

MALE HEGEMONY: MYTH OR REALITY IN WILLIAM BOYD'S *BRAZZAVILLE BEACH* AND MARGARET DRABBLE'S *THE SEA LADY*?

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Abstract: This article aims to question male hegemony in the British contemporary novel. In these recent years, considering the commitment, determination, competence and performances of women who still aspire to improve their living conditions, socially and professionally, questioning male domination would be an opportunity to push and encourage women to assert more themselves. The determination of the latter to achieve their objectives set in contemporary society, their aggressiveness in the defense of their interests, their autonomy, their demystification of men and their destabilization of male hegemony can serve a proof of combative and competitive women. In fact, British authors such as William Boyd and Margaret Drabble represent, heroines as role models in their stories, to reflect the cares and concerns of the woman from that society. Today, with the awareness of the discriminatory factors that keep her out of the public sphere, the woman is gradually freeing herself from the shackle of outdated ideologies. This attitude is justified by the power of decision in high levels, by the ambition, the will and the courage which animate her more and more. This is how great advances in several areas concerning women have been accomplished and *Brazzaville Beach* and *The Sea Lady* give an overview.

Key words: affirmation, condition, competition, commitment, hegemony, myth, performance

L'HÉGÉMONIE MASCULINE : MYTHE OU RÉALITÉ DANS LA *PLAGE DE BRAZZAVILLE* DE WILLIAM BOYD ET *THE SEA LADY* DE MARGARET DRABBLE ?

Résumé : Cet article vise à remettre en question l'hégémonie masculine dans le roman britannique contemporain. Ces dernières années, au regard de l'engagement, de la détermination, de la compétence et des performances de la gent féminine qui aspire encore à une amélioration de ses conditions de vie, sur le plan social et professionnel, remettre en question la domination masculine serait une opportunité de pousser et d'encourager les femmes à s'affirmer davantage. La détermination de ces dernières à atteindre leurs objectifs fixés dans la société contemporaine, leur agressivité dans la défense de leurs intérêts, leur autonomie, leur démythification de l'homme et leur déstabilisation de l'hégémonie masculine peuvent servir de preuve de femmes combattives et compétitives. En effet, les auteurs britanniques tels que William Boyd et Margaret Drabble représentent, dans leurs récits, comme modèles des héroïnes, pour refléter les préoccupations et les soucis de la femme issue de ladite société. Aujourd'hui, avec la prise de conscience des facteurs discriminatoires qui l'écartent de la sphère publique, la femme se libère progressivement du carcan des idéologies dépassées. Cette attitude se justifie par le pouvoir de décision dans les hautes instances, par l'ambition, la volonté et le courage qui l'animent de plus en plus. C'est ainsi que de grandes avancées dans plusieurs domaines concernant la femme ont été réalisées et *Brazzaville Beach* et *The Sea Lady* en donnent un aperçu.

Mots-clés : affirmation, condition, compétition, engagement, hégémonie, mythe, performance

Introduction

The contemporary British novel of the 21st century, which increasingly addresses the subject of the search for personal identity and revisits classic styles with a modern eye, encourages the reader to initiate reflections on his way of life. It also offers an opening view to the multicultural reality and helps to understand other ways of life.

All the forms of experiences known through the centuries, as well as the various reflections on man and on the world, have as their primary driving force and as their ultimate goal or as their primary trigger the quest for truth. The writer can succeed in representing the whole society in which he lives while describing the diversity of backgrounds and men from top to bottom of the social ladder. Authors such as William Boyd and Margaret Drabble endorse many women who seek to assert themselves in order to obtain reliable recognition of their feminine identity in a phallogocentric society.

Self-affirmation is knowing how to express one's opinion, feelings and needs. It is the power to act in response to one's needs, to one's environment. It is a way of communicating to our environment: spouse, family, friends, collaborator, etc. Self-affirmation develops a contact with others since this connection allows us to recognize our needs and our feelings. However, for many individuals, asserting themselves is difficult since they have learned little to talk about their feelings or their needs.

In today's world, we see that whatever the society, gender relationships are of a paramount importance, as they are the basic factors of each society. It is around these relationships that society is structured and evolves although people might neglect them sometimes. In an established society, men and women are socialized differently and often function in different spheres; their experiences, their priorities, their perspectives are generally different.

In recent years, the determination and commitment of women to improve their living conditions remain remarkable socially and professionally.

The contemporary British novel constitutes a symbolic writing of the reproduction of the image of the woman in the current society. The history of women, their social and professional functions in the modern world have often given rise to very varied themes leading to various interpretations of feminism. Retracing this history from Antiquity to the present day often gives the impression that any evolution of the female condition and the social status of women depends on the image that men have towards them. In any case, according to civilizations, traditions, religions and cultural contexts, changes appear in the ways of imposing duties or orders on women.

To relate the history of women is, to suddenly limit oneself to constructing a history of how men have looked at them, a history of gender relations. In short, in his essay entitled *Male Domination* (1998), the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers an analysis of the social relations between the two sexes and seeks to explain the causes of the permanence of the domination of men over women in all human societies. According to him, male domination is understood as a habitus giving women and men a predetermined role. The habitus designates a system of preferences, a lifestyle specific to each person. It is not an automatism, but a predisposition to act that

influences the daily practices of individuals such as their way of dressing, speaking and perceiving.

However, the question to see women smoking cigarettes was particularly raised up in England at the turn of the 20th century (1928-1929), the Edwardian period, and was emphasized in an essay by David H. Lawrence, *Cocksure Women, Hensure Men* (1928). Lawrence depicts an English society in full mutation, where men tend to effeminate 'Hensure' and women to masculinize themselves 'Cocksure', to smoke, to drive their vehicles with their hair in the wind.

The vision of Pierre Bourdieu and that of David H. Lawrence remain problematic in the life of women in contemporary society who seek at all costs to assert themselves more.

In the first part of this work, we will analyze the epitomes of moral and social virtues of the contemporary British Woman in *Brazzaville Beach* and *The Sea Lady*. British females resisting phallocentrism through active social and professional commitment in the stories under study will be the subject of a deep study in the second part. The third and final part of this work will be devoted to women empowerment who subvert male domination and assert themselves.

1. The Contemporary British Woman : Epitomes of Moral and Social Virtues

Each society has its own moral values, its principles, its constituted reason, its rules and standards to allow the individuals who belong to it to harmonize their ideologies, their objectives and their positions in order to live better. In the modern world full of mutations, competitions, conflicts and so many other evils that often hinder social relations, living together remains a great challenge to be taken up. With the neglect of promoting fundamental moral values and the evolution of personal opportunities, today human beings' morality is in decline and certain moral values are in decline. It is then up to the parents and predecessors of each era to serve as models or references for the generations that follow.

In addition, it is the duty of the latter to consider their predecessors as benchmarks who have the obligation to guide, to prove their moral values and to show the right way to the younger generations. Dignity, shame, courage, good reputation are among the basic principles that characterize the moral values of the individual.

The woman from the British society that Boyd and Drabble endorse in the romantic diegesis still ensures respect for her own values and standards for the well-being of her populations.

Brazzaville Beach and *The Sea Lady* encompass a set of aspects that relate to the morality of individuals, especially with regard to women who play a very considerable role in the family, for its proper functioning. Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman, by their actions, their position in their families and their relationship with people around them, are patient and respectable female figures. Their attitude proves that the modern British woman is aware of the virtues, of morality and that she does not neglect them at all for a meaningful life.

However, in every society there are men, women, parents and young people who struggle to uphold moral values, as seen in Boyd's and Drabble's stories with Eugène Mallabar's characters in *Brazzaville Beach*, an opportunist who favors his personal interests over those of his collaborators, and Sandy Clegg in *The Sea Lady*, a criminal who changes his name and doesn't want his family to know his identity. (p. 295)

Joseph Conrad said that man is behind in relation to the moral ideal he has set for himself. Long before Conrad, the novelist Emilie Brontë had shown to what extent the exercise of evil made it possible to blur the axiological tracks that governed Victorian society through her incorrigible character, Heathcliff.

The woman described by Boyd and Drabble demands an effective recognition and ensures good practice of moral values that characterize human dignity and encourage sociability in her still male-dominated world.

Conflict, source of turmoil, trouble and stress, is common in Boyd's and Drabble's productions and shows Hope Clearwater in *Brazzaville Beach* and Ailsa Kelman in *The Sea Lady* facing enormous difficulties in their midst. Most of the time, these are conflicts caused by pure provocations of individuals who seek to hurt, misunderstandings between lovers or malicious rivals. In *Brazzaville Beach* (252-253), *there are real conflicts where adversaries, for their survival, use stratagems and respond to violence with violence*, as it is evinced by the confrontation between Hope and Mallabar. In *The Sea Lady*, Ailsa has a provocative attitude. She is a rebel and prosperous in scandals, with provocative feminist positions. "*She has appeared in court for assault, and been sued for libel*" (*The Sea Lady*: 244).

Brazzaville Beach has a didactic impact in today's societies in so far as it lifts a corner of the veil on the binding contracts which, in the field of industry, link certain scientific experts with governments.

In the stories of Boyd and Drabble the presence of the woman in the family and the role of confident useful companion and protector that she plays there, are great. For example, the presence of Hope Clearwater next to John Clearwater and that of Ailsa Kelman next to Humphrey Clark clearly illustrate the fact that the woman has a very important role in the family and in society, so she can bring a lot of positive aspects to family members. The woman is able and determined to assume her roles. Kate Millett (1970, p. 74), clearly underlined this important role of women beside men and within the family:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them-these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy.

In the classic stories of English literature, the woman is represented as the faithful companion of man, whose presence at his side is essential to meet his needs, as Kate Millett suggests in the passage above.

However, some differences sometimes oppose them, as illustrated in the stories under study. Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman are women who assume very well this role of companion with courage, tolerance and patience, despite certain constraints that may transgress their social moral values.

At the beginning of the turmoil in her social life, Hope Clearwater adapts to the circumstances and adopts an affective behavior towards her spouse, John Clearwater. This is how the two spouses lived a sentimental love for some time, even if they experienced disappointments afterwards and struggled to maintain their relationship.

Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman show an ability to endure and overcome obstacles that could stand in the way of achieving their respective goals. They are all intellectuals who have proven that regardless their marital status, women, like men, can have a brilliant career and exercise valuable functions, just as they can be very courageous, capable of mastering situations of daily life, and participate in the development of their country with abnegation.

In *Brazzaville Beach*, Boyd tackle the idea of moral values through the character of Hope Clearwater who sets things going from her own understanding, to the necessary dismantling of a great primatologist's self-deluding theories about the chimpanzees at Grosso Arvore Research Project, a group of which has fallen into a pattern of cannibalistic wilding. While Eugene Mallabar, the project's founder and the author of a seminal book called *The Peaceful Primate*, emphatically denies this possibility, Hope pursues it doggedly, even though it hurts her to witness the actual killings. In fact, she pursues the truth with a literal vengeance. Outraged by Mallabar's willful blindness, she wants full credit for overturning his bankrupt orthodoxy. So, through the character of Hope Clearwater, Boyd endorses the moral values of the woman from the contemporary British society, who still prefers to preserve her dignity whatever the difficult circumstances.

As for Margaret Drabble, she highlights the moral values of Ailsa Kelman by showing that although the latter is grown up in a phallogentric universe, she does not allow herself to be dominated by men socially and professionally. As this is proven by her attitude towards her brother Tommy and his friend Sandy and her husband Humphry Clark.

Hope Clearwater's attitude to support her husband in a very difficult situation and her peaceful relationship in Grosso Arvore with people around her despite the frequent low blows, reflect some real aspects of social virtues of her character that Boyd evinces. Although Ailsa Kelman's attitude towards her family and people around her encompasses some moral virtues, they could be more socially convivial. To some extent, one can say that William Boyd and Margaret Drabble somehow differently display moral virtues. Boyd points out a main female figure's efforts who proves her moral virtues to better preserve social cohesion, whereas Drabble's main female character, worries more about her own interest to evolve both socially and professionally.

In *The Sea Lady* and *Brazzaville Beach*, the recurring representation of the sea is very symbolic in the sense that it constitutes a vast metaphor for women. In the sea, even if

we find happiness there thanks to water, we also experience boredom, trouble, helplessness or distress that can make life difficult for any individual. The presence of water in these two stories as a haunting metaphor for women, who are victims of a very turbulent and hectic life, reflects well the experience of women in the contemporary society.

In this respect, the main female figures resisting phallogentrism through active social and professional commitment in the novels of our corpus will be tackled.

2. British females resisting phallogentrism through active social and professional commitment

The reading of the two novels under study reveals that they both highlight the complex question of women's commitment and their respective attitude in the face of adversity in a world controlled by male domination.

Women are aware of the importance of their role and position. In the narratives of both novels, they have never stopped working to show ambition, commitment and courage in order to achieve their goals. Through the portrayal of heroines, Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman, Boyd and Drabble have highlighted the human qualities, including decision-making power, boldness, ambition and courage, that drive women.

These strengths require endurance, sustained effort until the goal is achieved. And once this is achieved, other challenges are in store, reflecting the perpetual cycle of life. Therefore, having priorities is essential. For the courageous and committed woman, the primary objective is personal success. However, women are distinguished by their multi-tasking function. They take care of the supervision and education of their children while striving to carry out other activities of daily and professional life.

A woman who is committed to actively participate in the development of her country has an interest in considering everyone she meets as someone who can bring her something extra. Moreover, this is what we have noticed in Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman's characters, who neglect nothing to achieve their objectives. The latter have the audacity to take their destiny into their own hands by preferring to move to less frequented areas to carry out their professional activities properly. They have shown courage by writing texts and theses, by investigating in the real events that are happening in their communities, by competing tirelessly with the male sex.

Ailsa demonstrated this well on stage to raise the society's awareness of the ability of women who actively participate in the development of their country. Hope Clearwater, who was writing a thesis entitled *Dominance and Territory: Relations and Social Structure* (William Boyd, 1990, p. 69), in very difficult circumstances, was obliged to avoid any quarrel with the neighbours, show proof of going beyond in order to be able to discuss and exchange with them, as W. Boyd (1990, p. 61) points out through this passage:

Hope has a small perturbation in her life at the moment. A woman from the village behind the beach is careless about tethering her goat. Several times a week, it breaks free and makes its way to Hope's garden behind her beach

house. Hope watches it now as it grazes her hibiscus hedge. She has thought about remonstrating, but the woman -called Marga- is a tough, bossy character. Hope can imagine the entire village becoming involved in their dispute, and she needs the village, and in a way they need her. The system is stable. She can spare a few hibiscus flowers.

Yet Hope has always been both professional and courageous in her work, in a place where she saw no one; she did not depend on any support, she was detached from the world to do researches on her studies and she was not afraid of her solitary situation. (*Brazzaville Beach*, p 121)

In the beech woods and the hazel coppices, with the sky screened and the horizon invisible, she felt even more cut off from the world and its hurry. Only occasionally was there the sound of a car or a tractor in a nearby lane, or the pop-popping of someone out with a gun. Otherwise she was alone with the shifting shadows and sunbeams of the ancient woodlands, hearing nothing but the endless husting of the coastal breeze in the branches above her head. (W. Boyd, 1990, p. 122)

Ailsa Kelman has also demonstrated her commitment and her courage to disavow the ideologies which consist in placing women on the margin. By writing very useful texts on specialized scientific fields, by contributing to a good documentation on the history of her country, Ailsa proves to be a reference for the intellectual woman who seeks to serve her community.

Ailsa Kelman had not invented feminism or Women's Studies or Orientalism singled-handed, but she had been there as they gestated, she had been there as they being born, she had played her part in their history...She had moved on, to the theme of Gender, Art and Anger, and then she had tried of that, and had taken up sociology and the iconography of domesticity and Mass Observation. She had written a book about Mass Observation techniques and the inter-war and post-war life of the housewife. She had edited a book on the history of hypochondria and patent remedies and the once-fashionable and predominantly female afflictions of neuritis and neuralgia and nerves, now subsumed, according to her, under the equally imprecise label of depression (M. Drabble, 2006, p. 255-256)

Boyd and Drabble, through their stories, undertake to endorse the attitude of the committed woman who aspires to better living conditions. These authors use strategies to denounce the factors that can undermine women's emancipation. Through their narrative techniques of awakening the reader's consciousness to ask questions about the human condition, they have succeeded in bringing the reader to discover the elements that encompass the experience of contemporary women and to question social positions of the latter.

In this context, there is indeed a relationship between the commitment of women of our corpus and that of the novelists quoted. For example, Boyd and Drabble, through their ways of approaching the social conditions of women, launch virulent messages to better encourage the reader to analyze their discourse.

The conviction deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of classical British society is that women are incapable of managing certain professional functions. However, Hope Clearwater, an intellectual, a very ambitious researcher in her project, and Ailsa Kelman, who does not give up at any obstacle and takes up all challenges, both of them have denied these prejudices. Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman whom Boyd and Drabble feature in their stories, are distinguished by their progress and courage which have made them earn notorious successes. *The Sea Lady* presents Ailsa Kelman, who is often in action and knows how to take on the role ; she was supposed to play in front of an unexpected audience. Ailsa is a genius activist, driven by competition and inspired by an emancipatory vision.

Through Ailsa Kelman, M. Drabble evokes the efforts and success of a woman who, despite the obstacles related to her marital status, proves quickly her skills in everything she undertakes. Ailsa admirably assumes the roles assigned to her. As a proof, when she is asked to announce to a large London gathering and an even larger television audience the winner of the Plunkett Prize for a science book with a vaguely defined ecological or environmental message, which turns out to be hermaphroditic: *change of the sea and sex change, a study of gender bending in various marine species, she rises to the occasion and her talent, her exploits galvanize the audience* (Margaret Drabble, 2006, p. 4). Her success in this mission, which is proving to be a real challenge, is the very evidence that she is full of skills and that she has well deserved the choice made on her personality.

Drabble is worrying too much about domestic and public social trends. In caring about the history of England, the history of a whole period of great social turbulence and change, serious documentation was necessary. The female characters mentioned above are all independent, hard-working women, who know how to behave in difficult situations or moments.

The situation of the female characters in the stories under study is comparable to that of the woman who lives in modern societies. Presently, in many societies around the world, it is not uncommon to see women who do not shy away from any challenge to achieve their goals. Women who are not afraid of threats or intimidations and who are able to defy the demands of the male sex, are free and autonomous women who expect nothing from men. Some of them use all strategies and means to have satisfaction in their projects or ambitions, or stubbornly try to maintain their relationships, despite their immeasurable disappointment.

The two authors strategically deal with social and professional commitment of their main female figures. As far as the social dedication is concerned, in *Brazzaville Beach*, social committal of women is seen through the female figures such as, Hope Clearwater, Ginga, and Roberta who reflect the image of women who preserve social cohesion. As far as *The Sea Lady* is concerned, rather collective commitments with friendly relationships strenghten social cohesion. Boyd and Drabble also display in their narrative writings two heroines who take the initiative of their sexual relations to endorse sexual freedom and the unbridled or exacerbated sexuality of women from contemporary society.

Coming to the professional responsibility, Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman are both rebellious, audacious, defiant, persevering, passionate, autonomous, combative, competitive and determined women for a professional success, although the two authors have different ways of dealing with the professional pledge of contemporary British women. For Boyd, the rebellion and strategic actions of women who aspire to assert themselves more in a still phallogocentric world are to be mentioned. Hope Clearwater, in her perpetual and tireless quest for happiness, and in her rebellion against the inhuman situation in *Grosso Arvore*, remains an emblematic figure to justify these strategic actions of women from contemporary society. Hope dared to signify to Eugène Mallabar, her project manager, that she wrote an article on the cases of infanticide and cannibalism of chimpanzees in *Grosso Arvore*, an article which will be published, disclosed despite the intention of the latter to hide this phenomenon at all costs. To Drabble's mind the psychological independence of the contemporary woman at the professional level means a lot for her. Ailsa Kelman, her main female figure, is the prototype of the independent, hardworking, multitasking woman who strives to be versatile. She tries herself in all activities, in all fields, symbolizing the mermaid, the myth of the fatal woman owing to the way she gets dressed and her behaviour.

3. Women empowerment : subverting male domination and self affirmation

In feminist literature, when women succeed in displaying social and professional responsibilities in phallogocentric societies, they seem to be now enough equipped to question the male version of the world. Once that women have learned to achieve things in the process of improving both female and social conditions, they now feel stronger to subvert man century-long traditions that served to oppress the female gender. In the novels by William Boyd and Margaret Drabble, the legendary domination of men over women is now challenged by women's determination and commitment to reach their objectives at the social and professional levels.

The actions, positions, discourses and ideas of the heroines in the novels under study are underpinned by feminist concerns. Thanks to their determination to have their autonomy, their refusal to suffer gender-based discrimination, their questioning of male hegemony, their demystification of the man who considers himself as the stronger sex, Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman have shown an unwavering resolve to work around the obstacles in their path. They also manage their marital and professional situations well, and take their destiny into their own hands. These are true models for any woman who aspires to a recognition and an autonomy.

Those women mentioned above are endowed with remarkable strength of character and challenge male supremacy.

In the accounts of Boyd and Drabble the woman, in general, turns out to be the stronger sex in the relationships of couples. For instance, in *Brazzaville Beach*, Hope Clearwater clearly dominates her husband John Clearwater and represents the engine that drives the marital machine. John has psychological problems that make him weak, unable to control himself. They say a strong man shouldn't cry once he is confronted

with some difficulties, but John doesn't hesitate to burst into tears when he feels overwhelmed by events. He is unable to control his emotions. He starts crying in a restaurant in full view of all the customers.

But he wept. He put his hands on the table, hunched forward and let the sobs blurt from him. He made a strange, panting, wailing noise, his mouth hanging open, tears, snot and saliva dripping from his face (*Brazzaville Beach*: 152).

The other customers of the restaurant, witnesses of the scene, couldn't help commenting: "*This was a man: why was he so afflicted?*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 152). But John's "abnormal" behavior is due to his depressive state. He was diagnosed as "*manic depressive*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 223). He ends up committing suicide in a pool (*Brazzaville Beach*: 310). Ian Vail's weakness appears in a crisis situation, when he and Hope are taken hostage by Dr Amilcar and his soldiers involved in the civil war in Congo, opposing UNAMO, FIDE and EMLA (*Brazzaville Beach*: 230). Ian Vail is in bad shape and in shock, has diarrhea (*Brazzaville Beach*: 230), throws a fit of hysteria in the face of danger; he begins to cry with an unworthy behavior of a man. We note the cowardly attitude, the ignominy of Ian who not only tries to rape Hope (*Brazzaville Beach*: 254-255), but when they are attacked, he abandoned Hope who sprained her ankle in a dangerous situation and fled (*Brazzaville Beach*: 255). Here also, it is Hope who turns out to be the stronger sex. This observation is confirmed first by Mr. Doblin, a second secretary unofficially attached to the Norwegian consulate, present in Congo during the hostilities, who saved Hope. He compliments Hope on her composure and informs her that Ian Vail "*had been in very bad shape*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 283-284).

Afterwards, Hauser, who picks up Hope to take her back to Grosso Arvore, confirms Mr. Doblin's impression by noticing that Ian tries not to show his traumatism, but he's been traumatized. He adds: "*Well, compared to you, he is definitely traumatized... No, no, Hope, he says. No no. You are much stronger.*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 294-295).

Brazzaville Beach provides information on Hope, who has problem with a professional archaeologist, Winfrith (*Brazzaville Beach*: 137-138). Hope was doing conservation work for Munro, a job which consisted in dating hedges and woods. She applied her expertise as a professional scientist and her work was successful. She had a dispute with the archaeologist because, with her discoveries, she was convinced that the latter was in error. She was convinced that the ditch and embankment belonged to something much older than the deer park – an old parish or manor boundary perhaps or even a burial mound. When she told this hypothesis to the archaeologist, Winfrith, he almost lost his temper. He reminded Hope that he had spent months calculating and reconstructing the layout of the deer park and he informed her that he had no intention of redoing his maps because of "*a bunch of brambles.*" (115-116). Hope was unimpressed by the overconfident archaeologist's claims who underestimated her. "*She was about to take several samples from her thirty-meter section and confuse it with these exhibits.*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 115-116)

Hope also refuses to be intimidated by Eugene Mallabar, her employer, and founding father of the Grosso Arvore Research Center, whom all the members of the

team in which she works almost idolize. Everything he says is considered as gospel, except for Hope. Mallabar lives an international fame with its publications, *The Peaceful Primate and Primate's progress*. In this perspective, his invitations, his performances and his successes multiplied and he became the honorary recipient of thirteen doctorates by the dozen. (*Brazzaville Beach*: 35). Galvanized by the success of his publications and adored by the general scientific public, Mallabar considers that his theories are authoritative and that he is infallible. Many perspectives and opportunities present themselves and the center has a very promising future.

In any case, it is all this that Hope comes to compromise with his personal discoveries on the ground which bring contradiction to Mallabar and discredit his career. It is easy to understand the stubbornness of Mallabar who refuses to listen to Hope. However, nothing can deter Hope from going all the way to prove her right and Mallabar's wrongness. Mallabar tries to coax Hope : "*Hope makes revelations to Mallabar but his paternalism, his smugness, his arrogance are at their peak*" according to Hope (*Brazzaville Beach*: 191).

He smiled patiently, the wise headmaster confronted by the difficult pupil. I always strove for extra confidence where Mallabar was concerned. He worked his charms so thoroughly on everyone else that I made special efforts to show how impervious I was to them. (*Brazzaville Beach* : 39).

Mallabar threatens to fire Hope when she tells him about her discovery about the behavior of chimpanzees if she tells her story to anyone else (*Brazzaville Beach*: 111). Not only does Hope defy Mallabar's threat, but she takes up the challenge by writing an incendiary and provocative article about her discovery entitled. "*Infanticide and Cannibalism Among the Wild Chimpanzees of the Grosso Arvoore Project*" (*Brazzaville Beach*: 111-112). She was convinced that the days of the peaceful primate were numbered.

Hope is then convinced that nothing can make her change her mind; she will not waver from her intention to prove what she is advancing, even if her colleagues who, for fear of Mallabar's reaction, pledge their allegiance to the latter and disavow her. This is the case of Hauser who, after confidently telling Hope that the body she had given to him for analysis is indeed that of a chimpanzee, retracts and says that it is a baby baboon.

As for Ailsa Keman in *The Sea Lady*, she is, as we commonly say, a fighter. From an early age, she fought her own battles to find a place for herself in the world of men. Her familial, social and professional situations forced her to do so; she provides the following explanations to Humphrey upon their reunion: "*I didn't like tagging along, ... I was always tagging along. It was hard, being a girl, with you boys. It was hard, being Tommy's little sister. I had to fight for survival*". (*The Sea Lady*: 178) She was obliged to fight with a firm will for her recognition. Several events highlight her determination to achieve her objectives; she does not back down from any obstacle, as proved by the following opinions:

She was boldly dressed, for a woman in her sixties, but she came of a bold generation, and she seemed confident that the shadowy shoals of her cohort were gathered around her in massed support as she flaunted herself upon the

podium. She felt the dominion. It pumped through her, filling her with the adrenalin of exposure. She was ready for her leap (*The Sea Lady*: 1).

So she was a rebel from her earliest childhood; she has always been resistant. She was a "Tom Boy" as proved by the following passage: "*Ailsa Kelman as a child, had played the old childhood games... A combative child, she had liked competitive cut-throat games, and she liked to win. She had tried to beat her brother Tommy for years, and occasionally she had succeeded...*" (*The Sea Lady*: 97).

The psychological portrait of Ailsa as a "child" reveals the firmness of her character, her determination, her stubbornness. Nothing can intimidate her:

Ailsa stuck to her brother, stuck along with Sandy and Humphrey, even when they made it clear they didn't want her. ... When they tried to leave her behind, or told her to go off and play by herself, her face would turn grim with misery, but she didn't cry, or not that he could see, and she didn't give in. After a few days, when she'd got the hang of the mild-mannered Humphrey and the reflective Sandy, she began to show another side of herself. When pushed, she could lose her temper in a spectacular manner. Over a lost ball, a lost game of cards, an insufficient portion of a Mars Bar, or a taunt and tease too far. ... Ailsa hated to lose at Snakes and Ladders. ... once, when luck was against her, she knocked the whole board over, accidentally on purpose, and once she threw the dice so violently that it got lost for some time behind the settee (M. Drabble, 2006, p. 15-106)

This passage rich in clues is revealing; it brings to light the singular personality of Ailsa. The qualifiers "*brave*" and "*bold*" often appear as leitmotifs in the psychological portrait of Ailsa. They are used several times by different characters, on very different occasions, to qualify Ailsa "*she wasn't very strong, but she was brave.*" (*The Sea Lady* : 106)

Ailsa's bravery in the face of the male sex is noticeable even in adulthood: "*Ailsa, Ailsa, brave and brazen*" (*The Sea Lady*: 132); in the face of adversity, she shows bravery: "*She is brave. She needs to believe in her own courage. And so she sings, against the rising tide.*" (*The Sea Lady*: 138) Humphrey Clark, Ailsa's childhood friend, lover and first husband, who reunites with her after almost forty years of separation, since their divorce, is fascinated by her boldness and her cheekiness, two concepts that come up invariably as soon as we talk about Ailsa. Humphrey recognizes these characteristics in her: "*She was brave, she would take on any subject, she spoke fiercely*" (*The Sea Lady*: 183), he remarks when he observes her giving a presentation on stage or when he remembers her and the times they spent together as children during school vacations. She has acquired a certain notoriety thanks to her perseverance and audacity that defy all competition: "*She is capable of anything*" (*The Sea Lady*: 280). "*Ailsa is bold, self-trained for decades in boldness*" (*The Sea Lady*: 286).

Moreover, Ailsa is compared to dangerous, poisonous creatures, "*Ailsa was a cobra*" (*The Sea Lady*: 105). "*She was as brave as a scorpion*" (*The Sea Lady*: 106). However, what Humphrey finds fascinating about Ailsa, among others, is her courage. And thinking back to the times they had together, he can't help wondering: "*Where does she*

find her courage? And how could he ever have been brave enough, so long ago, to board her?" (*The Sea Lady*: 288).

The many flashback that recount Ailsa's childhood emphasize her rebellious character. She gave her fellow men hard times.

Many authors such as Boyd and Drabble want to show that the woman of the British society is determined to progress, and the latter knows how to grant herself recognition in a world dominated by men, even if she is sometimes deprived of opportunities and support in the environment in which she evolves. The attitude and actions of the main female figures in the stories under study have undoubtedly led to a questioning of male hegemony and its demystification in the contemporary British novel. Such a situation could lead the female gender towards an affirmation of identity in modern societies.

Women's identity assertions are becoming more and more noticeable in modern societies. Women who aspire to an improvement of their social and professional conditions are constantly fighting, to be heard in order to be able to assert themselves more.

The female characters that Boyd and Drabble create and portray in their respective works represent women in contemporary British society who claim their recognition. They appear from several angles with attitudes in line with the principles of the modern world. In *Brazzaville Beach* and *The Sea Lady*, Hope Clearwater and Ailsa Kelman, by their audacity, their tenacity, their temerity, their determination to face many hazardous events in order to act in accordance with their convictions, show that women go forward. They act in harmony with the principles of contemporary society, which encourage them to invest themselves fully in family and professional life in order to be useful to society and to be recognized as full citizens.

Significant changes have taken place in the life of woman. Indeed, she is no longer this docile being, unjustly exploited by man who uses her as an object. She demonstrates an ability to lead her life with dignity. Before the existence of feminist movements, thinkers and activists who sought to advance the cause of women or who reflected on the condition of women are sometimes called proto-feminists. Some specialists criticize the use of this term: it would minimize the importance of the first contributions or would imply that feminism presents a linear history, with the notions of proto-feminist and post-feminist.

Simone de Beauvoir, often considered as a major theoretician of feminism, notably thanks to her book *The Second Sex* (1949), participated in women's liberation movement. In her book, de Beauvoir seeks to destroy the essentialism that claims that women are born women, but instead are constructed such by social indoctrination. She retraces the education of the woman from her childhood, through her adolescence to her sexual relations. She believes that female emancipation will succeed thanks to the united will of men and women. According to her, the two great facts that would allow women to emancipate themselves are birth control and access to the world of work.

The contemporary British novel, like other novels from different periods, is seen as a medium for revealing and transmitting the real experiences of individuals from

various societies. In *Brazzaville Beach*, Boyd describes the journey of Hope Clearwater, who seeks to find her place in contemporary society, in environments dominated by men. She struggles to prove her professional skills and ability to do her job well in order to succeed in her plans, but her quest is met with obstacles by a ruthless society. In the story, Boyd tackles the problem of the male-female relationship, of unions or couples, but also of wars, violence and conflicts between human beings which allow the woman to prove her intelligence and her courage.

Hope often faces retaliation for doing her professional job. For example, the tent which serves as her place of residence in Grosso Arvore is set on fire during her absence of two or three days to stock up, and this is how all her notebooks and her campaign diary disappeared or burned. (*Brazzaville Beach*: 116) The stakes are high as far as Mallabar is concerned. He had enriched himself through his Grosso Arvore works and he would derive substantial worldwide rights for the sequel to *The Peaceful Primate and Primate's progress*. In this perspective, he was preparing to continue his publications. (*Brazzaville Beach*: 127). However, Hope stands up to him and manages to destabilize him. She managed to get him to admit firsthand what he vigorously refuted. The following passage, which describes the confrontation between Hope and Mallabar in the forest, is very relevant to support the will and the audacity of Hope who seeks at all costs to assert herself:

He grabbed at me, and I pushed wildly at his face, scratching. At the same time, somehow, I caught hold of two of the broken fingers on his right hand and pulled them back with as much savage effort as I could muster. He bellowed with pain and let me go. I ran. (*Brazzaville Beach*: 214).

Regardless of the difficulties of the different stages of her life, Hope Clearwater, in *Brazzaville Beach*, persevered in her intellectual pursuits. With a community life centered on chimpanzees that she discovers cruel and cannibalistic, in a society of scholars, closed, and frozen in its certainties, which refuses to question its fundamentals, Hope has always focused on her principles and convictions to overcome obstacles and progress.

The firmness of Ailsa's character defies all competition, whatever the genre. She is a hardened deviant. She indulges in eccentricities to draw attention to herself. She has a predilection for shocking public opinion with bravado, and the most memorable of these that hit the headlines: it's an episode where she wears a chain around her neck with a plasticized foetus, and deliberately lying stubbornly maintaining that the fetus is hers:

Ailsa had once been involved in a foetus scandal. She had worn a plasticated foetus on a chain around her neck. It had been in a good cause, but she had long repented of this foolish act of bravado. As a publicity stunt, it had been all too successful. She had never been allowed to forget it. It hadn't been her own foetus, from her own womb, but she had lied about it, and defiantly claimed it as her own (*The Sea Lady*: 20)

Indeed, Ailsa is a very daring activist, who displays and assumes her feminism, and feels challenged by many socio-cultural causes relating to what she perceives as

social values; an attitude that has given rise to diverse conceptions of these social values.

Male figures recognize Ailsa's audacity, competitiveness and bravery while distrusting her abilities to hurt. Hymphry Clark, Tommy Kelman and Sandy Clegg have recognized that Ailsa seems to have a predilection for the most outrageous scandals and deliberately indulges in provocation; she loves to shock, indulges in extravagance and does not hesitate to expose herself to the most virulent criticism so that her skills and performance could be recognized and taken into account. For her, all means are good to achieve her goals. The ability of women to assert themselves has inevitably led to the questioning of male dominance in contemporary British society.

Conclusion

The experiences of the main female figures in the respective stories of *Brazzaville Beach* and *The Sea Lady* are perfect illustrations of the efforts, ambitions, successes and commitment of women in British society. In harmony with social realities, Boyd and Drabble emphasize the daily experience of women in contemporary English society. Aware of the skills and great advances of the women of their time, these authors value and support the social and professional activities of the latter, which are almost at the core of all the activities in the works under study.

By insisting on improving her living conditions and by proving her own progress, perseverance, performance and firm will, the woman from the contemporary British society manages to assert herself. She is able to overcome so many obstacles that could hinder her human condition and her professional career. Thanks to her courage, her determination and her will, she challenges the male sex at the professional level and manages to properly perform many tasks that were previously assigned only to men.

In this respect, the analysis of the experience of women in the British society has made it possible to recognize their capacities, their epitomes of moral and social virtues and skills to manage their social and professional life. In addition, woman's commitment, autonomy, freedom, combativeness and competitiveness in the field of work remain very remarkable and lead to results that challenge male domination and cause the affirmation of female identity for an effective recognition of women.

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