

## Margaret Drabble's Fiction: Hysteria and Agency

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**ABSTRACT:** Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* (1965) serves as a prime example of postmodern feminism, delving into the concerns of female agency within a patriarchal society in the post-war era. This article posits that the protagonist and narrator, Rosamund Stacey, embodies an autonomous female figure who challenges societal gender biases prevalent in late 20th-century London, England. Rosamund, functioning as a postmodern narrator, disrupts the conventional patriarchal notions of femininity, which depict women as inferior, fragile, reliant, and passive. By asserting her financial and educational independence, Rosamund strives for self-reliance as a single woman. However, her endeavor to live independently is met with accusations of hysteria, mirroring society's reluctance to accept empowered women. This paper argues that Rosamund embraces her "hysterical" label, utilizing it to dismantle the patriarchal notion of women as inherently predisposed to madness based on biology. Moreover, it suggests that Rosamund embodies the archetype of the "mad" female author, who narrates her own life and thus claims agency in shaping her narrative.

**KEYWORDS:** Postmodern Feminism, Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone*, Fiction, Agency, Madness, Hysteria

### INTRODUCTION

Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* (1965) exemplifies postmodern feminism. As a post-war novel, it engages with postmodern feminist preoccupations and concerns about female agency in a patriarchal society. This article argues that the novel's heroine and narrator, Rosamund Stacey, exemplifies an independent female individual who rebels against society's gender discriminations which deny women independence and individual freedom in late 20th-century, London, England. Rosamund, as a postmodern storyteller, subverts the patriarchal understanding of femininity which identifies women as inferior, weak, dependent, and passive. Her actions which put the patriarchal conceptualization of femininity into question include rejecting to marry, choosing to live alone, working, raising her child on her own, and studying as a PhD student. Rosamund declares her financial and educational freedom to gain self-dependence as a single woman. Yet, as she attempts to live alone as a woman, she is being viewed as hysterical. This article argues that Rosamund welcomes her "hysterical" label and uses it to deconstruct the patriarchal essentialist construction of women as inherently and biologically prone to madness. More importantly, it contends that Rosamund represents the so-called "mad" female author, the one who narrates her own life story and self into being and accordingly gains agency in her life story.

*The Millstone* is set in the 1960s in London. The novel narrates the life and decisions of Rosamund Stacey, a young, educated, clever, sophisticated woman who lives alone in the flat of her parents who are in Africa for a philanthropic mission. As a PhD student, she writes her thesis on Elizabethan sonnets and earns money via tutorship. After her first sexual experience with George whom she thinks is gay, she gets pregnant. Overcoming a mental conflict, she decides to give birth to her baby without telling its father. She shows up as a single parent who deals with her birth process as she does not inform anybody about the child's biological father; consequently, she lives her whole life with her beloved daughter. Drabble portrays a woman whose actions bring about her individual agency and freedom. The novel is empowering for women as it fictionalizes a woman who educates and becomes an intellectual, lives alone, bears and raises a child without a father at a time when the dominant view of femininity is still that of the myth of the eternal feminine.

Rosamund faces harsh criticism from society due to the choices she makes. She is given various degrading nicknames and labels just because she educates herself and lives as an independent female individual. For instance, as she does not marry, she is called a "spinster" (1968, p. 63), a patriarchal derogatory label implying the danger of a single woman, and "a woman with sexual problems" (1968, p. 93) as it is expected of women to satisfy their sexual drive via marriage early in life or they would have sexual problems leading to hysteria. In other words, a long-held patriarchal belief holds that a young woman should get married early, or she might get hysterical as the sexual desires would disrupt her womb which is a source of follies and evil. As Cecily Devereux puts it, "while hysteria was reframed with reference to new laws and was new in principle, its recommended treatment in psychoanalysis

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would remain what Bernheimer observes it had been for centuries: marrying and having babies and in this way regaining the 'lost phallus' (2014, p. 25). This patriarchal perception of hysteria indicates that unmarried women are more likely to become hysterical due to the lack of a phallus. As a substitute for this lack, they should get married and bear children. Referring to the conventional definition of hysteria, Devereux adds, "the woman whose lack of a penis condemns her to spend her life desiring its replacement or substitution, first, and 'normally' through children" (2014, p. 25). She continues that "[t]he basis of psychoanalysis, the 'invention' of modern hysteria (by Freud and Breuer, after Charcot) is thus also the 'invention' of modern femininity and the affirmation in modern medical discourse of women's necessary function as bearers of children" (2014, p. 25). Therefore, hysteria is historically associated with unmarried women, whose implication forces them to get married and bear children early.

However, the idea that unmarried women are more likely to get hysterical is an old myth. Its aim has been to maintain and sustain control over women through marriage and bearing children. For instance, when Rosamund and Hamish stay in a hotel, the receptionist realises that Rosamund writes her maiden name and hesitates to register their name due to their unmarried situation. The receptionist reacts: "[o]h well, I'll have to go and ask" (Drabble, 1968, p. 6). She has to ask the authorities who decide whether this unmarried woman is allowed to stay with Hamish. This clearly indicates de Beauvoir's argument that women have been viewed as the second sex, secondary to men, always defined and viewed in relation to men.

Single motherhood is not yet welcomed in the 1960s still due to its presumed connection to hysteria and madness and its social stigmatization as a shame. As Thane & Evans explicate, "[t]he conventional narrative about unmarried motherhood is that it was always shameful. Mothers and their 'illegitimate' children were disgraced, abandoned, cast out by society, even by their own families, except possibly among the poorest classes, until the 1960s" (2012, p. 1). Therefore, unmarried women and their "illegitimate" children were not respected or accepted. Vesna Leskošek argues that "[h]istorically, the life of mothers with 'illegitimate' children reflects the social and cultural position of women that was framed and bound by prevailing ideologies about the place of women in the society" (2011, pp. 209-210). Thus, unmarried women were targeted and labelled in the hospital, as well as other public institutions. For instance, their bed was marked with "U" signifying the word "unmarried" to indicate that it was birth out of wedlock. As exemplified in the novel, due to her unmarried situation, Rosamund's bed is marked with "U" as well (Drabble, 1968, p. 104). Rosamund's bed mark is discriminating, putting her in a different and inferior category among mothers. This discriminative tactic as a way of condemnation is to discourage them from disobeying social rules. The "U" in the novel, as well as in the 1960s society, functions similar to "A" in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, both implying adultery with an illegitimate child. Her sister Beatrice's anxiety about Rosamund's illegitimate child represents the concerns and fear of the unmarried woman's motherhood. Furthermore, Beatrice's worry about her brother's possible reaction reveals that they are under the shadow of a conservative mindset. As Beatrice puts it, "[w]hat if you were to run into him or something, or if any of his friends were to see you in the street It would be awful if they through heard him because he wouldn't think twice" (1968, p. 78). The way she reminds her of her brother Andrew shows that she confirms the conventional mindset as opposed to Rosamund's non-conservative decisions.

However, Drabble's novel demonstrates the transition from a patriarchal conventional society to a modern one wherein women experience sexual freedom empowered by the Sexual Revolution. As Jamila Abdul Amir Taher argues, "Drabble naturally reflects this change of the state of affairs of that time and enables her heroine to have higher education, as the career structure predetermines one's position within the society" (2019, p. 118). The novel is set in that transition period and is exemplary of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s when people faced some radical changes regarding marriage, premarital sex and birth and challenged authorities. As Arthur Marwick puts it, "[s]ocieties in the 1960s were characterised by a tapestry of interweaving movements challenging the existing authorities and conventions" (2005, p. 782). Societies experienced a different understanding of female freedom and sexuality. According to Millet, "[t]his, in particular, meant the attainment of a measure of sexual freedom for women, the group who in general had never been allowed much, if any, such freedom without a devastating loss of social standing, or the dangers of pregnancy in a society with strong sanctions against illegitimate birth" (2000, p. 63). The Sexual Revolution, as a social and cultural movement, emerged in the 1960s, questioning conventional views of sexuality, marriage, heterosexuality, and childbearing. In *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure*, psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich argues that individuals can achieve psychological relief if they can release their subconsciously repressed sexuality. As he articulates, "[t]he existence of strict moral principles has invariably signified that the biological, and specifically sexual needs of man were not being satisfied. Every moral regulation is in itself sex-negating, and all compulsory morality is life-negating" (1974, p. 25). Triggered by his explanations, this movement played a role in the normalisation of premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, childbirth control and female agency. In 1965, contraceptive pills became available just to married women and abortion became legalized in some countries. It was a period when women became more aware of their feminine rights. However, the patriarchal perception of genders still functions and does not fully disappear in the period.

Overall, the novel, coinciding with the revolution, demonstrates women's demand for their rights such as feminine sexuality and childbirth. However, it is a time when pre-marital sex is still criticized as Lydia, Rosamund's best friend, does: "I agree that ordinary babies aren't much of a status symbol, but illegitimate ones are just about the last word" (1968, p. 75). On the other hand, to prevent Rosamund from having an illegitimate child, her sister Beatrice, who expresses the patriarchal ideals of femininity and

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has three children, tries to persuade her not to give birth to the child: "I think this is the most dreadful mistake and would be frightful for both you and the child" (1968, p. 78).

### DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MALE-CONSTRUCTED METANARRATIVE OF FEMININITY

Drabble visits poststructuralism's deconstruction technique to deconstruct and subvert the patriarchal fabricated concept of the female self. Deconstruction challenges fixed meanings, stable identities, and hierarchical structures. It subverts and questions gender roles in line with postmodern scepticism toward established societal narratives. Deconstruction helped women writers to deconstruct male-controlled family structures and the myth of the eternal feminine rendering women as emotional, passive, and lacking creativity and consequently authorship. This part will reveal that the novel deconstructs the metanarrative of the eternal feminine by using hysteria against patriarchy. The novel relies on such techniques "to make [the] dominant totalising, naturalising and internalising discourses or metanarratives explicit" (Aryan, 2022, p. 15). The paper will demonstrate that Rosamund Stacey exercises female authorship and agency through hysteria.

Marriage functioned as an important social institution and a way of dominating women. As de Beauvoir argues, "[m]an succeeded in enslaving woman, but in doing so, he robbed her of what made possession desirable. Integrated into the family and society, woman's magic fades rather than transfigures itself; reduced to a servant's condition, she is no longer the wild prey incarnating all of nature's treasures" (2011, p. 241). As de Beauvoir indicates, women's independence and identity are endangered by men. After they get married, they lose their social status and identity. Similarly, Millet argues that:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband. But though our law in general considers man and wife as one person, yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion. (2000, p. 68)

Therefore, marriage is based on patriarchal control and functions in favour of patriarchy. Women are bound to men via marriage, causing a loss of their agency. That is why Rosamund rejects marriage as she does not want to be defined in terms of the other sex. In doing so, she rejects the male control which would make her an object in the domestic atmosphere of the house. The patriarchal perception of marriage enslaves women as well as withholding their identity and agency. When Rosamund is in the hospital, she is called "Mrs." as a married woman. She replies, "but I'm not Mrs. Stacey, I'm Miss." and the nurse replies that "but we call everyone Mrs. here" (1968, pp. 58-59). The nurse's response represents how women's self and identity are defined in relation to men via marriage. In this context "Mrs" implies possession of the woman: now you are not single but possessed by a man.

Rosamund is in a society that defines women according to the myth of the eternal feminine. She is subjected to harsh criticism due to her non-conservative behaviours. Her friends, affairs, and sister expect her to abort her child as it is a birth out of wedlock. Nonetheless, throughout the novel, she appears as a postmodern resistant female individual who deconstructs the conservative society's conventional codes by practising pre-marital sex, having a baby as a single mother, living alone as an independent woman, and not getting married or belonging to any man; instead, having an affair with two men (George and Joe) at the same time without hiding from anyone is a revolutionary challenge to the social morality. As she puts it, "I'm one of those Bernard Shaw women who want children but no husband" (Drabble, 1968, p. 106). She is referring to Shaw's work, *Man and Superman* (1903), which depicts a female character, Ann Whitefield, who is an unmarried mother.

Similarly, when Rosamund goes to a hotel, she puts a ring for Hamish, not for herself (1968, p. 53). This shows that she does not care about the social codes of femininity. She is both different from her society and indifferent to their understanding of morality. As she puts it, "I was born with the notion that one ought to do something, preferably something unpleasant, for others" (1968, p. 50). She does not care about the rumours and criticism about her sexual practice. On the contrary, she utilizes her affairs with two men as an opportunity to conceal that the child's father is George. Similarly, when she is at the hospital for registration as a pregnant woman, she faces particularly toxic reactions from the hospital staff. As the narrator states, "he said how long had I been married, and I said that I was not married. It was quite simple. He shook his head, more in sorrow than in anger, and said did my parents know? I said yes, thinking it would be easier to say yes, and not wishing to embark on explaining about their being in Africa" (1968, p. 38).

Additionally, similar to Sarah Woodruff who is happy with the title of the French lieutenant's whore, Rosamund embraces any label or criticism about her. Caro defines her as a "sexless female don" which means that as a successful academic, "she starts her sexual life with a college boyfriend, Hamish, with whom she doesn't have real sex although she appears to be having an affair. Later on, she dates with two men simultaneously" (2018, pp. 17-18). When Lydia, her best friend regards Rosamund's actions as sexually problematic, she feels flattered and welcomes criticism by others: "I flattered myself that I emerged rather well independent, strong-willed, and very worldly and *au fait* with sexual problems. An attractive girl, I thought" (1968, p. 93). Being in between the conservative and permissive mindsets, she struggles for her independence.

The 1960s is a transition period in which the Sexual Revolution occupies individuals' minds while the conventional norms still retain their existence in many parts of the social life of the family institution. As Millet puts it, "a sexual revolution would bring the institution of patriarchy to an end, abolishing both the ideology of male supremacy and the traditional socialization by which it

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is upheld in matters of status, role, and temperament" (2000, p. 63). As she argues, this movement threatens the conservative myth of the eternal feminine in the family institution. It awakens women against the patriarchal social norms which manipulate and control women under the male-dominated social construction and creates a ground for more postmodern feminists. This triggers feminist critics and writers to struggle for their autonomy, by reclaiming hysteria and utilizing it against the patriarchy. Drabble's *The Milestone* is an exemplary work to reflect the period's women in such a societal atmosphere. Rosamund uses hysteria and plays the role of a hysteric woman to deconstruct the man-made concept of the eternal feminine self and redefine both hysteria and femininity. As she puts it, "I had to have hysterics . . . And it worked, did it?" (1968, p. 137). Rosamund uses hysteria as a weapon against patriarchal oppression. As she articulates, "I think I know myself better than anyone can know me" (1968, p. 97). The awareness of her feminine "self" triggers Rosamund's demand for liberation as a female individual. She can afford any price for her independence: "All I had to sacrifice was interest and love. I could do without these things" (1968, p. 19).

To better understand how hysteria is associated with femininity, it is necessary to look at the 1960s sociocultural events such as the anti-psychiatry movement. The movement was led by David Cooper, Thomas Szasz, and R. D. Laing in the 1960s. It challenged traditional psychiatry and its treatment of mental illness. Laing's ideas in particular influenced women writers of the 1960s. He argued that individuals experience a split between their authentic self and a false, socially constructed self, leading to the disintegration of a unified self. As he puts it, "one must bear in mind that deterioration and disintegration are only one outcome of the initial schizoid organization. Quite clearly, authentic versions of freedom, power, and creativity can be achieved and lived out" (Laing, 1965, p. 89). Similar to the schizoid condition, which is understood as a fragmented sense of self/identity, in the 1960s many women began to portray female characters who strategically reveal their self is fragmented on the brink of disintegration.

Inspired by Ling's ideas, postmodern feminists try to get rid of the false self which is imposed on them by patriarchy and construct or find their true female self. To regain their own identity, autonomy, and control, women attempt to practise hysteria and madness as it allows them to go through a disintegration of the self, splitting it into multiple selves and then finding the true female selves among the false ones. Indeed, Rosamund deconstructs the male conception of female identity and place within society by practising the role of a hysteric, mad woman storyteller. She undergoes significant personal and identity transformations as she navigates through single motherhood. Firstly, she is an academic, single woman who lives alone in her parents' flat as an independent woman. Secondly, through experiencing an unexpected pregnancy during which she finds herself an emotional, sensitive pregnant Rosamund who needs love and affection. In an attempt to discover who she truly is, she experiences all of these selves and identities. Rosamund challenges these to subvert the conventional impositions. She is concerned with discovering her true feminine self among the imposed ones.

### CONSTRUCTION OF A SELF: WRITING THE SELF INTO LIFE

Rosamund experiences and observes herself in different periods such as pregnancy and motherhood. She is ready to risk everything for her autonomy. As she puts it, it "seemed so have this small living extension of myself, so dangerous, so vulnerable, for whose injuries and crimes" (1968, p. 147). During her quest for her true self, she expresses concerns and doubts: "Had it belonged to the realm of mere accident I would have surely got rid of [the baby], for though I am coward about operations and hospitals" she says (1968: 64). She tries to find the reason for being a mother and the baby's existence. Consequently, she decides to keep the baby: "I visited the doctor the next day. That visit was a revelation. It was an initiation into a new way of life a way that was thenceforth to be mine forever" (1968, p. 36). Giving birth functions as an act of rebirth for her to construct a new authentic female self, free from patriarchal impositions. She deliberately pushes herself into these extreme positions, with the purpose of revealing and breaking down the false self and constructing a new one: "The more I thought about it, the more convinced I that my state must have some meaning, that it must, however haphazard and unexpected and unasked, be connected to some sequence, to some significant development of my life" (1968, pp. 66-67). This process is seen as a way to dissolve the constructed identities and selves and allow her authentic self to emerge. She adds:

I could see that I was letting myself I for more hospitals and more unpleasantness by continuing than I would have done by termination. But it did not seem the kind of thing one could have removed, like a wart or a corn. It seemed to have meaning. It seemed to be the kind of event to which, however accidental its cause, one could not say No. (1968, p. 66)

Although she is not familiar with pregnant Rosamund, she dares experience her. Her pregnancy is also expected to be an obstacle to her independence career and independence; however, she reconciles motherhood and career. She continues:

My state was curious; it was as though I were waiting for some link to be revealed to me that would make sense of disconnexions, though I had no evidence at all that it existed. At times I had a vague and complicated sense that this pregnancy had been sent to me in order to reveal to me a scheme of things totally different from the scheme which I inhabited, totally removed from academic enthusiasms, social consciousness, etiolated undefined emotional connexions, and the exercise of free will. (1968, p. 67)

In order not to be defeated and swallowed by the patriarchal-constructed self, she struggles as a single woman during her pregnancy and motherhood and overcomes that period through her resistance and survives this conflict and skips to motherhood. Also, in the

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motherhood stage like in the pregnancy stage, she experiences some ebb and flow as she is not familiar with it. She feels confused, fragmented, and worried about the rest of her career as well as her life realising that it has already started changing. As she expresses:

With a baby, though, I could not afford such scruples. Also, I would have to go to the library to work, and one cannot take babies to libraries. Something would have to be done, plans would have to be made. I could feel that my own personal morality was threatened: I was going to have to do things that I couldn't do. Not things that were wrong, nothing as dramatic as that, but things that were against the grain of my nature. (1968, p. 72)

She used to be free and planned, but now she feels stuck. When the other women's husbands come to the hospital, she feels emotional and lonely: "I thought that I would not mind, but when the visiting time came and the shuffling, silent husbands arrived I drew my flimsy curtain and turned my head into the pillow and wept" (1968, p. 110). She struggles with being in between her true feminine self and the imposed false ones as weak, needy, and emotional. Consequently, she overcomes this confusion: "Actually, surprisingly enough, my stay in the hospital was one of the more cheerful and sociable patches of my life. Except for the last evening, I did not for a moment feel lost or abandoned; nor, owing perhaps to my delight in the baby, did I feel that I was the receiving end of pity and sympathy" (1968, p. 111). Finally, she reconciles with motherhood as part of her femininity. Motherhood "self" is adapted, so she has no more confusion.

As concepts of authorship did not include female authorship until the 1960s, women writers struggled to have a voice as authors. Authorship, that is "to be the author of one's own thoughts, feelings, emotions, voices, etc." can be defined as "a particular combination of subjectivity and agency (Aryan, 2021, p. 112). Moreover, Waugh defines female authorship as an "escape from the gender-specific myth of the 'Angel in the House'" (2006, p. 184). In the 1960s, women writers and feminists tried to assert their agency by subverting the angel in the house first and then constructing a new feminine self through writing. Consequently, they could achieve female authorship and write their own stories as exemplified by Drabble's heroine.

Rosamund stands for the female author, storyteller, who writes her own life into existence and thereby becomes the agent, and in control, of her life. She represents the challenging woman who creates her own world and defines its rules. In a period when sex and illegitimacy are still taboos, she embarks on becoming the author of her own life story. Her pregnancy pushes her even closer to authorship. Waugh argues that "[i]n both Drabble's and Brookner's novels, romance, marriage, and motherhood (as socially institutionalised) offer an irreconcilable loss and discovery of possible identity for women" (1989, p. 151). Like her decision to give birth to her baby, she decides to name her Octavia: "In the end, I said I would call her Octavia" (Drabble, 1968, p. 105). The name symbolizes her ideal feminine identity, which is defined in terms of self-reliance and control. Her daughter is part of her femininity, a reminder of her existence. Octavia stands for the continuity of her independence and career. Having a baby makes her spend more time alone at home, studying, and completing her final paper before the deadline. Her academic performance and authorship are not negatively but positively affected by motherhood. As George realizes, now Rosamund writes more than before: "You seem to do quite a lot of writing these days. I see things with your name on quite often" (1968, p. 166). Thus, she has decided to become an active agent, writing her own life story into existence.

Rosamund represents the female author as she narrates the story too. With the first-person narration, Rosamund's internal thoughts and reflections provide insight into her evolving sense of self and her attempts to construct a personal narrative that aligns with her experiences and aspirations. She also stands for Drabble's alter-ego, as a fictionalized projection of Drabble's own psyche and concerns. Aryan argues that "[c]haracters are projections and concretisation of voices or selves – voices which are first disembodied and detached from the author and then are given new attires by being embodied in imaginary bodies, as autonomous agents" (2020, p. 110). Rosamund's life story constructs and projects her authority and feminine identity. Narrating the story, Rosamund reminds the reader that they are reading her life story, that she is the one in control, the author: "When, some years after the Hamish episode" (1968, p. 7). Indicating the novel's episode, she emphasizes her authorship self-reflexively to indicate that she is the creator and ruler of her story. She informs the reader that she has the control of the narrative. As the heroine and narrator of the novel, she constructs her female self/identity and gains her freedom by storytelling: the way she puts things (in her mind and writing) together, the way she is writing her own self, and her life story. In doing so, she takes the place of a subjective agent in control of the characters and events rather than a passive object to which things happen. For instance, she intentionally gives Octavia's age wrong upon George's question: "I returned. Quickly, surprisingly quickly for one so bad at dates, I realized that it would be better and less committing to give a wrong age, so I lied and said that she was eleven months old, although she was still a long way off this ripe age" (1968, p. 164). She thinks that lying about the age is better for the flow of the narration. This makes her to be in control, leading the story as she intends.

Additionally, she mentions Lydia's novel and discovers that it is about her life story. Rosamund actually writes and narrates another story, Lydia's, within her own story. As she puts it, "[b]ut then, as the chapters wore on, I began to have my doubts. Like myself, the character was engaged in academic research, an activity which Lydia appeared to regard with thorough contempt" (1968, p. 93). As Aryan argues, "the fear of losing authorial agency . . . [is] a significant source of artistic creativity as the writer projects these semiparanoid delusions, fears, and anxieties into characters and stories" (2023, p. 339). In the same vein, Rosamund exercises her authorship and agency. Through Lydia, she writes her story within a story to establish her creativity. Sometimes, she attempts to try different tactics. She excludes herself from the fiction she writes within the story: "It was as though I had opened my eyes on

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a whole narrative caught in a single picture, a narrative in which I myself had taken no part; it had been played out between the Sister and the others" (1968, p. 135). She tells her story and identity which reveals her authorial power. Her self-storytelling indicates her creativity as well as her agency.

All in all, Margaret Drabble's major concern in *The Millstone* is what postmodern feminism takes as its focal point, that is, female authorship. The novel also reflects some of the preoccupations of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s, depicting concerns about the female individual amidst social constraints and individualistic issues. The novel's heroine and narrator, Rosamund Stacey, exemplifies an independent woman who rebels against society's discriminatory approach to gender in late 20th-century England which ignores women's independence and freedom, classifying them as inferior, weak, dependent, passive and secondary. By not approaching the idea of marriage, and not informing her child's father about the fact that he is its father, she subverts the social construction and understanding of the concept of femininity. Furthermore, she declares her financial and academic freedom by living alone, working, raising her children alone, and studying as a graduate student. This way she exercises her authorship and agency. As she tries to live alone as a woman, she faces society's label of hysteria; however, she uses hysteria against the patriarchy by subverting the imposed norms. She, like Sarah, is a so-called "mad" woman who brings her life story and self into existence and thereby has control on her life.

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