

Rosamund's Class-consciousness in *The Millstone*

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Most critics agree concerning Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* that it deals with the process of Rosamund Stacey's moral growth through the experience of motherhood. When you take special notice of Rosamund's class-consciousness, however, you will soon find that, being born into the middle-class, she has superiority complex towards the poor and is afraid to slide down to the lower class, although she herself is not aware of such feelings. Her superiority complex and fear of social degradation is not recognized by Rosamund to the end, much less gotten rid of. *The Millstone*, seen from this viewpoint, is not a Bildungsroman as it is generally claimed to be.

What puzzles and dissatisfies readers most in Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* is that in the final scene with George, her illegitimate daughter's father, Rosamund resists to the end to open up and go and tell George that she loves and needs him. This scene has usually been just ignored or dismissed simply as Rosamund's perversity by most critics, who believe that Rosamund has achieved some kind of moral growth through pregnancy, childbirth and child upbringing. Among the few critics who take any notice of this scene are V.G. Myer, who argues that Rosamund's moral growth has a limit because she is "incapable of sharing Octavia [Rosamund's daughter] with George, of extending her love to anyone but Octavia"¹ and Ellen Rose, who concludes that "she [Rosamund] does not even love Octavia except as an extension of herself, being a mother does not link her with the outside world."² On the verge of confessing her love and

beseeking his love, Rosamund says,

Words kept forming inside my head, into phrases like I love you, George, don't leave me, George. I wondered how much damage it would do.³

Apparently there is nothing she could have lost by the confession. What kind of damage was she afraid of? I think her choice of the word "damage" is subtly revealing, because it has sprung from the depth of the unconscious area of her mind. Susanna Roxman says this novel presents us with the problem of privilege, Rosamund being a very privileged person. She deplores that the theme of the privilege problem is not developed fully and there is "comparatively little dramatization of the privilege problem."⁴ What I'm going to prove in this essay is that the privilege problem is not just an incidental factor but constitutes the

水産大学校研究業績 1484号, 1994年7月28日受付。

Contribution from Shimonoseki University of Fisheries, No. 1484. Received July. 28, 1994.

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main theme of the novel, whatever the author's original intention might have been.

1

First I'd like to examine the characterization of Rosamund closely. The very first sentence of the novel is deeply significant in this respect:

My career has always been marked by a strange mixture of confidence and cowardice: almost, one might say, made by it. (p.5)

As to "confidence" about what, it is fairly easy to identify. For instance, she says she has "rock-like confidence in my [her] talent" in her job of literary criticism. When she talks about her work and thesis, the tone is full of confidence. About intelligence in general, too, she estimates herself very highly, as you can see from the frequent mention of her "superiority of mind" (pp.18, 112) About her appearance, too, she says she possesses "a fine pair of legs" (p.69) and until she got pregnant she had received considerable attention from men on the street, like whistles of admiration, pointed remarks about her physical charms in cafés or shops, "being tall and well-built and somehow noticeable" (p.61). In addition, she comes from a fairly rich family, which is a big source of her confidence. She lives in Castrol House in Marlyebone Road, which means a lot to her. When the ambulance men collected her, she admits she "was glad to be going from so good an address." (p.96)

The problem is that she cannot enjoy her superiority without feeling of uneasiness because she was educated by her parents to believe in equality. Her awareness of being superior in many ways makes her feel guilty. Her parents' education played a crucial part in the formation of her character. Rosamund succinctly describes "their extraordinary blend of socialist principle and middle class scruple, the way they had carried the more painful characteristics of their non-

conformist inheritance into their political and moral attitudes." (p.27) She also says that "They had drummed the idea of self-reliance into me [her] so thoroughly that I[sh]e believed dependence to be a fatal sin." (p.9) This education "had made me [her] believe in the poor without being of them." (p.84) Because she doesn't belong to the poor and her contact with them is almost none, she doesn't understand them. She pities them, she feels for them, in theory, but at the same time she is afraid of them, which is clearly shown in the episode from her childhood about fishing with the two boys from the working class. Her sister and she were "middle class children", while the two boys were, as they found out later, from the working class. When they responded to Rosamund's casual mention of her maid by saying, "Blimey then, are you rich?" her sister and she have a momentary fear that the boys might throw stones at them. Nothing of that sort happened. The boys didn't mind. They liked the girls all the same. However, "Beatrice and I knew that for our part, we were not deserving: we had not deserved their kind interest, but their contempt." (p.86) This episode clearly shows that Rosamund is ignorant of the poor and assumes that the poor invariably have hostility and contempt. This trait has stayed with her even after she has grown up. In a word she has contradictory feelings of guilt, pity and fear towards the poor.

However, this does not mean that Rosamund doesn't share the sense of superiority with others from the middle class. On the contrary, although she is unconscious herself, she has a great deal of superiority complex. Her frequent use of the word "superior" should be noted. But there are more direct references to her feeling of superiority. They are not noticeable enough because it is obscured by Rosamund's remarks about her obsession about justice and reluctance to bother people and by the persistent mention of her pity for the poor. (I don't mean to say she is a hypoc-

rite. Her concern for the poor is genuine. And this is what makes Rosamund's character all the more complicated.) Indeed, once you set eyes on Rosamund's class-consciousness, then everything, every seemingly irrelevant episode in the novel, begins to bear significance. There is no unnecessary detail. Every episode fits in together admirably like a jigsaw puzzle.

Her class-consciousness takes a strange outline because of her unusual upbringing. She cannot stand the idea of anyone pitying her or despising her. She repeatedly says she hates to bother people. It apparently agrees with her principle of independence, and is seemingly a beautiful attitude. As she herself admits, however, it is sometimes "more of a fear of being told that I am [she is] a nuisance." (p.117) To be brief, Rosamund is always afraid of losing the upper hand, with anyone. For example, when she finds that her friend Lydia was writing a novel about her secretly, she first gets angry, but relents soon because she felt that "[m]ore than ever now [she] had the upper hand." (p.95)

I will now give an example to show how the idea of independence and class-consciousness is subtly blended in Rosamund. She finds that she is ignorant on many scores after her first visit to a hospital: she didn't know that she had to take her health insurance card with her, nor did it occur to her that she would have to wait. This causes her a great loss of confidence.

Everyone else there had looked resigned; they had expected to wait, they had known they would have to wait. I was the only one who had not known. I wondered on how many other serious scores I would find myself ignorant. There were things that I had not needed to know, and now I did need to know them. I emerged upon Marlyebone Road and walked towards the *lovely* coloured gleaming spire of Castrol House. I felt threatened. I felt my *independence* threatened:

I did not see how I was going to get by on my own. (p.39) (*Italics mine*)

Why does she specifically mention "Castrol House" here? Why does the spire look "lovely" to her? It must be because she is unconsciously trying to turn to her social status for emotional support. Here independence is identical with the desire to stay aloof from the poor by having no need to ask for any kind of help.

The lack of any action to correct her friends' mistaken notion about her financial status also stems from this arrogance. Because she lives in an expensive flat, almost all her friends (and there appears no one who knows her real financial situation) assume mistakenly that she is rich. She lets her friends develop this wrong idea that she must be rich because she is living in an expensive flat. More actively, she tries hard to hide her poverty, and this has something to do with her class-consciousness, too, I think. Let's look at the following paragraph:

...the complete lack of any sense of *control* or direction scared and alarmed me. All I know was that I must get rid of Joe quick, before he sensed my poverty, because even Joe was capable of pity and of kindness. (p.43) (*Italics mine*)

She couldn't bear the idea of receiving Joe's pity because she thinks she is superior to him. "I had always prided myself on regarding Joe from a position of dignity and *control*. It meant a lot to me, the safety of my attitude." (p.150) (*Italics mine*) Here I'd like to draw your attention to the word "control". Rosamund thinks until she gets pregnant and finds out a lot about her ignorance, she has managed to "control" her life, her environment, even some of her friends. What "independence" meant to her is in true colors nothing but an arrogant assumption that one can control life.

I have said earlier that Rosamund's feelings towards the poor is those of guilt, pity and fear. I also pointed out just now that at the same time she has a great deal of superiority complex. It is easy to deduce that these feelings altogether naturally engender in her a great fear of tumbling down to the lower class. Except for the few who are either at the top or the bottom of the social hierarchy, it is possible for one particular person from the working class to move up to the middle class, and vice versa. People don't necessarily belong to the middle class only because they are fairly rich; on the other hand, poverty can cause social degradation. Rosamund comes from a middle class family and has a high academic career. But she is always in danger of sliding down to the working class because of her poverty. This explains why she tries very hard to hide her poverty.

Before I go on to discuss Rosamund's change through the experience of motherhood, I'd like to discuss another conspicuous aspect of her characterization, her fear of sexual intercourse. It is not its social implication but the physical act itself that frightens her, and she cannot think of why she is frightened of sex so much. She goes out with Joe and Roger alternately, without sleeping with either of them. She manages to carry out this arrangement by letting either of them assume she is sleeping with the other. I suspect this fear of sex has its root in her fear of "exposing herself to others." (p.29) Because sex is a most primitive type of communication, where neither intelligence, superficial beauty, nor social status doesn't count, people are exposed and tested in their own right. When she meets her ex-lover Hamish after a long time, what thrusts itself into her mind suddenly while innocently chatting with him, now a father of two children, is the sharp memories of his lips and naked flesh. And they are "shocking, anti-social disruptive memories, something akin to those impulses to strip oneself in crowded Tube trains,..." Images

of fear, not of desire." (p.165) For Rosamund, sex is identified with the fear of "exposing herself" to the public in a wild, violent, destructive way. Therefore, the more securely she puts up the barrier of false images around herself, say, about her financial situation, the greater the fear of exposing herself. The avoidance of sex is her way of protecting herself and also might have something to do with her fear of social degradation.

2

Most critics agree that Rosamund has achieved mental development through the experience of motherhood. It is true that she grows in some minor ways. As I have said earlier, she is not a total hypocrite, her concern for the poor is genuine, and through the contact with the poor pregnant women in the clinic waiting room, she learns their ways and her concern for the poor undergoes a change from theoretical to realistic:

Facts of inequality, of limitation, of separation, of the impossible heart-breaking uneven hardship of the human lot. I had always felt for others *in theory* and pitied the blows of fate and... myself no longer free, myself suffering, I may say that I felt it *in my heart*. (p.68)(Italics mine)

She recognizes how superficial her relationships with her friends have been, compared with "the bond that links man to man," like the ones that "bind parent and child, husband and wife, child and aged parent." (p.69)

Rosamund's efforts to keep aloof begin to be threatened when she gets pregnant. When she looks around her in the antenatal clinic waiting room, she is depressed beyond words by the sight of general gloom.

And there we all were, and it struck me that I felt nothing in common with any one of these people, that I disliked the look of them,

that I felt a stranger and a foreigner there, and yet I was one of them, I was like that too, 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. (p.58)

Any baby, illegitimate or not, will hinder its mother's vigorous pursuit of her career by encroaching on her time and energy. An illegitimate one, on top of that, will ruin its mother's reputation completely enough to drag her down to the lower class. This is a positive danger to Rosamund. But at the same time, we shouldn't overlook one merit this encounter with the poor had for her. The fact that she is one of them in a way now has absolved her from the feeling of guilt. She admits she has grown more selfish and "less and less like finding excuses" (p.80) for others' faults and offences done to her. This is because she doesn't feel as guilty any more as she used to. She is suffering, too. Why should she alone endure?

After giving birth to Octavia, she acquires genuine love. Because she is secure of her child's love for her, she feels free to bestow love in return. Through this experience, Rosamund acquires new self-confidence: she is good enough to receive someone's unconditional love.

When she was visiting the prenatal clinic she felt she was in danger of sliding down to the lower class, as I have discussed earlier. Once the child was born, however, she finds that the worry was for nothing. When the ambulance men collected her at a good address, she won some deference from them. Likewise in hospital, she distinguishes herself because she receives a lot of distinguished visitors, including Joe Hurt, who is currently on an egghead program on TV. Another thing that gratified her was that she didn't feel she was on the receiving end of pity and sympathy; on the contrary, she felt like a hostess of a saloon. She says proudly as follows:

My ways and my acquaintances were defined, made more precious and more themselves, by contrast with those of the other women in the ward (p.111)

Moreover, because she has physical beauty which only one other young woman shares in the ward, she doesn't feel like submerged as other mothers are. Her work progresses remarkably. Several months after the childbirth she finishes her thesis, which receives good reputation from every quarter. She expects that the form of address of Dr. Stacey will go a long way towards offsetting the disadvantage of having an illegitimate child. In a word, Rosamund has proven herself. In spite of the existence of an illegitimate child, her career and life has not been affected in any way. She was not submerged like other mothers as she had dreaded. She didn't slide down to the lower class, either. Her superiority in every way has been kept intact. Accordingly, her superiority complex has been kept as intact as ever. Her preserved class-consciousness is quite plain in her comment on Lydia's grey macintosh, for instance. Throughout the novel one notices Rosamund's frequent mention of Lydia's ever-dirty grey macintosh. Towards the end of the novel, Rosamund speaks of Lydia's uncleanliness positively accusingly, and refers to the colour of her macintosh as "the greyness of one reared on baked beans, jelly and bread and dripping." (p.152) As for Joe, too, she has had feeling of superiority over him. Nonetheless, she tells him about her blunder of leaving Octavia alone, "to her surprise" (p.150). This shows a little bit of her improvement, but not much.

However, we must admit she has grown up in that she has given up her arrogant assumption that she can control her life. Two incidents show clearly her that she is "vulnerable, tender, naked, an easy target for the malice of chance" just like everyone else. (p.120) One incident is that Octavia was found to have a congenital heart defect

and had to go through a highly risky operation; the other is that Octavia crawled into Lydia's room while Rosamund kept its door open and tore up Lydia's novel. Octavia's atrocious act almost mocks Rosamund's efforts to control and makes them look ridiculous. This is the final event that makes her give up her vain efforts to control.

In a way it was clearly the most awful thing for which I had ever been responsible, but as I watched Octavia crawl around the sitting-room looking for more work to do, I almost wanted to laugh. It seemed so absurd, to have this small living extension of myself, so dangerous, so vulnerable, for whose injuries and crimes I alone had to suffer. (p.147)

Rose pays attention to the phrase "this small living extension of myself," and argues that Rosamund's love for Octavia is a kind of narcissism.⁶ I don't agree with her because this whole episode is to make Rosamund realize the absurdity of the efforts to control her life and be independent in every single way, and the phrase "the small living extension of myself" should be understood in this context. I think Rosamund's love for Octavia should be identified as genuine love.

3

As I have said in the beginning of this essay, what is most puzzling and dissatisfying in this novel is that Rosamund doesn't open her heart to George to the end. However, once you take her class-consciousness into consideration, this is not so puzzling. It is important to know that Rosamund has sense of superiority over George, too. When she lets him into her flat for the first time, she has "a moment of horrid fright":

As he followed me into the kitchen, he seemed a little subdued by the grand paren-

tal atmosphere which never quite left the place, and I had a moment of horrid fright: perhaps he wasn't quite up to it, perhaps he wasn't quite up to my kind of thing, perhaps I should never have tried to talk to him for more than five minutes, perhaps we were both about to see each other in an unpleasantly revealing social light which would finish off our distant pleasantries forever. (p.25)

Here Rosamund is clearly conscious of the difference of her class and his. Although she doesn't sound like enjoying her superiority, this awareness must be part of the reason she refuses to acknowledge her love for his before he acknowledges *his* love for her. When George didn't try to get in touch with her after that night, she didn't try to see him, even accidentally, either. Her "pride" doesn't allow her: "If he does not want to see me, I thought, I do not want to see him." (p.33) She doesn't know which class George belongs to exactly, but suspects he is in a lower position than she. "I could not place his background or education at all, which intrigued me, naturally." "There was something about his hair, oddly enough, that made one think he might not be quite as refined as he otherwise appeared."(p.22) For the job of radio announcing Rosamund appears to have a slight contempt. She asks George twice if it is not boring. When George turns down her suggestion that he should be on TV and insists that *she* should be on TV instead, she says, "I have all sorts of far more important things to do." (p.168) Anyway, the job of radio announcing alone is not enough to put a person in the middle class. Therefore, the union with him can be threatening to Rosamund because by marrying him, she too can be dragged down to the working class. To be refused by a man who might come from the lower class could be a downright insult to her. I hope by now it is clear why she refused to confess her love for

him. She says, "I wondered how much damage it would do." The damage would be done to her, not to him. She is afraid of losing her superiority.

Because this novel is narrated in the first person in retrospect, we need to understand what Rosamund thinks now about what she did and thought and felt in order to get an idea about whether she has achieved any kind of moral growth. To our regret, she is very vague here, as you can see from her frequent use of phrases like "I think", "I suppose I must," "I must say..." "it must have been." However, there are two indications which show that Rosamund at least approves of what she did (or didn't) as to whether George should have been told or not.

Had I known my nature better then I would have rung up and found his number and told him, then and there [about my pregnancy]. But I didn't. And perhaps it was better that I didn't. Better for him, I mean. (p.16) (I will call this paragraph Paragraph A for convenience)

From this it can safely be said that Rosamund still thinks she did the right thing by not telling him, and that for his sake. There is another paragraph which states Rosamund's reluctance to "encumber George with anxiety, embarrassment and sorrow" on Octavia's account. The following paragraph needs a close examination.

I fancied I knew enough about human nature to know that no amount of charm could possibly balance the quite unjustified sense of obligation, financial, personal, and emotional, that such a revelation would instantly set to work. So I spared him and myself. (p.116) (I will call this paragraph Paragraph B)

When we compare Paragraph A with Paragraph B, we notice something interesting. Paragraph B

seems to imply that she didn't know enough about human nature actually. But how about the last sentence of the paragraph, "So I spared him and myself"? The word "spare" involves a value judgment; this sentence, therefore, implies that she still thinks that she did the right thing, and it agrees with Paragraph A. Consequently, what we can deduce from these two paragraphs is that she doesn't positively say she now knows her nature nor is she sure if she does, but all the same she thinks she did the right thing, by not informing him. Simply for his sake? There arises another question. Paragraph A clearly states it was for his sake. But if so, why does she say, "I spared him and myself," instead of simply saying "I spared him"? In what way did she spare herself? She gives us no explanation. From those vague expressions, it is possible to deduce that she doesn't understand the moral implications of what she did. And with good reason, because we cannot help questioning ourselves if it was really better for George to remain ignorant. It is quite plain from the way he treats her that George had some affection for Rosamund. Moreover, he even suggests taking her and her child with him abroad though he is ignorant of his paternity. Even if we presume ignorance was bliss for George, still there is a problem of Octavia's welfare, as Rosamund's sister points out.

Rosamund's sister, Beatrice, is the only person in this novel that states her opinion in any substantial length. She is more realistic about life than Rosamund and their parents. She, like Rosamund, is not easy in her social conscience. Her husband works for an atomic station, while she is a pacifist. She tries to convince herself unsuccessfully that his work is in the long run to advance the peace of mankind. She tries to prevent her children from playing with a child from the poor because this child teaches them bad language. Her sad, resigned, realistic attitude towards life is clear in her statements like, "but in the meantime I've got to live" (p.89) and "I know

that ideally, in a decent society, no child ought to suffer because of this kind of handicap, but this isn't a decent society, and I can't bear the thought of what your baby would have to go through, and what you would have to go through on its account." (p.78) Rosamund, elated by receiving a lot of visitors during her stay in hospital, feels "Beatrice had been ludicrously mistaken by her fears for the social position of my child." (p.111) After having gone through the ordeal of Octavia's operation and survival, Rosamund states as follows:

I suppose I must have a rock-like confidence in my own talent, for I simply did not believe that the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of one difference to my career: I was in such a strong position by nature that were a situation to arise in which there were any choice to make between me and another, I would win, through the evident superiority of my mind. I felt that I was good enough to get away with it, and so far I must say that I have not been disproved. (p.112)

Though in her usual tone of diffidence, she makes it clear that she hasn't suffered from any kind of defeat or frustration so far. (though we can't tell what stage of life she means by "so far.") And this again leads to confusion on our part as to what moral stance we are supposed to take towards this novel. Rosamund herself admits she would "not recommend my[her] course of action to anyone with a shade less advantage in the world than myself[herself]", which means anyone who lacks any one of her merits of intelligence, physical beauty, middle class status and a career as a professional. Clearly this novel is not intended to activate a campaign to promote feminist movement. As Rosamund is a very privileged person, it is no use to try to generalize her experience.

Margaret Drabble is well-known for her allegiance to the novelistic tradition handed down from the 18th century novelists, especially Jane Austen, George Eliot and Arnold Bennett. Her remark that she would "rather be at the end of a dying tradition she admires" is too wide-spread and quoted over and over again enough to disgust Drabble herself. However, is it really safe to take her words at their face value? Usually in the 19th century novels readers are accustomed to looking to the last chapter for the moral of the tale. Therefore, we feel like jumping at Drabble's own comment on *The Millstone* as follows:

I think that it was this feeling of a very narrow mind being forced to grow outwards into a kind of humanity that I was interested in. And that's really what I wanted to write about.⁷

However, what she claims is the theme of *The Millstone*, is actually nothing but peripheral. *The Millstone* does deal with unmarried motherhood, but what emerges out of the novel quite unexpectedly for the author is the heroine's class-consciousness. Moreover, we can hardly deduce any kind of moral from the story, either. Rosamund does "get away with" an illegitimate child and her superiority complex derived from class-consciousness. There is no punishment. Rosamund is not even aware that she has superiority complex. Drabble, by making Rosamund say, "so far I must say I have not been disproved," hints very vaguely that Rosamund suspects some day in the future she might. But it is not strong enough for us to feel easy to call this novel a Bildungsroman, which most of the 19th century novels are. We will have to wait for her next novel, *The Waterfall*, where Drabble is more consciously dealing with the problem of class and class-consciousness by describing the heroine's husband Malcolm as a man from the working class.

Notes

- 1) Valerie Grosvenor Myer, *Margaret Drabble: Puritanism and Permissiveness* (London: Vision Press Limited, 1974), p.175.
- 2) Ellen C. Rose, *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), p.21.
- 3) Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (1965: Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968), p.170. Further references to *The Millstone* will appear in the text.
- 4) Susanna Roxman, *Guilt and Glory: Studies in Margaret Drabble's Novels 1963-80* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984), p.70.
- 5) For example, Rosamund says, "I have spent so much of my life in intelligent, *superior* effort to understand ignorance." (p.133) One notices a disturbingly arrogant tone in this remark.
- 6) Rose, p.21.
- 7) *Outlook: Artist Talking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.74.

「碾臼」におけるロザモンドの階級意識 (英文)

高本 孝子

Margaret Drabble の *The Millstone* は、従来出産と子育てを通じて主人公 Rosamund Stacey が精神的に成長していく過程を描いた作品として捉えられることが多かった。しかし、ロザモンドの階級意識という視点からこの作品を分析した場合、中流階級に属する彼女が自分の階級に必死でしがみつこうとしていること、すなわち、下流階級に身を落とすことに対する恐怖、下流階級の人々に対する優越感を抱いていることが作品全体からうかがえ、しかも、それらの感情は最後まで自覚されることなく、したがって当然克服されることもない。そういう観点から言うならば、ロザモンドは何らの精神的成長も遂げていないことになり、この作品は教養小説とは言い難いことになる。