987, p. 180)

Liz moved from Harley Street into a house in St John’s Wood and got a little tabby kitten. She lives there alone without a man. She is fully satisfied with her life; “What do women need with men? All that’s gone out of fashion.” (Drabble 1987, p. 130) Despite the fact Liz and Charles have got divorced, Liz tries to maintain her standard of living.

“Liz, probably the closest one to being a Thatcherite heroine, does quite well in spite of a difficult childhood and other serious setbacks later on in life.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 106)

“Projects of thrift do not attract Liz Headlean, as they attract, in different ways, her friends Alix and Esther. She does not wish to turn back, to cut back, to live in a reduced style as a divorced woman. [...] She is afraid that if she takes a step back, all her worldly riches will crumble, like Cinderella’s at midnight, and that she will find herself once more polishing the boots.” (Drabble 1987, p. 183)

Although Liz knows quite familiarly what it means to be poor she has very hypocritical opinions about poverty. “The rich suffer as much as the poor.” (Drabble 1987, p. 128) Liz lives in her own psychotherapist’s world. She really believes that this is the truth. She takes into consideration only emotional suffering. That is partly because the political changes did not touch her public life. “She knows that, by a mixture of instinct and management and luck she is extremely well placed to face the 1980s” (Drabble 1987, p. 180) “The government although she did not vote for it and frequently criticizes it, suits her well. She is not threatened by cuts in public spending, by the decline of the National Health Service, by the new and growing emphasis on privatization; her income derived from judicious blend of public and private practice.” (Drabble 1987, p. 181) Her income is not endangered during 1980s because she works privately and does not need any state support.

Even if her public life remains more or less the same she has changed a lot. Her private life has completely changed; she got divorced and moved from Harley Street. Only one thing persists to be the same; her loathing of her old life in Northam.

Alix, in contrast to Liz, is the most down-to-earth character. It is natural for her to care about things. On account of that, she is probably the most affected character of all. “She is the character who, as Greene argued, is most directly affected by government policies partly due to her jobs and partly due to her caring nature.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 109)

Alix’s life was not always simple. She had to face many difficulties. She got married quite early and, what is more, her marriage was rather unlucky. “So here she was, married to a man she no longer wanted, at the age of twenty-one.” (Drabble 1987, p. 97) Her husband Sebastian died soon after they got married. Alix became a single mother.

This position was not easy to cope with and Alix had to fight with poverty, with a lack of everything. “In the streets of Islington, she observed poverty. She experienced it, also. A one-parent family, living on scraps from the educational world.” (Drabble 1987, p. 102) This was the most harmful period of Alix’s life. “Indistinguishable from her neighbours. Unrecognizable to her Cambridge friends.” (Drabble 1987, p.103)

Partly due to this experience she found her purpose in working for society. Alix works as a part-time teacher in a women’s prison, the Garfield centre, and she also has a part-time job in Nightingale Terrace. Both of her part-time jobs are for community and these are dependent on the public spending. Alix did not think a lot about her position in society, she has never thought about her career as about an important part of her life. Nevertheless, in the 1980s with all the privatization and cuts in public spending she started to reflect on her life; whether there is a purpose in that what she does. “What an ill organized, hotchpotch, casually assembled, patchwork life.” (Drabble 1987, p. 71) Her husband Brian also works in the public sector, Adult Educational Institute. According to that, they are “the closest of the characters to events of the eighties, they are vulnerable in their work to cuts in welfare spending.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 109)

Alix and Brian have the same political opinions. This is one of the things which hold them together. As the 1980s approached things began to be difficult for them. Alix is no longer convinced about her old political opinions. She used to believe in post-war consensus and in Welfare state support. Now, she is asking herself:

“Why we all expect so much. And I expect too. Oh yes, I do. [...] But what worries me most, she pursued, is that maybe, perhaps, they might be right (by they in such a sentence, of late, as 1980 moved onwards, Alix had tended to mean the Tory Party)” (Drabble 1987, p. 130) “Alix undergoes a crisis of confidence in the political assumptions that have been her guiding lights.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 109)

Their marriage started to be in trouble “and the problem is political, for Brian is being drawn to the militant left just as Alix is losing faith in any sort of political action.” (Ruth Wittlinger, p. 109) Their political opinions began to differ and this is really difficult for Alix to bear. “Alix and Brian can no longer speak, as once they did.” (Drabble 1987, p. 285)

In the end, Brian loses his job and he and Alix are forced to move to Northam. She is no longer happy with Brian; it seems to her “as Brian hammered away at the past.”

(Drabble 1987, p. 235) Alix found a job in Northam. This job was not like her previous ones. She did not want to work for the community any more. “She has had enough, for the time being, of trying to serve the community.” (Drabble 1987, p. 392)

Alix is the character who was influenced by the political issues of eighties. She has changed her opinions and also her relationship with her husband has totally transformed. “This system under which she lived. There was no hope in it, so why did her common sense, her rational being, her education all scream out in protest against the folly of Brian’s newly wasted life? Against the vacuous pointlessness of the slogans of his new-found, moustached, thin-lipped, polytechnic chums?” (Drabble 1987, p. 342) Alix feels bitter about the whole situation. „So there is where my privileged education has brought me. [...] I have been driven into paradox, thinks Alix. I have not chosen it. I have been driven in to it.“ (Drabble 1987, p. 393)

Esther is the most eccentric character of the three. She seems to be little affected by 1980s’ issues even if she has a job which is, similarly to Alix, dependent on public spending.

“Esther Breuer’s connections with market forces always been tenuous, but even she is a little affected by the magnetic shift. The series of public lectures in one our great public galleries which she has intermittently graced with her erudition is discontinued [...] English students are failing to get grant.” (Drabble 1987, p. 186) “But she doesn’t worry about it very much. There are plenty of other people to worry about it for her.” (Drabble 1987, p. 187)

Esther is not willing to deal with political issues and she often clearly expresses herself. “What I can’t see, said Esther to Alix, is what any of this has got to do with you. Or with me. It’s simply not our problem. We didn’t make it, and that’s that. “(Drabble 1987, p. 343) Esther is not immersed in political problems; she is rather interested in her work. “Monetarist theories did not prevent Esther from going to Bologna to look at the possible Crivelli.” (Drabble 1987, p. 188)

Esther, from my viewpoint, is a lifelong feminist. She is perhaps a radical feminist. She has never got married and she has never lived with any man. She lives with her niece Ursula or “with a young woman she says is her niece.” (Drabble 1987, p. 87) I believe that this reveals the fact that Esther is a lesbian, but she does not want to confess it. Another thing which implies the fact that Esther is a lesbian is her later relationship with Elena, a woman she met in Italy.

What is more, Esther also dislikes men. She thinks they are “a strange a lot. Meditatively, they are so inflexible. So extreme. They have to take sides” (Drabble 1987, p. 192) There was only one man in her life. This was Claudio Volpe, a little eccentric Italian writer. Their relationship is rather a platonic one and in the novel is represented by a potted palm which Claudio gave her.

“You see that palm that Claudio gave me? I’m very worried about it. They are tricky things, palms.” (Drabble 1987, p. 114) “Esther’s interest in her potted palm, in the spring of 1980, was obsessive. She would talk of little else.” (Drabble 1987, p. 137) [The] ominous palm, the gift of that sinister wizard, Claudio Volpe.” (Drabble 1987, p. 157)

This palm is a symbol of decline. Esther “offered it painless euthanasia by putting it out on the front steps one frosty night.” (Drabble 1987, p. 345)

At the end of the novel Esther makes a decision to leave London for Bologna to live with Elena. For Esther “London has become difficult. Not impossible, but difficult. [She] feels a little old for that kind of thing.” (Drabble 1987, p. 192)

Liz, Alix and Esther, all of them experienced many changes during these first years of the 1980s’. They have changed their opinions; they also have changed their way of live.

“Liz Headlean, having apparently reached the pinnacle of success as a psychotherapist and wife to an affluent media whiz, suffers from self-doubt over the breakup of her marriage, nagging quite over neglecting her ailing mother, and numbing shock on recovering repressed memories about her pedophilic and suicidal father. Alix Bowen, a lifelong Liberal and dedicated teacher in a women’s prison, sees her life and value system turned upside down as a result of Conservative governmental policies that by cutting welfare spending endanger her job and that of her committed socialist husband, Brian, an Open University teacher, Esther Breuer, an art historian and emotional loner, experiences ambivalence about her commitment to research as she witnesses the physical decline and death of her mentor.” (Miracky, 2003, p. 136)

Nothing seems to be the same; each of them has lost something, some important part of themselves. And here they are in June 1985. Liz in her new house, divorced, lives with her cat. Alix, lives in Northam, has a new job, she is no longer in love with her husband and Esther who has had enough of London and Britain and is off to Italy.

The end scene of the novel shows these three women on a picnic. They are celebrating Esther’s fiftieth birthday. They are speaking together like nothing has happened, like there were no changes. They know that nothing is going to be the same any more.

“They make their way on, along the footpath, the devious way home. The sun descends. A fox watches them from the edge of a clearing, sits its ground for a moment, then runs away into the hazel coppice. [...] Below them lie the deep wood, the grove, the secret valley. [...] Esther, Liz and Alix are silent with attention.” (*The Radiant Way*, 1987, p. 396)

I believe that this end scene represents the bad things which they went through and, at the same time, the uncertainty about the things which will come.

4. Conclusion

The 1980s' in Britain was the most changeable time in recent British history. Concerning gender issues, the situation got a little better but not much. The position of women was slowly improving but most of them were still influenced a lot by men. The strong gender stereotypes of a patriarchal Britain still remained quite visible but at least a few changes began to occur. Women had more paid working opportunities as part-time workers but they were not equally paid compared to men even if the Equal Pay Act had been set. There are many signs that the position of women during the eighties was improving, some women started to appear in higher positions and began to be economically active. Nevertheless, this process was very slow and difficult.

The most visible and also harmful changes occurred in the political sphere. There was a strong call for change because the economic situation was getting worse. Nonetheless, nobody expected that change would be so resolute and harmful. A woman became Prime Minister for the first time; it was Margaret Thatcher, also known as the Iron lady. She was the most strict and straightforward politician at this time. Margaret Thatcher came up with a new political attitude called Thatcherism. Thatcherism is famous for cutting state spending, cutting state involvement in the lives of citizens – the end of the Welfare state, for the end of consensus with the Trade unions and for the privatization of the state sphere. Thatcher's politics caused many changes in the political and economic sphere and also in the lives of ordinary people. Unemployment increased a lot and it touched nearly everybody. During the 1980s' the face of the state changed and people's lives transformed a lot.

The novel *The Radiant Way* is a feminist criticism of the Thatcher's era. It is focused on the impact of 1980s' issues and the changes caused by these issues in the lives of the three main characters, Liz, Alix and Esther. Their lives change a lot. Liz's life changes

were caused by a man, by her husband, later ex-husband, Charles. She was really worried about the consequences which the divorce would bring. She linked her position with Charles and she feared losing it. She also found out the truth about her father, another man who influenced her life a lot despite the fact that she is a strong, reasonable woman. Alix started to have her doubts about the principles she believes in. Her and her husband Brian's opinions started to disagree. He lost his job and Alix had to move to Northam with him even if this was not her dream at all. Esther's life during the eighties is also influenced by politics because she worked in the public sphere. But her personality did not let her fear it. She was more influenced by her soul mate Claudio. The relationship with Claudio turned out to be just in her mind and she wasted a great deal of her life on it.

Their way of life transformed a lot during the eighties and these changes were caused either by political issues or by men or, sometimes, by both of these things.

From my point of view, this novel is about three women who experienced the most changeable times in recent British history but did not take advantage of it. They were, figuratively speaking, preparing the ground for the next generation. They, themselves, were independent women but their independence was still restricted by gender stereotypes, even in their minds they were still devoted to their men. This time did not let them be fully independent; it did not let them shine.

Resume

Tato práce se zabývá genderovými a politickými tématy 80.let 20.století v Británii v románu *The Radiant Way* od Margaret Drabble. Margaret Drabble je současná britská autorka, spisovatelka a kritička. V 80. letech napsala trilogii o třech ženách a jejich životech během této doby. Román *The Radiant Way* je prvním z těchto románů. Tento román je feministická kritika thatcheristické éry.

Tato práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí, teoretické a praktické. Teoretická část této práce je zaměřena na vysvětlení historického pozadí tohoto románu. Teoretická část je dále rozdělena na dvě hlavní části. První z nich se zabývá otázkou genderových témat.

Na úvod vysvětluji rozdíl mezi genderem a pohlavím. Genderem je chápán rozdíl mezi mužem a ženou ve smyslu postavení ve společnosti. V patriarchální Británii je tento genderový stereotyp velice zřetelný. Muži jsou chápáni jako vůdci a živitelé, zatímco ženy jako matky a hospodyně. Jelikož ženy nebyli spokojené s touto skutečností a se svým postavením ve společnosti, začala vznikat feministická hnutí. Jako první vzniklo hnutí s názvem Women Liberal Movement. Ale ani ženy nebyli ve svých pohledech na rovnoprávnost jednotné. Feministické hnutí se začalo rozpadat do více částí. Jednou z těchto částí byl radikální feminismus – jeho zastánkyně vyžadovaly úplné zrovnoprávnění s muži, ba co více, radikální feministky muže úplně zavrhovaly. Shledávali je nepotřebné pro jejich životy. Tak vznikl takzvaný politický lesbinismus. Tyto ženy odmítaly mít cokoli společného s muži. Dalším odvětvím feminismus byl takzvaný liberální feminismus. Tyto ženy nechtěly úplnou rovnoprávnost s muži, bojovali za stejné možnosti, jako mají muži. Chtěly mít stejné pracovní příležitosti a chtěly být stejně placeny jako muži. Nechtěli dosáhnout toho, aby byly brány stejně jako muži bez nějakých ohledů, a v tomto se od radikálních feministek výrazně lišily. Ženy se zapojovaly do veřejné sféry zejména prostřednictvím různých kampaní, které bojovaly za práva žen, ale některé ženy se začaly zapojovat i do politické sféry, což nebylo vůbec jednoduché. Jejich snaha přinesla zlepšení postavení žen, nicméně postup a pokrok byl velmi komplikovaný a pomalý.

Druhá část teoretické části mé bakalářské práce se zabývá politickými tématy 80. let v Británii. Ekonomická situace na konci 70. let byla velice složitá a vážná. Inflace stále stoupala. To znamenalo, že peníze ztrácely svou hodnotu. To bylo způsobeno takzvanou politikou konsensu – dohodou vlády s odborovými svazy, že je vláda bude finančně podporovat. To mělo zajistit, že bude ekonomika vzkvétat, a že zaměstnanost bude téměř stoprocentní. Tento způsob spolupráce fungoval po mnoho let. Stát podporoval podniky, které nevydělávaly dost na to, aby uživily své vlastní zaměstnance. Odborové svazy byly spokojené, ale státní ekonomice hrozil bankrot.

Lidé začali volat po změně. Nicméně netušili, že změna přijde velice brzy a to velice rozsáhlá a bolestná. V roce 1979 se dostala do čela vlády Konservativní strana v čele s první ženou na pozici předsedkyně strany, Margaret Thatcher. Margaret Thatcher ve své nové pozici premiérky jejího veličenstva začala okamžitě jednat. Složila kabinet jen z lidí, kteří podporovali její názory, nikomu jinému nedala šanci. Její politika byla velmi přísná a přímočará. Margaret Thatcher si šla pevně za svými cíli a nikomu nehodlala ustupovat. Postupem času začala své rozhodnutí dělat sama, aniž by se radila se svým kabinetem. Její styl politiky, dnes známý pod názvem *thatcherismus* je proslulý. Koncepce *thatcherismu* byla jednoduchá – ukončit spolupráci s odbory, takzvaný konsensus, omezit státní výdaje na podporu státních organizací, omezit státní podporu občanům státu, takzvaný konec státu blahobytu, tudíž snížit vliv státu na život lidí, zprovoznit tržní ekonomiku a státní majetek rozprodat do osobního vlastnictví, takzvaná privatizace. Margaret Thatcher byla toho názoru, že lidé by se měli sami starat o své potřeby a problémy a nespolehat se při jejich řešení na pomoc státu, měli by fungovat bez jeho pomoci. Tato politika přinesla spoustu změn nejen v ekonomické sféře, ale i v životech běžných občanů. Ekonomická situace státu se sice začala měnit k lepšímu, inflace se zastavila a začala se snižovat, co však mělo velký vliv na život obyčejných lidí, byla stále se zvětšující nezaměstnanost. Chudí lidé byli stále chudí nebo ještě chudší, zatímco bohatí vydělávali stále více.

Praktická část této bakalářské práce se zabývá analýzou románu *The Radiant Way* na základě poznatků z teoretické části. Nejdříve se zaměřuji na popis tří hlavních ženských postav tohoto románu, Liz, Alix a Esther. Každá z nich reprezentuje odlišný typ ženy. Liz je docela úspěšná psychoterapeutka. Je to žena, která se snaží vše vyřešit rozumem.

Nemá ráda, když něco nechápe. Pochází z chudé části Anglie z Northamu, ale potom co se vdala za Charlese Headleana, tak žije v Londýně a patří spíše k těm bohatším. Alix, na rozdíl od Liz, o věcech moc nepřemýšlí, spíše je bere tak jak jsou. Její kariéra není tak úspěšná. Alix učí na poloviční úvazek anglickou literaturu v ženské věznici. Alix je liberálka a na věci nahlíží velice optimisticky. Jejím hlavním charakterovým znakem je šetrnost, což pramení v jejím mládí, když se ocitla sama s malým dítětem a musela takzvaně bojovat o přežití. Esther je nejvíce zvláštní z těchto tří žen a ráda si tuto pozici udržuje. Je ráda když působí záhadně až tajuplně. Estherina největší vášeň života je její práce. Zabývá se historií umění a často kvůli tomu cestuje. V Itálii také poznala svou životní lásku, ženatého spisovatele Claudia, ale tato láska je spíše platonická. Podle mého názoru je Esther životní feministka a některé skutečnosti v knize naznačují, že je lesba. Tyto ženy se jedna od druhé hodně liší, ale přesto mají některé věci společné. Všechny vystudovaly Cambridgeskou universitu, a jelikož jsou přítelkyně, tak se jejich názory a způsoby navzájem ovlivňují.

V druhé části se práce zaměřuje na dopad záležitostí osmdesátých let na životy třech hlavních hrdinek a na změny způsobené těmito záležitostmi, jak se jejich životy změnily a co bylo příčinami těchto změn. Všechny tři během prvních let tohoto desetiletí prošly mnoha změnami, většinou změnami bolestnými. Liz ztratila manžela, hned první den roku 1980 se dozvěděla, že ji opouští a má v plánu se oženit s jinou ženou. Liz se s touto zprávou vyrovnala velice dobře. Co ji ovšem trápilo, byla starost o její pozici ve společnosti, když už nebude Charlesova manželka a nebude mít dům na Harley Street. Liz také začala cítit nepopsatelnou nejistotu, která pramenila někde v jejím dětství. Postupem času přišla na to, že ji její otec zneužíval. Alix byla velice ovlivněna politickou situací. Začala mít pochybnosti o tom, čemu celý život věřila. Kvůli tomuto faktu si přestala rozumět se svým manželem Brianem. Nakonec Brian přišel o práci v Londýně a Alix se s ním přestěhovala do Northamu. Estherin život byl také ovlivněn politickou situací, i když jiným způsobem. Esther si uvědomila, že život v Londýně už dále nesnese a rozhodla se odstěhovat do Boloni a žít se svou přítelkyní Elenou.

Životy všech třech hlavních postav tohoto románu byly ovlivněny jak politickou situací, tak muži, kteří v jejich životech hráli velkou roli. V tomto románu se Margaret Drabble

nesporně podařilo popsat jak genderovou, tak politickou problematiku na životech třech obyčejných, byť vysoce vzdělaných žen.

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Attachment

Translation 1 – Na dotaz čím nejvíce na ni otec zapůsobil, odpověděla – Jeho pevné přesvědčení, že některé věci jsou špatné a některé dobré. Jeho víra, že kvalita života závisí na charakteru a charakter je to, co ze sebe člověk udělá. Musíš pracovat, abys vydělal peníze a přežil, ale obtížná práce je pro formování charakteru důležitá. Musíš se učit stát na vlastních nohou – na to kladl zvlášť velký důraz. Stát na vlastních nohou.

Translation 2 – Hlasy pro Margaret Thatcherovou nebyly ani tak hlasy pro ni jako hlasy proti Heathovy (odpůrce) a proti politice konsensu. Je proto snadné pochopit, proč se leckdy tvrdí, že se Margaret Thatcher dostala do čela strany shodou náhod

Translation 3 – Její vítězství ji učinilo unikátem nejen v dějinách Británie, ale celého západního světa.

Translation 4 – Její způsob jednání s lidmi byl naprosto suverénní, nepřipouštějící námitek. Snahou nové premiérky se stalo vytvořit tým loajálních politiků a přesvědčit sebe i ostatní, že je skutečnou osobností vůdce. Její styl jí přinášel přívržence i odpůrce, ale téměř nikdo nezůstával lhostejný. Tehdy se zrodil okřídlený známý slogan. “One of Us”.

Translation 5 – Thatcherovci považovali koncepci konsensu od samého počátku za špatnou. Sama premiérka označila situaci takto: “Nebyli jsme daleko od toho, co já nazývám permanentní socialistickou společností, kde svoboda byla neustále pošlapávána.”

