

## Rosamund's Conflict with "motherhood"

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Margaret Drabble (1939-) is a contemporary British novelist, who was pregnant with her third child while writing *The Millstone* (1965), her third novel, the winner of the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. It is set in London in the 1960s, and the protagonist, Rosamund Stacey is a literature student and a Ph.D. candidate. She is respected by her peers for her academic prowess. She was brought up in a very conservative environment, and her parents believe in the significance of independence. Her mother's principals restrict her behaviour in many ways and situations therefore she is characterized as too independent and strong-willed a woman. Rosamund gets pregnant due to having her first and only sexual intercourse with a man. Moreover, she does not tell the him about her pregnancy and chooses to become an unwed mother. *The Millstone* has drawn critical attention from scholars and readers, who characterize the novel as a woman's Bildungsroman and feminist novel:

*The Millstone*, forms her female bildungsroman around the problems of independent females and their experience in modern world by exploring her feminist heroine Rosamund Stacey's quest to find and define her feminist ideology without reference to men in such aspects: *social, familial, professional and maternal*. . . . Rosamund struggle to find out her feminist ideology and feminine identity within the patriarchal world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century England. (Sümeyra Buran 496)

In addition, Miho Nagamatsu refers to depicting a process in *The Millstone*, of a highly educated young woman who establishes her own identity; Naomi Okamura discusses that a witty, yet naive young woman grows as an independent person through various experiences. On the other hand, Setsuko Kikuchi has analyzed the novel in a different way:

"She [Rosamund] touches the realities of the world and grows spiritually as a man, released from parents' middle class ideal. . . . She achieved that desirable : that by remaining a single she has established her independence in relation to values other than the male-superiority, while through her motherhood she has affirmed both her flesh and her bond with humanity." (13)

These critics consider the fact that *The Millstone* was written in the 1960s. Although

it is crucial to pay attention to the mother and daughter relationship in *The Millstone*, in my view, Rosamund has both positive and negative feelings about her mother. This paper, therefore, focuses on the mother and daughter relationship, examining how she overcomes the limiting values her mother and reconstructs of her values and way of life.

“My career has always been marked by a strange mixture of confidence and cowardice: almost, one might say, made by it” (1). Rosamund recognizes that there are two aspects in her own character, a recognition which become a key in this novel. (Goto 100) She develops “cowardice”, deriving from her fear of failing her mother’s education, moral guideline and feminist ethics, they become oppressive for her in her psychological relationship with her mother. As for “confidence,” it represents a characteristic acquired from the middle-class respectability and elitist pride of Rosamund’s father. This aspect creates her ideal image among her friends. The relationship with her father’s social standing forms her confidence.

Rosamund internalizes cowardice nurtured by her mother’s education. ‘My mother, you know, was a great feminist. She brought me up to be equal. She made there be no questions, no difference. I was equal. I am equal. . . . I have to live up her, you know’ (24) She has raised “no questions” because she was too oppressed to ask questions. She grew up in a rigid family environment and her mother dominates Rosamund who feels she cannot go against her mother. Hence, she has to “live up to her” (24). mother’s creed and boast of herself as an “Emancipated woman, this was me” (5).

In addition, her parents “believed in independence. They had drummed the idea of self-reliance into me [Rosamund] so thoroughly that I believed dependence to be a fatal sin” (5). Likewise, her parents’ creed, which is “drummed into” Rosamund consists of “independence” and “self-reliance.” Not only Rosamund, but also her sister, Beatrice inherits the moral creed especially from their mother. Beatrice “was very much our parent’s daughter: educated to be independent and to consider herself the equal of anyone alive, she had a streak of practical earnestness that reminded me very much of my mother” (71). In spite of the upbringing as a daughter who is obedient to parents, she chooses a life as a housewife and mother.

Here, it becomes clear that their mother gives “conditional love” to Rosamund and Beatrice based on the loyalty to their mother’s creed. Both of them do not notice the fact. They have their own dilemma between their own ways of life and that of their mother. Their parents’ impact on their children is enormous; Rosamund regards her mother’s creed as something that she has to “live up to her [mother]” (24). Thus, her mother’s teaching becomes a kind of doctrine to her, a doctrine which is turns into Rosamund’s mental weakness and strength. It can be said that her mother’s creed dominates

Rosamund way of life, as follows. "It is a morality, all right, a well-established, traditional, English morality, moreover it is my morality, whether I like or not" (140). Her mother does not allow Rosamund to protest against her. Her mother exerts control over her children's behavior. Under the influence of her mother's idea of morality, dependence becomes a fatal sin for Rosamund. According to Katada, this type of mother forces her children her own sense of value and life plan which are based on her successful experiences. Consequently, a child comes to have a guilty conscience easily (87) .

Therefore, it is because of her cowardice that Rosamund does not want to depend on others and hesitates to rely on others. Due to the fear of the consequence of the psychological bondage with her mother, she needs to pay attention to her own behavior at all the times.

As a result, Rosamund becomes too self-conscious and defiant, she analyzes and censors her own images for self-defense. She mentions Lydia's novel, the heroine of which is based on Rosamund: "for the first few chapters, I [Rosamund] flattered myself that I emerges rather well-independent, strong-willed, and very worldly and *au fait* with sexual problems. An attractive girl, I thought" (89). In her depiction of the protagonist, Lydia recalls Rosamund as a person who desires to be an independent woman. Furthermore, Dick, her friend, said to her that "One never can tell with you. You lead such a secret life. (6)" Goto points out that Dick's remark reveals Rosamund's stoic and secretive lifestyle. (101)

For instance, Rosamund indicates to George that she spends her odd sexual life, as follows. "He [George] was very amused by the Joe-Roger alternation, and clearly thought the worst, a conclusion which gratified my [Rosamund] pride" (18). She enjoys "the image of my [Rosamund's] own imaginary wickedness reflected from his eyes, for he saw what he thought he saw with so entertained an indulgence, exactly the kind of reaction I would have wanted had what he seen been true" (18). Rosamund satisfies her excessive self-consciousness and pride with George's false image of her sexual life. Also prior to her pregnancy, Rosamund has received much attention, from a tall and well-built man she responds to this, saying it had given me [Rosamund] much pleasure. This contradicts the fact of her sexual inexperience, she worries about damaging her own erotic image when she detects her own pregnancy. She wants to conceal her pregnancy because she "had to face the problem of publicity" (35). In addition, it means that her independence is to be threatened because if she had a baby, she would have to be dependent in terms of care for the baby. Critics describe this novel as a feminist novel. However, can Rosamund be safely called feminist? She hides all of these real images of herself, boasting of her self-knowledge as follows:

I [Rosamund] think I know myself better than anyone can know me, and I think this even in blood, for too much knowing is my vice; and yet one cannot account for the angles of others. . . . I asked him [a schoolmate] which, and he had pointed through the crowd at a tall, skinny girl with too-neat hair and a shut, frightened face (92).

Rosamund shows 'cowardice' here, in reality she wants to hide that she plays a role of an independent woman. Due to her obsession with her mother's influence, her image of an emancipated woman is Rosamund's fictional image as noted above.

In various situations, she puts herself under her own observation, so that her image from others is intact. Therefore, Rosamund is deliberately "creating love and the terms of love" (3) in her own way through her relationship with Hamish, her ex-boyfriend. She calls the relationship 'a rigid prison' (3), something which results from her mothers' oppression.

For instance, Hamish is Rosamund's classmate in university, a platonic relationship. One day, they informed their parents "that term ended a day later than it actually did" (1), and they plan to stay at a cheap-smart hotel. At the reception desk, she makes a mistake and writes her name "for some deeply rooted Freudian reason" (2).

However, Rosamund does not get involved sexually until she goes out with George. "he looks unnoticeable, being unaggressive and indeed unassertive in manner" (17) and above all he is gay. His impression makes Rosamund think that he is a safer man than other men when she sees George for the first time. (Okamura 263) In addition, both Rosamund and George much in common: they are both individualistic and secretive. Rosamund is convinced that 'I neither envied nor pitied his indifference, for he was myself, the self that but for accident, but for fate, but for chance, but for womanhood, I would still have been' (167). Rosamund talks of her mother's creed as George kisses her fingers. But they are carried away and Rosamund accepts the sexual relationship with George happily, as she finds in him something identical with herself.

He was queer, I was not frightened of him at all, . . . he might like me, by the thought that he found me of interest. I was so happy for that hour that we lay there because truly I seemed to see him through the eye of love, so irrationally valuable did he seem. (25)

While Rosamund tries to assure herself that they are essentially of the same nature so as to accept George, Rosamund uses obscure words, "might", "thought" and "seemed", such as when she confirms her love for George. Because it means dependence for Rosamund that she has sex with a man and loves him, she is not able to evade her mother's creed which is always in the bad of her mind.

Rosamund's father is a university professor of Economics. The relationship with her

father secures her academic, social values and reputation. She describes her father as, "He was on the right track himself" (4). In the hospital, Dr. Protheroe recognizes Rosamund as his friend's daughter:

Protheroe: 'You're not related to Herbert Stacey, are you?'

Rosamund: 'As a matter of fact, I'm his daughter,' I said grudgingly, aware that my avowal in these circumstances did my father little credit: but change immediately passed over the whole demeanour of this man, . . . (118)

Thus, she realizes her father's respectable social standing. These images of her father become the elements of Rosamund's outward appearance. She is "acknowledged to have a good critical mind in other spheres [not only to collecting of certain sixteenth-century poetic data]" (8). Her parents' education and Rosamund's father function like a social system.

Their [Rosamund's parents'] behavior seemed natural to me, for I am their child, but I have speculated endlessly about whether or not they were right. Such tact, such withdrawal, such avoidance. Such fear of causing pain, such willingness to receive and take pains. It is a morality, all right, a well-established, traditional, English morality, moreover it is my morality, whether I like it or not. (140)

It is also the same with the Hospital, which is a kind of established institution with authority. Dr. Protheroe mentions his hospital organization, "Our buildings here are old...and our staff are old" (131), which suggests the authority of the established status of the medical system there. However, Rosamund makes a fuss in the hospital because a nurse did not allow her to see her daughter, Octavia. She is assertive in expressing her feeling. Rosamund controls herself, saying " [I] remember also the clearness of my consciousness and the ferocity of my emotion, and myself enduring them, myself neither one nor the other, but enduring them, and not breaking in two" (129-130) and she considers that "there are things [English and middle-class morality] in me that cannot take it, and when they have to assert themselves the result is violence, screaming, ugliness" (140). She has never shown her feeling until this time. Here, she can liberate her real emotions for the first time. Although she releases her emotions in the hospital and it was heard by Dr. Protheroe, he said to Rosamund "Think about yourself" (131) after her fuss. Moreover, she meets a mother in the hospital where Octavia is treated, she tells Rosamund that 'My [the mother's] concerns are my concerns, and that's where it ends. I haven't the energy to go worrying about other people's children. They're nothing to do with me. I only have enough time to worry about myself. If I didn't put myself and mine first, they wouldn't survive. So I put them first and the others can look after themselves' (136). Rosamund is "inevitably, touched almost to tears, for it is very rare

that one meets someone who will give one such an answer to my question” (136). Their teachings enlighten into her a new way of life and make her liberated from Father’s rigid morality. She recognizes the justice of individualism in what they said to her, which allows her to turn into “think about myself” (131). Rosamund puts what she truly wants to do first, opposing the formality of these organizations and authorities. As a result, she manages to establish herself by refreshing and resetting her lifestyle in society. She used to avoid accepting the standing of life of other people, so that she could face reality and unknown lives until she visits the hospital for the first time, assuring herself. “This visit was a revelation: it was an initiation into a new way of life, a way that was thenceforth to be mine forever. An initiation into reality, if you like” (31). This revelation influences Rosamund’s morality that is imprinted on her by her mother. Furthermore, she has a chance to hold a baby in the hospital.

it was the first time I had ever held a baby and after a while, simultaneously with preoccupations about damp on my coat, a sense of the infant crept through me, its small warmness, its wide soft cheeks, and above all its quiet, snuffly breathing. I held it tighter and closed my arms around it. . . . I do not know how she could get along that road. Nor could I feel that weight till my own arms had tested it. (66-67)

The sensation at the time stimulates and provokes an affection and love as a mother. It begins to break down and opens up Rosamund’s rigidly imprisoned self to become a mother. Moreover, this experience allows her to feel love and warmth in her body and mind. “being a mother is not unalloyed happiness. And Rosamund is given a larger quotient of pain than most mothers are assigned: Octavia is discovered to have a congenital heart defect” (Ellen 18). Rosamund faced her guilt before Octavia’s operation.

The night before Octavia’s operation I lay awake, enduring what might have been my last battle with the vast shadowy monsters of doubt. . . . having been brought up a good Fabian rationalist and notions such as the after-life and heaven seem to me crude quite literally beyond belief. Justice, however, preoccupied me. I could not rid of myself of the notion that if Octavia were to die, this would be a vengeance upon my sin. The innocent shall suffer for the guilty. What my sin had been I found difficult to determine, for I could not convince myself that sleeping with George had been a sin; on it as the only virtuous of my life.

I began to think that my sin lay in my love for her. For five minutes or so, I almost hoped that she might die, and thus relieve me of the corruption and the fatality of love. Ben Jonson said of his dead child, my sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy. . . . Oh God, let her survive, let her live, let her be all right, and God was created by my need, perhaps. (122)

The conflict qualifies Rosamund as a mother. In addition, she brings herself to an effort to come to terms with and reconstruct her motherhood which she once rejected.

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