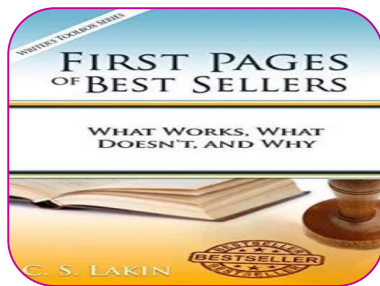




ROSAMUND STACEY: A MOUTHPIECE OF THE FEMINIST WRITERS

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ABSTRACT:

'The Millstone' is a crucial novel on feminism and motherhood. The Millstone is told in the first-person by Rosamund Stacey, a well brought up Londoner, and well educated daughter of middle-class socialists. She is working on a Ph. D. at the start of the novel and her sentences reflect her brain. She is intelligent, fluent, and meaningful, but there's also a shy stiffness in her. She was once told that sex is a very terrible thing, and after all her problems with the subject, Rosamund does finally allow one man to make love to her, just the once and that makes the difference. Rosamund's inhibition, her virginity isn't because she doesn't like the sensations of sex. It's rather an excess of self-consciousness and self-doubt, part of the class penalty she pays for her flat in Marylebone and the principled parents and the good education. And after an unsatisfactory one night fumble with the charming George, an announcer at the BBC, she becomes pregnant, but never tells him that she's pregnant, and decides she will have the baby, on her own. Rosamund is headstrong, and believes it's her job to provide for her baby whatever it takes. She is a world away from the bone idle teens of today.

KEYWORDS : *crucial novel , intelligent, fluent, and meaningful.*

INTRODUCTION:

This research article will focus on the novel *The Millstone* by Margaret Drabble. The novel is written in the early 1960s, and published in 1965. The writing of Margaret Drabble explores the complexities of the lives of modern educated women, such as motherhood, loneliness, longing, love, career, and pleasure. Margaret Drabble projects women who break away from the traditional role for women in society. She focuses on her heroine's problems and shows how women can adapt in a changing society. In modern literature it is permissible to write about every aspect of a woman's life. Experiences of childbearing and the rearing of children as well as career and relationship are explored by women writers. Modern women face and experience various dilemmas today.

Margaret Drabble started writing in this period alongside other distinguished women writers, such as Doris Lessing, Edna O'Brien, Iris Murdoch and A.S. Byatt. Drabble depicts the conditions of modern England and specifically the conditions for women. Her novels are a fictional history of women's lives. They talk about the lives of women in detail without any hesitation. They form a chronology that moves from

young women and young mothers in their early twenties to mature, successful and worldly women in their fifties.

Margaret Drabble is regarded as the "novelist of maternity". Maternity is one of the most important themes of her novels. She is not an ardent feminist or a writer of experimental novels. Her emphasis is on the everyday details of her heroines' lives. These details, for example the maternal experiences of Rosamund Stacey in *The Millstone* of breastfeeding and of holding a baby in one's arms gives voice to the female experience, and provide her novels with a very obvious sense of reality.

She has written novels forty years ago but the themes and solutions she has offered to her protagonists' problems are quite relevant and applicable to modern society. Women today still cope with the identical questions posed by Drabble's protagonists: How to combine motherhood and career? To be an unmarried mother in the 60s was not just embarrassing, it was also seen in wider society as dishonorable. Rosamund's sister remonstrates she cannot inflict the slur of illegitimacy on a child. It's totally unwise. She must give up the baby for adoption. But Rosamund digs her heels in. Insulated by her class and her brilliance she will go ahead and have the child. We follow Rosamund through pregnancy, and the early days of being a mother with her baby girl Octavia. She also got to sail through labour in next to no time, so can count herself lucky. I've been told countless times by the mothers in my family that men are wimps, compared with what women have to go through giving birth.

The novel unfolds with elegant minimalism and clever out-of-sequence turns; the little scenes and the fragments of background happenings are the stepping stones that carry the reader across the river of the story. Essentially this is a novel about maternal love. Rosamund has the means to earn a living and the respect of others. But above all she has her daughter, and no one can interfere with that. Rosamund's adventure is pregnancy and motherhood, and her freedom is the option, new and still tentative in the 1960s, to become a single parent without stigma. The novel can also be seen as a fascinating record of those still-early years of the NHS, when women of all classes mingled about in dingy waiting rooms, feeling like being part of a social experiment.

The Millstone is the famous novel by Margaret Drabble. Its main focus is on the theme of single motherhood, a social phenomenon still viewed as stigmatizing at this time. In modern time also society has not become that much mature to accept single mother as independent entity. Rosamund Stacey is such girl. The new female identity that Margaret Drabble forms for Rosamund in the guise of an educated, single mother from the middle-classes goes against the social norms of the mid-1960s. As we know that Rosamund's motherhood is not planned but it is just an accident. At the beginning of the novel she is a virgin; a state she herself feels is unusual in her social circle of writers and other literary people. She has tried to hide the fact of her virginity because it felt like a "scarlet letter embroidered on [her] bosom" (*The Millstone* 18). To be known as a virgin would be like wearing the mark of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne.

One night Rosamund takes an acquaintance, George, home and has her first sexual experience. She ends up pregnant and Margaret Drabble will show how Rosamund comes to terms with this unwanted pregnancy and an illegitimate baby. Rosamund's initial reaction when she realizes that she is pregnant is shock. She then proceeds to try to abort the baby, but her attempts do not seem whole-hearted. After one such attempt she concludes that having a baby would be a just punishment for being a woman:

It would serve me right, I thought, for having been born a woman in the first place.I might as well pay, mightn't I, if other people had to pay?" (*The Millstone*: 16).

Rosamund has been imbued by her feminist mother with the sense of being equal. As the quotation above shows, Rosamund now realizes that there is a limit to equality, a biological difference that she cannot change. She says:

I was trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life, and I was going to have to learn how to live inside it" (*Millstone*: 58).

Drabble's own view is a confirmation of female biology. She says that Motherhood, single or otherwise, is not necessarily a biological or social trap, but a milestone, because even if her initial reaction is

one of shock and a feeling of punishment, Rosamund's pregnancy and motherhood will prove beneficial to her. Drabble makes clear that pregnancy and becoming a mother can make a woman more mature and self-aware. She demonstrates that these two states are bonds that connect women, and opens the heart to the surrounding world. It is a meaningful and fulfilling experience. Rosamund learns this too as she takes a few steps out of her selfish shell. Rosamund tells us that:

I had always felt for others in theory and pitied the blows of fate and circumstance under which they suffered; but now, myself no longer free, myself suffering, I may say that I felt it in my heart. (The Millstone: 68)

She believes that pregnancy and motherhood must have meaning and will reveal a new scheme to her, different from the one of her earlier life. Motherhood develops a sense of responsibility. Margaret Drabble stresses that a mother can no longer be entirely selfish. She must see the needs of another person wholly dependent on her. Drabble imparts the importance of women to be independent. It is evident that the independence and emancipation Rosamund confesses might not be true independence but loneliness. Rosamund reveals how few real friends she has and the estrangement from her parents and siblings when she finds out she is pregnant, concluding that "there was nobody to tell, nobody to ask" (7).

I am that Bernard Shaw woman who wants Children but not the husband. (The Millstone)

Rosamund's family is not very important to her. Margaret Drabble means to show how the conditions and values that have been part of one's past and one's upbringing are crucial for determining one's present personality. Rosamund has been brought up to believe in the importance of self-sufficiency, which in her case has been turned into a solipsistic lifestyle. She now fears that her independence is threatened by her baby, because she "did not see how I was going to get by on my own" (39). She might have added how she was going to get by on her own anymore. Octavia's heart condition and Rosamund's dread for her and struggle with the hospital staff to be able to see Octavia after her surgery reveals a new level of independence and strength in Rosamund.

Rosamund's reasons for not seeking marriage to Roger or George and establishing a family of her own are also found in her selfishness and her urge for independence. In answer to George's statement that she never seemed to want a husband, Rosamund replies, "No . . . perhaps I never did" (171). Rosamund's views of marriage come from the examples of her siblings' marriages. From her point of view they are both disappointing and have proved to be mistakes for both her brother and her sister.

Either consciously or unconsciously, Rosamund chooses to reject both sex and a more lasting relationship with a man. In the novel's first few pages Rosamund tells us that she has never really loved a man and certainly not in the flesh. Rosamund does not grasp the concept of sexual fulfillment, never having experienced the kind of love that can be shared between a woman and a man.

However, Rosamund is not to remain a virgin. So Rosamund has sex for the first time with George, mostly in order not to offend him. She is afraid he will think she does not like him if she says no. It is not a very satisfying experience for either of them. They part company and Rosamund waits for George to call her but he does not. Neither does Rosamund contact George, another pattern she establishes during her pregnancy and after the baby is born. Her reason for the rejection of sex and intimacy is above all that she is afraid that it would encroach on her independence. It might be that Rosamund recognizes in George the kind of independence she craves and believes that in making him her partner she must give up that independence and, like her sister, take up the traditional role of wife, having to give up her career and to share Octavia.

George seems genuinely interested in Rosamund and has been keeping up with her rather specialized work and Rosamund often thinks about George and how he would make her feel less lonely. However, neither of them makes a move towards the other and Rosamund has the sense that she has spared him both guilt and sorrow in not telling him about his fatherhood. As we have seen, George does not seem to be interested in being in touch with Rosamund after their one sexual encounter.

True to her pattern Rosamund does not see how she could incorporate George in the life she envisions for herself. Rosamund is first and foremost a career woman. The following conversation between Rosamund and George confirms this opinion: 'You can't have everything,' said George. 'No, indeed,' I said. 'And I have more than most people, I admit.' (*The Millstone*:171).

The Millstone is a step in Drabble's attempt to knit a new pattern for women's lives. In her personal, and thus selfish, choice to raise Octavia alone, refusing to share her love or divide it with anyone. Joan S. Korenman affirms that motherhood brings Rosamund "the greatest pleasure [she] has ever known; however, it also limits [her] possibilities and isolates [her] in a world that includes only mother and child" (62).

In conclusion, motherhood and career are evident in Drabble's independent but not necessarily a husband or a family. Definitely Margaret Drabble has presented a woman who is very different from her predecessors and contemporary. While presenting this she has shaken the patriarchy from its roots and yes she is posing the challenge to patriarchy.

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