CHAPTER IV

THE MILLSTONE: NOVEL OF SELF-DISCOVERY?

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The Body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
(W.B.Yeats, "Among School Children")

The Millstone is the third novel of a trilogy and is cast in the retrospective first person narration. The heroine Rosamund Stacey looks retrospectively at her life and scoops up as much from there as is relevant from her point of view. Here Drabble is writing about the situation of a woman who is stuck with an illegitimate child, thereby exploring the possibility of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of independence in an interdependent network of community.

This chapter, however, will exclusively focus on the form of The Millstone, with a view to showing how this novel follows the broad outlines of the novel of self-discovery, a relatively recent genre of female fiction and how Drabble is questioning the modernist conventions.
of novel-writing within the fabric of this novel through a metafictional discourse. The Millstone has attracted a great deal of critical attention in terms of its content especially for the fact that its heroine is an unwed mother which was a social taboo when Drabble wrote this novel and caused ripples in the England of that period. However, much has not been written on its form except a few stray remarks here and there. An anonymous reviewer of The Millstone, for example would prefer "a happy ending" which would have been quite difficult to bring about and would have made it even more interesting. The ending naturally stems from the form of the novel and is justified in terms of its structure and the structure in turn is determined by the view of reality or the vision of life the novelist professes. The ending of The Millstone is, therefore, to be seen or judged in relation to its form and the form, in turn, in relation to the perception of reality the novelist has. Hence my task is two fold: to discover and discern the form of the novel and to analyse the view of reality that supports and sustains that form.
I think that its form does not fall squarely in line with any form that existed in nineteenth century fiction - either male or female fiction i.e., form with a conclusive conclusion or a characteristic structural pattern which is dictated, by and large, by a deterministic view of reality. For example, it does not fall in line with the typical plot of the English Bildungsroman in spite of being a novel of education and development in certain respects, because the majority of studies of the Bildungsroman not only focus almost entirely on novels written by males about male protagonists, but also define the genre in terms that apply exclusively to male experience. This is true, for example, of Jerome Buckley's recent study of the English Bildungsroman, *Season of Youth*. As defined by Buckley, the typical plot of the Bildungsroman concerns a sensitive male child who grows up in a provincial environment where he finds constraints placed upon his imaginative life. According to

Buckley, the Bildungsroman explores the young man's progressive alienation from his family, his schooling, his departure from home, his sexual initiation and his ultimate assessment of life's possibilities. Buckley does devote one chapter of his Study to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* but the remainder of the study deals largely with novels by male writers about male protagonists, including *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Richard Feverel*, *The Way of All Flesh*, *Marius the Epicurean*, *Judge the Obscure*, *Tono Bungay*, *Sons and Lovers*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Of Human Bondage* and *Free Fall*. In spite of the undeniable breadth of his spectrum, Buckley bases his generalizations about the Bildungsroman almost entirely on novels written by male novelists about male protagonists. One wonders, therefore, whether these observations would apply equally as well to the Bildungsromane written by woman. In their brilliant study of a group of nineteenth-century
women writers, The Madwoman in the Attic, 2 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that confronted by male hegemony, nineteenth-century women writers characteristically both followed and in significant ways departed from male-defined genres. Coining the phrase "anxiety of authorship", (as opposed to Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence") to describe the feelings of vulnerability experienced by women writers in a patriarchal culture, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that some women writers "may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by revising male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories in disguise".3 The observations of Gilbert and Gubar, as well as those of Elaine Showalter in A Literature of their Own, 4 and Ellen Moers in Literary Women, 5 strongly suggest


3 Gilbert & Gubar, p. 51.


the existence of distinctively female literary traditions which both conform to and in significant ways depart from prevailing male literary modes. If the assumptions of these feminist literary critics are correct, then one would expect to find significant differences between the Bildungsromane written by men and those written by women, especially since, as Buckley and others have pointed out, the Bildungsroman frequently draws upon autobiographical material. In a patriarchal culture where the "education" of males and the "education" of females is so vastly different, surely the Bildungsromane which male and female novelists respectively write would be very different.

Several critics, in fact, have suggested recently that there are significant differences between the Bildungsromane written by men and those written by women. For example, in her discussion of a number of nineteenth century Bildungsromane, Elaine Hoffman Baruch has observed that while the ultimate aim of a male protagonist

6 Buckley, p. 23
in such novels is life within the larger community, the aim of the female protagonist of the Bildungsroman is marriage with a partner of her choice. Additionally Annis Pratt maintains, "if there is a 'myth of the hero' there must also be a 'myth of the heroine', a female as well as a male Bildungsroman, parallel, perhaps, but by no means identical." According to Pratt and Barbara White, one important difference between the Bildungsroman as written by men and the Bildungsroman as written by women is that the female protagonist, does not choose to live on one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject, rather, she is "ontologically or radically alienated by gender role norms from the very outset." Thus, although the authors attempt to accommodate their heroes' bildung or development to the general


pattern of the genre, the disjunctions we have noticed inevitably make of the woman's initiation less a self-determined progression toward maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life. While examining the form of *The Millstone* along the above mentioned statements, it does not seem to conform to the pattern of a Bildungsroman. It does, however, display certain similarities with the novel of self-discovery – a relatively recent genre of female fiction. As Bonnie Hoover Braendlin has noted that the feminist movement of the nineteen-sixties and seventies has of late given rise to a number of feminist Bildungsroman which more closely approximate the male model of the Bildungsroman in their delineation of the education, reassessment, rebellion, and departure, of their respective female protagonists.


And before I proceed on to analyse *The Millstone* along the lines of the novel of self-discovery and then link the form with the view of reality from which it stems, I would like to state briefly what is meant by the novel of self-discovery as defined by Rita Felski in *Southern Review*, 19(July, 1986).  

Rita Felski considers it a representative and highly visible genre in recent women's fiction. Autobiographical and usually realistic in form, it delineates a process of increasing self-knowledge in the female protagonist gained through a process of separation from a male defined context: "Thematising gender as the central problem for women attempting to mediate between individual and social demands, the textual depiction of female development leads to a necessary revision of existing biographical genres such as the Bildungsroman."  

As a paradigmatic 'exemplification' of the influence of  

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12 Felski, p.131.
feminism on generic form, the novel of self-discovery raises some interesting questions about the relationship between the changing social status of women and the structure of recent fictions of female identity.

Given the marked differences in the overt political and ideological stance of such texts, they are put broadly into two categories:

Those texts like *Shedding*\(^{13}\) and *The Shame is Over*\(^{14}\) which, besides being the autobiographical novels of self-discovery, are also political manifestoes written by authors active in women's movement, while other novels associated with the rise of a new "women-centred" literature express a quite different world - view. *Gaining Ground* from Canadian novelist Joan Barfoot,\(^{15}\) for example, expresses a quite different world - view. It

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\(^{13}\) Verena Stefan, *Shedding*, Trans. Johanna, Moore and Beth Weckmuller (London: Women's Press, 1979). (Verena is West German)


defines female identity as a form of metaphysical self-transcendence in nature. Besides, the contemporary novel of self-discovery offers obvious differences in its plot and thematic structuration from earlier novels. Nancy Miller, for instance, argues that the female-centred novel of the eighteenth-century is characterised by a choice of two plots: "euphoric and dysphoric". In the former, the heroine "moves in her negotiation with the world of men and money from 'nothing' to 'all' in a feminine variation of Bildung", and the latter ends with the heroine's death in the flower of her youth. It is this either/or dichotomy, which is transcended in the contemporary novel, suggesting that female otherness does not inexorably result in compromise or destruction, but can provide the impulse for alternative forms of living. The novel of self-discovery is, therefore, an essentially optimistic genre, reflecting the historical process of women coming to consciousness of female identity.

as a potentially oppositional force to existing social and cultural values.

In short, the novel of female self-discovery can be categorized as a quest narrative tracing a protagonist's search for self-knowledge, a positive transformation expressed through a number of binary oppositions from ignorance to knowledge, from speechlessness to speech/language, from alienation to authenticity. This transformation, however, does not mean an end to the conflict given, the continued reality of a male governed society. There are significant variations in the development and conclusions of such narratives. The self realization is frequently understood as a purely individual and psychological process. The heroine becomes increasingly conscious of her potential autonomy, an experience which can occur abruptly in the form of a sudden illumination which Carol Christ describes as similar to that of religious conversion and with that the narrative usually ends.

17 Carol P. Christ, "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision", Signs, 2, No.2 (Winter 1976), 325, quoted in Rita Felski.
The Millstone comes under the category of the female-centred novel of self-discovery where the novelist avoids larger socio-political issues because it is a limited emancipatory model. Given that the heroines of these texts are usually educated and/or affluent—there is little interest in the broader social and political issues implicit in the liberation of women as an oppressed class. Drabble, however, seems to concentrate exclusively on showing how her protagonist grows from the half-knowledge of her early adolescence to the full-knowledge where she enlarges and extends herself by giving birth to a baby. However, while The Millstone does follow the pattern of women-centred novel of self-discovery, Drabble does not stop there as her novel raises many more important questions and issues than the ones that are the ingredients of the novel of self-discovery. She questions the concept of reality itself as put forth by modernists and postmodernists. (This will be dealt with later).

The Millstone is, then, an autobiographical narrative in which Rosamund Stacey narrates the
process of her own development from reflection to affection, from a reason oriented, "purely personal" into non-personal, throbbing being, from a sort of ignorance into full knowledge (where logic and intuition and individual and society do not seem in uncomfortable company), from solipsistic personal world into a broader social world. As an adolescent, she was a believer in absolute independence and religiously avoided external reality. After parting from her early boy-friend Hamish with whom she had chastely slept, she made an excellent arrangement with Joe Hurt and Roger for the sake of company, without which, she thought she could not do! "I managed to construct an excellent system which combined I considered fairness to others with maximum possible benefit to myself" (MS, p. 19). 18 She carried a scarlet letter around her neck but "A" stood not for "adultery" but for abstinence (which she calls ironically a typically 20th-century disease). She could not even imagine any corporeal relationship with any man.

18 The Millstone (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1965; London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 19. All the subsequent references are to the same edition and cited as MS in the text.
It is by sheer chance that she meets George, a BBC announcer through Roger. She likes him very much and makes frequent trips to the bar where they would meet. It is on one such trip that she meets George all alone. They have a drink together at the end of which George offers to walk her home. She reluctantly agrees and on reaching her flat, she asks him in for a cup of coffee which he accepts. Once again chance plays its role. In a moment of infatuation their bodies meet and the inevitable happens in her bedroom. After about two months she discovers her pregnancy and having failed to dilute it with gin and a hot bath, she decides to have the baby. This decision marks the first stage of her growth. It is with her pregnancy that she begins to grow into knowledge for she sees some hidden meaning in it:

It did not seem to me a mere accident nor the effect of divine malevolence. It did not seem the kind of thing one could have removed like a wart or 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.'

(MS, p. 66)
Drabble's admission, in one of her interviews that in The Millstone,—once again she used the wonderful material of The Second Sex, Part II, to understand what it means to be a young woman stuck with an illegitimate child trying to enter the adult world, gains significance. Before her accidental pregnancy Rosamund is seen as a Simone de Beauvoir type woman equating herself with men and denying herself her essential nature in her absolute belief in independence and merely rational attitude to life. If her pregnancy shocks her into an awareness of her essential nature as a woman, and of the forces operating in human affairs over which they have no control, then it is a marked development into maturity and rejection of de Beauvoir ideology. She realises how mistaken she had been in her conception of choice and free will, because both the sexual intercourse and the consequent pregnancy, are neither wished for, nor planned by her and yet these things happen to her in spite of herself. Till her pregnancy it was as though for too long she had been living in one way, on one plane and the way she had ignored had been forced thus, abruptly, to assert
itself. It was as though this pregnancy had been sent to her in order to reveal to her a scheme of things totally different from the one which she inhabited, "She had always had the illusion of choice but now for the first time she seemed to become aware of the operation of forces not totally explicable and not, therefore, necessarily blinder, smaller, less kind or more ignorant than herself" (MS, p.67). She gets this illumination after separating herself from all her male friends. She tells even Joe Hurt and Roger not to move with her as they could be easily implicated in her pregnancy. She gradually alienates herself from even her relatives except Lydia who begs her for accommodation which she gladly agrees to provide. This separation from male company marks another stage of the novel of self-discovery, when the protagonist decides to carry on life without aides, or crutches of any kind. The crucial decision which Rosamund takes is not to see George in spite of wishing it whole-heartedly. "When I realised the implications of my deceit, (denying her sexuality) it became apparent that I was going
to have to keep the whole thing to myself. So I decided to get on with it by myself as best as I could" (MS, pp. 34-35). When George did not ring up to her and after a week she knew he was not going to, she abandoned the idea of visiting him. It is from a curious sense of pride and confidence that she even ceases to tread the paths which are often trodden by him. The decision is not an easy one. Almost at every moment she remembers George and desires intensely to talk to him but consciously prevents herself from so doing; she often switches on the radio to listen to his voice. The conflict between seeing or not seeing him manifests the inexorable reality of a male governed society and her relation to it. However, after estranging herself from all the friends and relatives, she exercises carte blanche in doing everything. With her pregnancy she is faced with the need to visit the doctor, the hospital and other related places. This way she is initiated into the harsh and bitter realities of life, of the real world of which she knew nothing before, as if she had put on blinkers to prevent herself from a broader perspective on life. She weeps every day for all the things she had to do
by herself, but does not ask even Lydia, her friend, for help with whom she is sharing her flat (which is actually given to her temporarily by her parents who have gone to Africa). She rather tries to bear her burden gracefully; the idea of self-reliance having been drummed in her by her parents so thoroughly that she believes dependence to be a fatal sin. By observing the suffering women in the hospital and at the doctor's clinic who together presented a vision of hell, she is gradually transformed from an abstraction and a solipsist into a throbbing, feeling and sentient being. She now feels with, and not merely for the suffering lot as she is herself now a sufferer. She, thus, shatters the supremacy of the self to be able to reach out to other selves which in turn shock her into an awareness of herself, with all its inchoate and amorphous impulses and instincts. She had felt for others before but only in theory, "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" (MS. p. 68).
It was not that "the irrational was taking its famed feminine grip upon me. My Elizabethan poets (her Ph.D. Project) did not begin to pale into insignificance in comparison with the thought of buying nappies. On the contrary, I found I was working extremely well at this time and with great concentration and clarity. I thought continually and with relief that I was as sure about the Elizabethan poets as I was sure that I liked baked potatoes." She did not go over from the camp of logic to the camp of intuition, it was rather that she became aware of facts that she had not recognised or even noticed before. "There is nothing logical about ignorance. I am sure that my discoveries were common discoveries; if they were not, they would not be worth recording." The only curious feature in her case is that the facts that she now discovered were precisely the same facts that her admirable parents had always so firmly presented to her childish eyes: "facts of inequality, of limitation, of separation, of the impossible, heart-breaking, uneven hardships of the human lot" (MS, p. 68).

This is an outright rejection of the
solipsistic view of reality as she takes cognizance of the facts, which were remote from her closed, cloistered world. Her pregnancy, in short brings her in contact with all those unpleasant realities of life of which she knew nothing before. It forced itself upon her as a solid reality; she was now herself trapped by human rather than female limitation. Deserted by her lover, she was now experiencing grim facts of life in every fibre of her being. This is a definite development from ignorance to self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world. She could now perceive some kind of moral order in the world in which even her accidental pregnancy achieves significance.

After the birth of her child, Octavia, she experiences an extension, an enlargement of her self. This is a movement away from alienation to authenticity. Her love for her child shatters the narrow fold of her personal shell, opens her out, stabilizes, unifies, and integrates her. Even her so-called philosophy of absolute independence receives a jolt, when she was to ask for help from others as she confesses:
To me the pain of causing trouble was greater than any thing that I myself within myself could endure. But as I grow older, I find myself changing; partly because with Octavia I cannot inflict all hardships on myself alone; what I take myself she gets too.

(MS,p.145)

It is again on coming in contact with the external real world that she speculates endlessly whether or not her parents were right in their tacit withdrawal and indifferent 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 but there are things in me that cannot take it" (MS,p.195). She is reborn emotionally and spiritually and acquires a new identity. The infinite maternal solicitude for her child redeems her and puts her in touch with the external rhythms of life. Earlier on, she had always had a sense of inadequacy but toward the end of the novel she tells us that: "perhaps I could take it and survive. I had thought this before when drunk but never when sober." But then, however, fleetingly, she felt that she could
take what she had been given to take, "I felt for the first time since Octavia's birth, a sense of adequacy. Like Job, I had been threatened with the worst and like Job, I had kept my shape, I know something now of the quality of life" (MS, p. 142).

This marks the achievement of a coherent self which will not disintegrate now under any pressure. She recognises that an alternative pattern of living is emerging for her which is as meaningful as any other form of living.

But towards the end of the novel when she meets George by chance in the Chemist's shop, her conflict surfaces again. She feels so intensely like going into his arms and begging for his affection that one feels her alternative way of living, which she had just settled for, might break down like a house of cards. "On seeing him I felt myself on the verge of tears and noise, and I held hard into the arms of my chair to prevent myself from throwing myself on my knees in front of him, to beseech from him his affection; his tolerance, his pity, anything that would keep him there with me, and save me from
being so much alone with my income-tax forms, from lacking him so much" (MS, p. 170). This however, proves a momentary feeling. As she looked from Octavia's face to George's, she acknowledge. "It was too late, much, much too late! It was no longer in her to feel for anyone what she felt for her child, compared with the perplexed, 'fitful illuminations' of George, "Octavia shone there with a faint constant and pearly brightness quite strong enough to eclipse any more garish future blaze. A bad investment, I know, this affection, and one that would leave me in the dark and cold in years to come but then what warmer passion ever lasted longer than six months?" (MS, p. 172).

With this rhetorical question the structure is complete. She admits that there was one thing in the world that she knew with a degree of certainty and that was Octavia, her daughter. She had now lost the taste for half-knowledge in which George still lived. She could see George knew nothing with such certainty. She neither envied nor pitied his indifference for she says, "he was myself, the self that but for accident, but for fate, but for chance,
but for womanhood, I would still have been” (MS 172).

It is obvious that Rosamund clearly recognises the emergence of an alternative pattern of life for herself out of her benign, even though initially forced motherhood. Besides, the above quoted lines, wind up the major theme of the novel—the role of accident, fate, chance and womanhood in Rosamund’s life. Rosamund recognises the tremendous revolutionary and salubrious role that accident and fate played in her real life— not the life in imagination— which is simply being sneered at by so-called modernists as Lydia.

*For The Millstone* carries Margaret Drabble’s questioning of the conventions of “realism” further as it has no place either for coincidence or accident or chance. It is not for nothing that Rosamund’s friend, Lydia, tells her how she once went to a doctor seeking an abortion on psychiatric grounds, abortion being legal at this time only for what were considered ‘good’ medical reasons. To qualify for the abortion, however, she would have to be mentally so unbalanced that the doctor would forbid it on
the ground that she was not mentally fit to cope with it. Lydia left the doctor's office so upset that she walked unseeing into the road and was hit by a bus which did not injure her but which did produce a mis-carriage. Rosamund suggests that Lydia, a novelist, put the incident into a novel; but Lydia protests that it is "unconvincing" and "for too unrealistic." When Rosamund points out that it really did happen to her, Lydia patiently explains that "there is a difference between what happens to one in real life and what one can make real in art. That happened to me, I agree it happened to me, but I am not convinced by it, it hasn't got the 'stamp of reality' on it to me. I do not write about that kind of thing. I could not. And anyway I don't like accidents in books" (MS, p.56).

The apparent paradox - that what "really happened" is inappropriate for a realistic novel - is easily explained if literary realism is taken to mean not a transcription of reality but an interpretation, "the stamp of reality" or illusion of effect produced by a set of conventions. It is
interesting to quote Mark Twain in this connection, "Truth is stranger than fiction, for fiction follows probability, truth does not". It is perhaps this sort of fiction he is referring to, which builds itself on certain conventions and is not concerned with showing the whole truth of human experience. Drabble knows that this is the case and that these conventions are not innocent or value-free. The "realistic" novel can include only events which articulate a particular conception of life, a specific interpretation of what is 'important' or 'representative' or 'typical' or 'significant.' Michael F. Harper, says in this connection: "In so far as these matters are determined by an ideological practice that articulates the hegemony of men, it is hardly surprising that "realistic" novel has no place for the 'insignificant' or meaningless 'accidents' that make up so much of the lives of women in Drabble's world." However, I see no evidence in the text of the book that Drabble is pleading either for a feminist poetics of the novel

19 Harper, p. 159.
or for the uniqueness of women's basic paradigm
of experiences that are left out in the modernist
view of realism - articulating the 'hegemony of men.'
The questioning of such realism by Drabble is of a
philosophical and psychological nature irrespective
of who the upholders of such a view are or whose
hegemony, ideological or otherwise, it articulates.
This is immediately evidenced by the fact that
Lydia, herself a woman, is averse to accidents in
books.

Or again by the fact that Rosamund shows
signs of growth as a human being irrespective of
sex by noticing and accepting a plane of reality
which is not rational but irrational and thus goes
beyond male - female categories: "I do not wish to
suggest as perhaps I seem to be suggesting that the
irrational was taking its famed feminine grip upon
me. She did not go over from the camp of logic to
the camp of intuition. "There is nothing logical
about ignorance. I am sure that my discoveries were
common discoveries, if they were not, they would
not be worth recording" (MS, p.68). This rebuts
the claim about Drabble's so-called feminist approach
to the novel. She and her protagonist reject the conventions that Lydia so unreflectingly accepts; Rosamund and the novel, in which she is the protagonist, are primarily, as already stated, concerned with what can be called an accident and its aftermath in the life of Rosamund, the operation of (blind) chance rather than scientific necessity. No wonder, then, that the whole book hinges on the accidental sexual encounter of Rosamund with George which leaves her pregnant and consequently brings a sea change in her attitude to life and the world. That is why she refuses to accept her pregnancy as a meaningless joke. "Had it belonged to the realm of mere accident I would have surely got rid of it. It was the kind of thing to which one could not say 'No'" (MS, p.66).

By implication Drabble refuses to say 'No' to an interpretation that modernist realistic fiction has shunned or denied. Rosamund's thoughts and feelings during pregnancy and her daughter's first months of life, its drama and interest deriving from
situations too often dismissed as banal or mundane, are mere life than art, in Lydia's terms, who is a female. To underline the point, Drabble has Rosamund to discover the manuscript of a novel that Lydia is secretly writing about Rosamund's pregnancy, in the context, its distortions in the interest of 'art' seem not only unfair but ridiculous, and absurd. Commenting on this aspect of the novel, Harper observes:

Drabble is not simply opposing 'reality' to interpretation here. She knows that any given 'realism including hers (the one she professes and practises in her novels) is an interpretation. But she does not find this to serve as a ground for metaphysical despair or for a celebration of anarchy. 20

Instead, Harper says that she accepts fully the political implications of this position and feminist insists upon giving expression to a interpretation that conventional realism has largely ignored. What appears to be an accident in the conventions of one ideology may be nothing of the sort in those of another.

Again, I disagree with Harper in so far as he maintains that Drabble accepts the relativity of different ideologies. Because for Drabble, social collectivities are not in principle evil. Society in the form of community is not an evil to be resisted but a good to be preserved and its very foundation seems threatened by the free play of interpretation. To my mind she seems to be re-incorporating in her fiction what has for long been ignored or discarded by 'modernism' because of its belief in strict causality governed by scientific necessity - a view which sprang from the onslaughts of scientific view of life on art and literature in the early twentieth-century.

To put it differently, she is doing what Wordsworth did when he appeared on the scene in the late eighteenth-century by 'throwing a colouring of imagination over distant objects!' It was nothing novel but something that had been practised universally before but deliberately suspended, because of non-literary social compulsions, by eighteenth-century authors.
Coming back to the structure of the novel, then, the ending of the novel is not bleak but quite optimistic in that Rosamund rejects the appeal of self-sacrifice out of the need for self-assertion and thus approaches wholeness and integrity. She does not falter under the pressure of life but receives smilingly all the buffets of fortune and takes them in her stride. She seems to celebrate the way of life she has traced for herself. Unlike a traditional female, she does not feel unfulfilled without a husband after the birth of her child. Her love for her child seemingly fulfils her and puts her in touch with the external rhythms of life. That is why she felt a sense of adequacy after the arrival of her daughter. In Hardy's words whose *Life's Little Ironies* seems to have tremendously influenced our heroine, she makes the best use of 'the chinks of possibilities' that fate makes available to her. Hers is a terrible struggle with life and she emerges triumphant out of it. She could easily leave George aside as she derives sufficient pleasure and contentment from her motherhood. At the same time she is not unaware of her affection
for her child being a 'bad investment.' But, then she asks, "what warmer passion ever lasted longer than six months." Therefore, her investment is as bad and as durable as that of others. Hence there is no reason to feel less happy or more sad for what she has got.

All this is true about the structure of The Millstone and yet Drabble does not propagate the politics of feminism in the novel. For the novel ends up by Rosamund questioning her parents' ideals of total independence, total self-reliance; indifferent avoidance of external reality as also being doubtful about the total transcendence of patriarchal society which is obvious from the presence of continued conflict in her mind, her intense need and haunting remembrance of her lover George and her almost total disintegration on seeing George again. The rhetorical question she asks is in itself an indication of the unconvincing resolution of the conflict. The structure and the texture of the novel are, then, in a state of tension which is also paradoxically the strength of the novel.
Drabble, nowhere in the text of the novel, is very enthusiastic about the feminist question. Rather she is very enthusiastic about showing the 'meaning' and 'reality' in Rosamund's life of an 'unreal' accident and chance. In fact, the texture is put in opposition to the structure from the very act of her separation from her male friends onwards till the so-called resolution of the conflict. Alienation from male society and the final resolution made by Rosamund are of a tentative nature; Rosamund is not so much forced by circumstances to alienate herself from her friends and from her lover, she rather opts for it. In fact George's feelings for her are quite genuine in the beginning as well as when he meets Rosamund toward the end of the novel. It is, in fact, he who awakens her to an essential aspect of her feminine nature that she had for long ignored. One has an uncomfortable feeling that he has been kept away from meeting her under the demands of the plot. This is indicative of the tentativeness of the point of view Drabble is exploring here. It also enables one to understand her statement that she is actually trying to show an adolescent woman entering patriarchal
society in the framework of Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex*. Drabble does not commit herself to any view about feminism or Beauvoirism as she is essentially engaged in search of a pre-existent reality which makes her writing exploratory. And being in search of such a reality implies concerns far deeper and more comprehensive than those of feminism or any other ideology, or a single interpretation only, because a stereotyped interpretation or ideology gives a partial view of reality and falls short of presenting the whole truth about human experience. Her view of reality is inclusive rather than exclusive as she points out in this novel and *The Waterfall*, that "I must make some effort to comprehend" the whole truth about human experience. "I am tired of exclusion" (*WF*, p.85), and that "I should like to bear leaves and flowers, and fruit, I should like the whole world" (*SBG*, p.73). It will be a contradiction in terms, then, to read a mere feminist interpretation of reality in her novels by interpreting her work only as a fictional and metafictional critique of the conventions of modernist 'masculine' literary realism as Harper implicitly suggests.
Drabble is, in fact, in search of such a literary realism which will not leave out any aspect of human life, no matter how insignificant it might appear to those writers who choose only that sequence of events which could be explained in terms of scientific necessity and leave out much more important events which are not easily explicable in terms of probability.

At the most, the female-centred novel of self-discovery receives only a tentative treatment in this novel, or by imitating its structure, *The Millstone* offers a comment on the possibility of such a genre which is very limited and treats only of the educated, sensitive, intelligent and affluent women. This is affirmed by Rosamund herself when she says that it is because of her rich background, her education, her intelligence, her scholarly talent and her position of a lecturer in the university that she is saved from the social stigma of being an unwed mother. Implicitly, it is extremely difficult for ordinary women to manage things as Rosamund did and consequently to transcend and live outside the male sphere. Or one might as well
conclude by saying that what Rosamund comes to
cognise by the end of the novel is relevant to her
then only and that too at that particular stage of
her life and experience. This throws into high
relief Rosamund's rhetorical question, "What warmer
passion ever lasted longer than six months?" And this
is in keeping with Drabble's own statement that
'what you learn at each point of your life is relevant
to you then, yet it is n't quite enough because you
have got to go on learning.' And as her characters
have an ongoing existence, regardless of whether or
not she writes about them, Rosamund's cognition of
an alternative way of living or the so-called
epiphany is valid and viable enough, and hence an
optimistic ending of the novel.