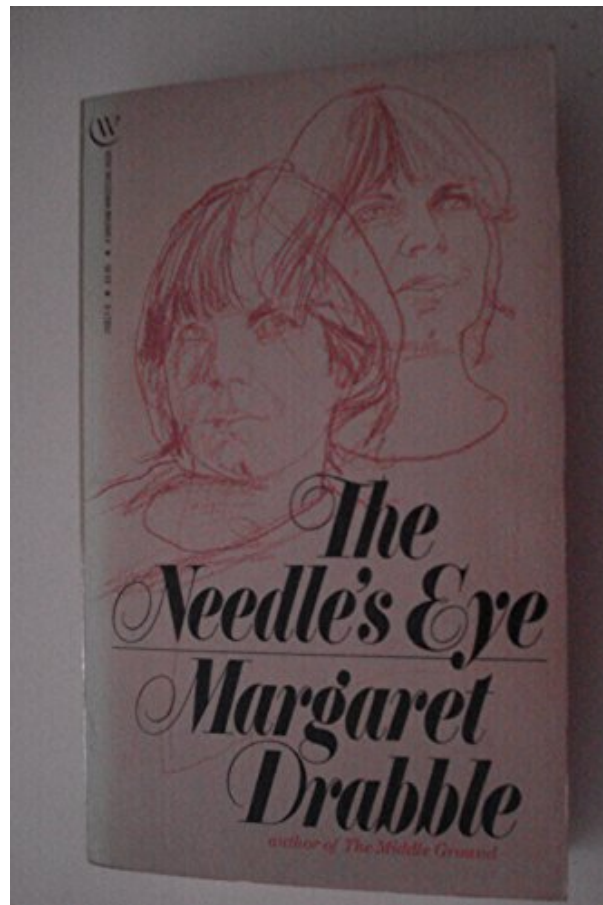
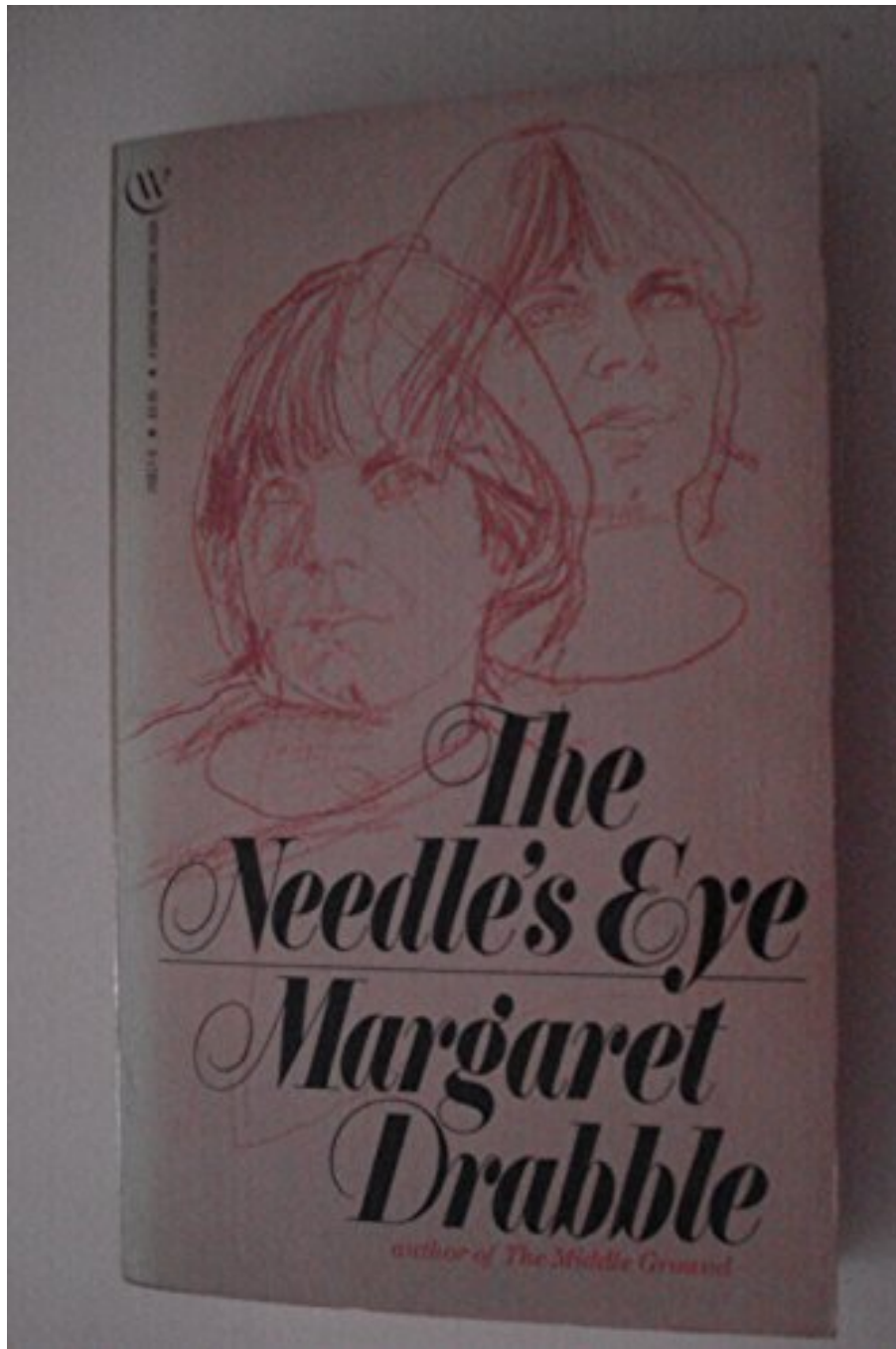


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Margaret Drabble's acclaimed novel of love and money, poignantly and humorously tells the romantic story of Rose, an eccentric heiress who lives in a shabby London rowhouse. "An extraordinary work," says Joyce Carol Oates in a New York Times Book Review article.

- Sales Rank: #16058543 in Books
- Published on: 1982
- Number of items: 1
- Binding: Paperback
- 368 pages

Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Subtle and moving

By Noel J. Pinnington

This is an excellent book. It may be that it's genesis was a formula: a bright man from a deprived background fulfills his mother's ambitions by going to Oxford and having a legal career, and seeks to escape the pressure of his background by marrying someone who symbolizes freedom from social and financial anxiety; he meets a woman not particularly bright, from a wealthy background whose parents had no interest in her, who suffers from having been subject to embittered and puritanical servants, who gives away her money, marries someone who symbolizes social stigma, in search of values independent of financial and social ones. He sticks to his unhappy marriage, is free of anxiety, but seems to have virtually no pleasure in other people including his children. She divorces her husband and lives in squalor, but loves her children and finds great pleasure in her lower class friends and neighbours.

The reason this formulaic starting point works out so well is two-fold. First, the author sets these people into real places and times, which are vividly recognizable, an incredibly richly described, closely observed world. Second, the events that unfold are anything but formulaic, rather they are allowed to follow their own logic, as the author's imagination dictates. There is a considerable if restrained reporting of the inner lives of the two main characters, and that is probably hard going for some readers, but as things progress, the characters deepen, becoming more vivid, convincing and charming. The contrast between what the reader knows of the characters' thoughts and what they surmise about each others inner lives is particularly interesting.

With views in passing of numerous eccentric and sharply observed secondary characters, and extraordinary evocations of Southern English occasions and locations, this is a brilliant expression of the human condition - at least as it was in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. It is also leavened with a number of scenes that made me laugh out loud, waking my wife in bed beside me.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Analysis of minutiae

By Philip Spires

The Needle's Eye by Margaret Drabble is at one level a story of two marriages, the Vassiliou and the Camish. Its focus is on two characters, Rose Vassiliou and Simon Camish who, even at their first meeting, find themselves inexorably drawn to one another.

Rose Bryanston was brought up in an upper middle class English family. The rambling country house in Norfolk figures large towards the end of the book when Rose and Simon make an unscheduled weekend visit to her parents. Rose has married Christopher Vassiliou, of Greek origin, and has settled near Alexandra Palace in north London. They have three children and have separated. Rose has also inherited and has given the money away, taking to heart the Bible's advice on rich men and the eyes of a needle. Perhaps that's why Christopher has left her. They are squabbling over the children, as one would expect when rational people, so capable in the area of analysis and reason, apply their powers selfishly.

Simon Camish is a specialist on labour relations and trade unions. He is also a writer and is co-authoring a book on aspects of his specialism. He is also resident in north London and also has three children of his own. He is married to Julie who, despite everything we are told, does not appear to be the kind of person who would fall for a man whose main interest was trade unionism. Her dismissive materialism is often tinged with a barbed anger.

These characters soon begin to develop their obvious penchant for thought and analysis. They seem to be capable of endless, un-paragraphed free association from almost any starting stimulus and leading to any imagined end. And it soon becomes a process apparently without end. Consciousness streams forth in long, unbroken flows, often appearing strangely directionless, sometimes almost repetitive. At times Simon and Rose seem to be so obsessed with themselves that they seek to analyse even the mundane, a process that always endows the mundane with deep, if passing significance. It seems that they seek implications in every catchable breath. Christopher, Rose's husband, on the other hand, seems to be direct and largely pragmatic, while Julie, Simon's wife, is often short tempered, dismissive, prejudiced and more inclined to worry about the curtains than the eternal.

By the middle of the book, we are completely engrossed with these people but, to be charitable, we can hardly associate with them. They dwell on every thought, meander through past and future, while apparently taking any present for granted. Rose and Christopher are fighting over the custody of their children, but we feel that they themselves are the only people in their thoughts.

Eventually, The Needle's Eye does develop its own direction. But it is a long journey and, despite a drive from London to Norfolk, we feel we have travelled very little from where we started. But then life is like that, isn't it? How many plots do we live? In The Needle's Eye we share the lives of people, perhaps live them a little. We become participants, not mere observers, but we never really know the characters because they probably don't really know themselves. I suppose we are different nowadays...

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Horrible Kindle edition

By nobody

I'm not rating Drabble's novel. I think it's a regular Drabble novel, fully representative of her style. But the edition I read - the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt edition to Kindle devices - is an unacceptable one. It's full of errors. There is a lot of sentences with no punctuation. There is a lot of misspelling words - "Creek" instead of "Greek", "Erst" instead of "first" and so on. I think there isn't a single page without mistakes. It's annoying. It seems an amateurish scanning, using a bad OCR software. I am asking Amazon to exchange this terrible edition for the Penguin edition, which I hope it's better.

See all 8 customer reviews...

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