Patriarchy and Masculinity in Doris Lessing's The Fifth Child and in Ben in The World

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2011

Uppsats, kandidat, 15 hp
Engelsk litteratur

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Abstract

The English novelist, Doris Lessing elucidates the rigidity of a society, which is based upon patriarchy, in her novels, *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World*. This essay illustrates the causes and the effects of a patriarchal system in the light of feminist ideology supported by Freud’s theories about the acquisition of gender roles. The analysis in this essay of patriarchy and masculinity shows that the novels’ societies as a whole, as well as their criminal subcultures are upheld by people who hold prejudice against others, who do not fit in society’s normal structures, believe in authoritarian social systems and prefer rational solutions to decisions for reasons of conscience.

Lessing depicts the complexity of the social relations between characters of different social classes and their relations to society’s institutions. Her unprejudiced penetration into the minds of society’s marginalized people and into the minds of those who represent the oppressive established society illuminates different sides of patriarchy. Lessing gives us to understand that it is extremely difficult, from a moral point of view, to distinguish the established society from its criminal subcultures or society’s oppressors from its victims. Society’s accepted gender roles in the patriarchal system are often ironically described in these novels, certainly with the aim of making us question normative manners, habits and attitudes.

**Key words;** patriarchy, patriarchal system, masculinity, masculine, feminism, feminine, gender roles, gender identities, repression of feelings, psychological violence, hierarchical structures, alienation, masculine attitudes.
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Introduction

The term masculinity refers to men’s traditional manners, habits and attitudes, which constitute the patriarchal system of order in society. The literary critic Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that it governs the relationship between men as well as between men and women in society, where women in general are subordinated to men (147-157). It is, however, difficult to make a clear distinction between masculinity and patriarchy, but in feminist theory the term patriarchy is often used to describe a socio-political system and in such contexts the term masculinity designates traditional male attitudes and behaviour.

Feminist theories, feminist writing and feminist criticism are opposed to the traditional attitudes in society that deny women as a group the same right as men have as a group. Before entering deeper into the ideas and the thoughts of the feminist movement, one ought to make a clear distinction between the terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’ and ‘feminine’. I refer to Peter Barry’s definition with respect to these conceptions. “[T]he first is a ‘political position’, the second ‘a matter of biology’, and the third ‘a set of culturally defined characteristics” (122). They are, however, closely linked to one another, which will be discussed in this and in the following section. Barry asserts that “the feminist literary criticism of today is a direct product of the ‘women’s movement’ of the 1960s” (121). “In this sense”, Barry argues, “the women’s movement has always been crucially concerned with books and literature, so that feminist criticism should not be seen as an off-shoot or a spin-off from feminism […] but as one of its most practical ways of influencing everyday conduct and attitudes” (121-122). Accordingly, I argue that feminism and the feminist movement must basically be understood as a political movement in a broader sense, whose aim is to bring about a fundamental socio-political change in society, which will not only be useful to women, who compete with men, seeking high social positions in working life, but as a more thorough change, which hopefully will favour all neglected and disregarded people.

The American feminist critic, bell hooks, replaces the commonly traditional feminist catchwords male chauvinism and sexism by the all-embracing socio-political term ‘patriarchy’ (25), drawing our attention to the fact that feminists have to challenge society’s fundamental social structures in order to change traditional masculine sexist attitudes. She describes patriarchy as an oppressive socio-political
system, which sustains society’s hierarchical system of order at the same time as it justifies unfair treatment and discrimination of socially vulnerable people, whether they are men or women. Therefore, I argue that one should look upon patriarchy as a socio-political system that preserves institutionalized gender roles, allowing those who adopt traditional masculine attitudes and values to dominate and oppress others. Consequently, it is not exclusively men who exercise traditional masculine power, but women do that as well. Thus, men are not always all-powerful and women are not entirely powerless, no matter what particular society we are talking about. The essence of bell hooks’s reasoning is that men in a biological sense and their attitudes towards women in general should not be the main issue for feminist advocates, but rather patriarchy as a political ideology. Furthermore, she does not look upon patriarchy as a political ideology which men have consciously chosen and defined, yet it permeates the whole society, it governs our lives and we are socialized to accept it she asserts1.

In the light of these facts, I claim that the ultimate goal of the feminist movement is, and must be, to change the socio-political structures in society by opposing the system of patriarchy, hoping to end it. Thus, feminism as an ideology challenges, and has to challenge all kinds of people who represent the patriarchal ideology, whether they are men or women. Unfortunately, the political agenda of the feminist movement has not always been so sharply worded with respect to its political object. Therefore, feminist followers have often been looked upon as militant women, who energetically try to stir up the tension between the sexes.

bell hooks defines patriarchy in a very concise way as follows; “Patriarchy, is a political-social system dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (18).

Realizing that patriarchy represents the basic values in society, and that it constitutes its underlying structures, one can better understand how the relations between individuals within a family come about and how the family as a social institution relates to society as a whole. Describing the relations between the family and society in terms of social order, age and gender, the Australian sociologist

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1 bell hooks develops her ideas in The Will to Change, in the chapter “Understanding Patriarchy” p.17-33.
Raewyn Connel affirms, that “[t]he underlying interest appears to be consistent and strong. The patriarchal pattern, with young people subordinated to old and women subordinated to men, reappears in a long series of sociological researches on families in different countries, together with ideologies of masculine authority that support it” (122-123), which of course is a generalisation. Yet, I claim that Connel is right, as far as the overall description of society’s social structure on the macro-level is concerned. If we now show consideration for Barry’s and hooks’s view upon patriarchy as an incorporated unofficial political system in society, the term ‘masculine authority’, which Connel uses to describe one social constituent in the patriarchal system of order, may signify both men’s and women’s exercise of power, since gender roles are not biologically conditioned, and for that reason the patriarchal system of order would still be upheld if social and economical equality between men and woman were the feminist movement’s only object. Men’s and women’s gender roles will be further discussed in the following section.

In *The Fifth Child* and in *Ben in the World* the British author Doris Lessing describes different aspects of patriarchy by illuminating the consequences of such a system. Sometimes psychological terrorism and physical violence in the novels are explicitly illustrated, but very often they are described in a very implicit way, as well. Lessing describes among other things the psycho-social relations between male and female characters in a fictitious English and Brazilian society from the sixties to the eighties. However, I do not look upon Lessing as an author who specifically writes about women’s situation in society, but as both *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World* deal with social dilemmas in general, they inevitably also shed light upon the oppressive mechanisms in society, based upon traditional masculine values and attitudes, which all together constitute society’s patriarchal system. For that reason, I have chosen the psycho-social conceptions patriarchy and masculinity as major themes, which in this essay will be analysed from a feminist perspective.
Freud, Patriarchy and Feminist Ideology

In order to understand what gender norms and gender identities are supposed to represent in society and what psychological processes men and women have to go through, I refer to Warren Steinberg’s interpretation in *Identity Conflict and Transformation* of Freud’s psychological theories. Freud defines two dimensions of the human psyche, which are opposite one another, but also complementary. One is the ‘instrumental/active’ and the other is the ‘expressive/passive’ dimension. The first mentioned “is oriented toward the achievement of goals through the manipulation of the object world” (22), and is characterized by rationality, emotional insensitiveness, resolution and repression of spontaneous impulses and feelings, which according to Warren Steinberg are all psychological qualities which normally are associated with the traditional male gender role. The complementary dimension is the expressive/passive psychological part of the human psyche, normally associated with the traditional development of women’s psychological qualities, which is “oriented toward fostering the harmony of the group through the expression and management of feelings and emotions” (23). People normally develop their gender identities from only one of these psychological perspectives, he claims, but have to accept and understand both of them. The social environment determines entirely which of these psychological dimensions a human being orients itself towards and to what degree, and the only thing that is natural in a psychological sense is “the tendency of the human psyche to split reality into opposing dimensions” (24), Steinberg argues, by referring to Freud, who also maintains that the psychological identity is independent of a person’s biological sex, which I claim support postmodern feminist ideology.

It is true that Freud, especially, by earlier feminists was often seen as the prime source of the patriarchal attitudes in society, although he does not really advocate such a system in his works, yet feminists of the sixties like Kate Millett “condemns Freud as a prime source of the patriarchal attitudes against which feminists must fight” (Barry 130), while later and in recent years many feminists defend Freud’s psychoanalytical theories, insofar as they accept the distinction he makes between sex as a matter of biology and gender being a social construct. Moreover, postmodern feminists as Juliet Mitchell cites him as one of her authorities
in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*[^2] in which she explains how gender roles in society are not there just naturally, but formed through a social process and also changeable in course of time, if society changes[^3]. The understanding of the process in society, which leads to the acquisition of different gender roles, is therefore important to many feminists today, who try to see inequality and injustice in the context of a political system, in which vulnerable people, whether they are men or women can be oppressed by other stronger and dominating men and women.

While early feminists, that is, those of the 1960s, for political reasons, tried to categorize women as a specific homogeneous group, postmodern feminists challenge the traditional notion about some kind of a natural bond between women, based upon the assumption that it would be possible to identify distinct female traits, making women and men appear to be social categories poles apart. Although Freud, according to Warren Steinberg, asserts that one of the dimensions of the human psyche, mentioned in this section, should represent traditional feminine characteristics and the other traditional masculine characteristics, he disclaims, which I have stated earlier, that there are not any naturally inherent psychological qualities, which distinguish women from men. Bob Pease elucidates the postmodernist feminists’ reluctance to treat women or men too lightly by assigning them to homogeneous social entities[^4]. “Instead”, he says, “we should only speak of particular women and particular men constructed by historically specific sets of social relations” (26). In this respect, what Bob Pease designates postmodern feminism ideology can be said to derive, at least partially, from Freud’s theories, in that it affirms that gender roles in society are socially constructed. No doubt, feminists today take greater pains than in earlier years to understand specific individuals in specific social environments, as they go against the stereotyped image of women as a social group, sharing psychological qualities and political values, which are quite different from those of men as a social group.

However, neither Freud’s theory about the development of gender identities, nor postmodernist theory can entirely explain society’s traditional system of patriarchal order. In a general sense, however, these theories draw our attention to the close relation between gender identities on the one hand and the traditional societies’ social

[^2]: Peter Barry refers to Juliet Mitchell’s book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* published 1974, which is a reassessment of Freudian psychoanalysis.
[^3]: Peter Barry describes earlier and modern feminists’ relations to Freud’s philosophy about gender roles in *Beginning Theory* chapter “Feminist criticism and psychoanalysis” p. 130.
structures on the other hand, that is, they show that there is an intimate relation between people’s tendency to orient themselves towards specific gender roles and the influence society exerts on them. It is quite evident that there is a great demand for people with dominating psychological characteristics in a strictly competitive society, making its strong individuals orient themselves towards traditional dominating masculine gender roles, at the same time as weaker individuals become subordinated to them, often women, and by that the basic fundament of a patriarchal system of order establishes itself. In this way patriarchy becomes perpetuated through socially acquired traditional masculine attitudes and behaviour. At least, I believe that Freud’s theories, supported by feminist ideology can throw light upon such processes in society.

**Thesis**

In my essay about masculinity and patriarchy in Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and in *Ben in the World*, I argue that the novels describe a patriarchal socio-political system, which allows discrimination and oppression of people who are weaker than others in a psycho-social sense. I claim that such a system of social order compels the characters to adjust to society’s norms and conventions. Moreover, I assert that patriarchy as a socio-political system, supported by traditional masculine attitudes, presupposes suppression of feelings, of passion and of love among all kinds of people and that it also sustains gender inequality, stable social classes, all kinds of violence and oppression, which can be derived from society’s patriarchal structures. Further on, I also maintain that a society based upon the principles of patriarchy militates against people’s inward beliefs and dreams, whether they are oppressors or oppressed. I also claim that women are just as able as men to exercise traditional masculine power in a traditional sense in a patriarchal socio-political system, providing that they take over traditional psychological masculine characteristics.

**Method**

First of all, I attempt to understand patriarchy and masculinity in the light of feminist ideology. Here, I refer to feminist criticism and I apply Freud’s psychological theories
about gender identities to my analysis of the chosen themes. Furthermore, I focus a great deal on the defiant Harriet Lovatt in *The Fifth Child*, on the rebellious Teresa Alves in *Ben in the World* and of course very much on the main character Ben Lovatt in both novels; what they and other characters do, say and think which is relevant to masculinity and patriarchy. The novels implicitly show how the individual, different kinds of social entities and society’s official institutions are socially and economically interwoven. Therefore, I try to elucidate the social interaction between the novels’ characters within the traditional families and within similar such constellations, as well as I try to illuminate the relations between the individual characters and society’s official institutions. In doing so, I concentrate on the relations between the dominating and the oppressed characters, whether they have a similar set of values or not, which I hope will explain, at least to certain extent, the mechanisms behind psychological and physical abuse in society. In particular, I take the novels’ hierarchical structures into consideration by trying to illustrate hierarchy within the patriarchal system and its connection to society’s masculine attitudes, as it is described in the novels. My ambition is to show how the characters’ psycho-social situations affect their relations to one another and to society as a whole and what the consequences are for them and for society.

Assuming that the socio-economic circumstances described by the narrator have a bearing upon reality, I let real life’s facts serve as a background to my analysis. Yet, there is a clear notion in the novels of what the French writer Jean Baudrillard would call “the disappearance of the real” (Barry 87), especially in the description of the main character Ben Lovatt’s psychological and physical qualities and also in the depiction of his meeting with his imaginative soul mates from the past. In this respect, there is not really a major degree of reference between fiction and an external reality in these novels. Nevertheless, I have tried to foreground both the distinct and the underlying elements of the real in Lessing’s mixing of different literary genres, which, as far as these novels are concerned, could be described as a mixture between a traditional detective story, a science fiction story and a realistic psychological novel. To sum up, I refer to feminist theory in general, to feminist literary criticism and I apply Freud’s psychological theories about the acquisition of gender roles to my analysis of the chosen themes in *The Fifth Child* and in *Ben in the World*, and finally, I maintain an interest in the novels’ story and in the characters’ attitudes.
The Plot in the Novels

The Fifth Child is centred on David’s and Harriet’s dream about an old fashioned life in a big Victorian house in England in the sixties. Their life is very much dependent upon David’s father James’s financial support. David and Harriet have an idealized image of a happy family life with a lot of children. When their fifth child, Ben, is born, who appears to be abnormal, according to society’s low opinion about his physical and psychological characteristics, their family life falls into pieces. Ben, who is this unwanted child is sent away to an institution but is eventually brought back home by Harriet against everybody’s will. Naturally, he is then shut out from normal family life, and becomes instead a leader of a band of unemployed young men, from which he eventually becomes excluded as well. He may be said to represent the kind of children or young people who fail to adjust to society’s norms and conventions, who lead their lives outside the conventional society in various subcultures. Ben does not only become the victim of the English established society, but he also becomes a victim of its criminal subcultures, which The Fifth Child shows and later, as Ben in the World describes, a victim of similar such subcultures in France and in Brazil, as well as becoming a victim of the official Brazilian society.

Excluded from his own family, Ben works for some time at Mary Grindly’s farm in England, before he becomes duped by a prostitute named Rita and by her boyfriend Johnston, who use him as a drug-courier, although he never really knows what he is involved in. He ends up in France, where he is completely lost. He is then going through a long process of alienation, being at the mercy of other people, who for different selfish reasons try to use him. He is eventually taken to Brazil by an American film maker, named Alex Beyle, who tries to persuade him to act in a film about youth becoming criminals and dealing with drugs, but becomes instead a victim of the American professor Gaumlach’s fanatical interest in scientific research, who kidnaps him and locks him up in his research institute, located in a remote place in Brazil, as an object for medical research. The description of this place in Ben in the World echoes that of Dr MacPherson’s child care institution in The Fifth Child. It is the same barbarous view upon weak human beings and the same lack of respect for human dignity in the treatment of their patients. Later in the novel, Ben becomes liberated by his Brazilian friend Teresa Alves, who is an ex-prostitute from the poor favelas in Rio de Janeiro, and by her boyfriend Alfredo.
Ben in the World describes the dark side of a cosmopolitan society, where the economically and socially weak characters become victims of a brutal socio-political system, which essentially is based upon free market forces, allowing a few cynical and ruthless characters to use others for their own selfish purposes. In the twilight zone between reality and imagination in the middle of nowhere, where Ben is taken by Teresa’s friend Alfredo, his process of alienation seems to come to an end and his group-identification with people of his kind reaches its climax as he joins an animated gallery of pictures, who are said to be his people, shortly before he falls from a high cliff and dies.

The disdainful treatment of the despised and abnormal Ben Lovatt is illustrated in a more tangible way in Ben in the World than it is in The Fifth Child. In the latter society’s contempt for him is not always so explicitly described and reading it uncritically, one may easily be lulled into false security in matters of human feelings and joviality, since the story is told in a rather humorous way, besides it is so closely connected to the well known and recognized English society with its familiar traditions, habits and manners. The plot in The Fifth Child and in Ben in the World can be analysed as a fictitious, but still as a realistic psychological depiction of life in a relative modern society.

Traditional Men in The Fifth Child

Considering the English class system of the sixties and its gender roles, the male characters’ professions as such often give us to understand what psychological qualities the characters are supposed to have. At least, their occupational titles clearly suggest what positions they hold in working life. “James Lovatt was a boat-builder” (TFC 12), “David was an architect” (TFC 9), Frederick Burke, “was an academic, a historian” (TFC 12), and William, “[h]e had got himself a job, a poor one, in the building trade” (TFC 3). The epithet boat-builder calls attention to the fact that James is an entrepreneur in the boat-building industry and that he is very successful with respect to private means. “Everybody knew David’s father was rich” (TFC 27). The professional title architect emphasizes David’s academic background and it puts him under an obligation to get on in the world. Taking into account that Frederick is a middle aged character, his title indicates in an implicit way the high-water mark of his career. James’s, David’s and Frederick’s professional titles, exclusively, give us to
understand that they are at heart conformed to society’s patriarchal system of order, in
that James needs people working for him, David needs inferiors in order to make a
career and Frederick is at the top of a hierarchical bureaucratic system of education in
Oxford. James’s, Frederick’s and David’s occupational titles suggest that they
practice qualified professions, which are different from the unqualified work that
William does.

Anne Witz describes a profession by quoting Turner⁵, who “has defined
professionalization as a strategy of occupational control involving occupational
relations of dominance and subordination” (42), indicating that the social structure in
working life is essentially of patriarchal character. It seems as if James’s, Frederick’s
and David’s socially acquired masculine identities are shaped in working life and that
their professional status empowers them to exercise power in the private sphere as
well, which William experiences, who holds a rather low standing in working life,
even if none among these dominating characters overtly demonstrates his advantage
in this respect over him. Nevertheless, William finds it difficult to associate with the
other traditional male characters within the clan, who hold higher social positions than
he does.

As far as James, Frederick and David are concerned they are rather
remorseless characters who try to solve the problems they face in a rational way,
which confirms Warren Steinberg’s interpretation of Freud’s theories about men’s
emotional insensitiveness and their rationality. Listening to Dorothy’s worries about
Harriet’s and David’s obsessive longing for more and more children, James sees the
conflict between mother and daughter as a pure financial problem, that needs to be
solved and the basic reason why he does not question David’s and Harriet’s
preposterous out-of-date dream about an old-fashion life in this big Victorian house is
because he sees it as a business deal in which he is involved. “It’s a good investment”
(TFC 19), he affirms, seeing the house for the first time. Frederick on the other hand
does not explicitly show what he thinks, but when he eventually becomes involved in
the family discussion about Ben’s psychological state of mind, he is prepared to
contribute financially towards keeping him in an institution, which he does in order to
restore the family order.

When David is about to lose control over the whole family situation, he does

⁵ Anne Witz quotes and refers to Turner, BS (1985) Knowledge Skill and Occupational Strategy: the
professionalization of paramedical groups, Community Health Studies Vol.9: 38-48-(1987) Medical
not hesitate to express his contempt for his own son, in the most explicit way. He is then completely in want of empathy, fails to find appropriate words to talk about what he really feels, instead he becomes mean and sarcastic, and he either represses or lacks feelings of compassion. bell hooks describes men’s psychological dilemma in the patriarchal society. “Patriarchy as a system has denied males access to full emotional well-being, which is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful, or powerful because of one’s capacity to assert control over others” (31).

Trying to justify Ben’s exclusion from their family, David tells Harriet, that “[h]e is going back to report on what he’s found down here” (TFC 90), which he says laughing spitefully. His attitude in this matter should not be understood as a gradual or sudden change of his mental health, because he is basically very dominating, which is implicitly shown very early in the novel, as the narrator penetrates his mind. “His wife must be like him in this; that she knew where happiness lay and how to keep it” (TFC 13). This clearly shows, that David already from the beginning of their marriage tries to impose his personal view of happiness upon Harriet. David is self-controlled as long as he believes that he can control the whole family situation, but when he is about to lose control, anger, sarcasm and psychological violence become means for him to regain that control, by that he performs masculinity in a traditional way.

**Dominating Men in *Ben in the World***

The male characters’ struggle for life in *Ben in the World* makes them overtly more ruthless than those in *The Fifth Child*. The novel describes characters like the criminal Johnston and his colleague Richard Gaston, whose failures in society have made them criminals. Their insensitiveness and their dominating male characteristics become accentuated when they are about to make plans for a drug-deal in which Ben involuntarily becomes involved. Succeeding in this business, Johnston and his colleague believe that they will become financially independent for the rest of their lives. Making Rita hope for a better life, Johnston tries to justify the use of Ben in this business. In doing so, he reveals his own selfish needs and his condescending attitude towards socially weaker people like Ben, who is rejected by the established society and who do not really fit in the criminal world either. “If I get away with this, then I’m clear for the rest of my life” (BW 55), he assures her. By that Johnston manifests his criminal philosophy of life. When Rita hesitates to be a part of this criminal
activity, he reassures her that it is going to work, because Ben is in it. “It’s just because he’s so weird that it’s going to work” (BW 57), he says, which shows his indifference to Ben and to others, who may become addicted to drugs. His lack of emphatic feelings for others makes it easy for him to organize this drug-deal and he does not hesitate to let Ben or others run the risks of getting caught.

The American film-maker Alex Beyle is another dominating character in *Ben in the World*. He takes advantage of the corrupt cosmopolitan Brazilian society, which seems to be governed by free market forces and arbitrariness. He enjoys the freedom in this society in which he is not culturally, morally or politically integrated. He is basically cynical, but even so, he believes that he is treating his fellowmen in a decent way. Hoping to make Ben participate in a fictitious story together with a projected but arbitrary group of ingenuous members of some genuine Brazilian tribe, Alex does not feel that he is using Ben and he does not question the moral right to bring about a subjective portrait of such a tribe. Instead, he gives free rein to his imagination and keeps on fantasizing about its primitive morals and manners. Alex and his colleague Paulo look upon people of this kind from a traditional masculine point of view as they work with their film-script. From that perspective they can only see Ben as a member of some exotic tribe in one of their future films. Looking upon the world as “a phantasmagoria of film sets” (BW 78), Alex alienates himself from the realities in the world around him, but still maintains his traditional and dominating masculine attitude towards life.

Making surveys among the people of a remote tribe in Brazil, he and Paulo become fascinated by a pretty young girl, to whom they ascribe certain external physical traits like “the most delicately beautiful creature” (BW 115), which implies that she is merely seen as an object for masculine desire from their point of view, than an equal, who ought to be respected for her inner qualities. Thanks to her physical attributes, they make her an actress in one of their films, where she is supposed to play the part of a young girl who is forced to marry “a wild hillman” (BW 115). The man becomes handicapped in a revised manuscript, making a love-story between them marketable to an imagined audience. Thus, they relate to this young girl in a sexist way and their view upon marriage and romance is naive and it is basically Hollywood-inspired, since they see this young woman’s innocence and beauty as complementary psychological qualities to this self-made hillman, who is expected to become civilized by just falling in love with a beautiful girl. bell hooks refers to and
quotes Christine A James’s text *Feminism and Masculinity*, which is a study of gender roles in a modern society, in which James argues against the men’s movement spearheaded by Robert Bly, whose view upon the male gender identity corresponds with that of Alex’s and Paulo’s. “Bly holds up the myth of the Wild Man as an exemplar of the direction men must take and never challenges the hierarchical dualisms that there are so integrally linked to the tension he perceives between men and women”, James argues (hooks 113). ⁶

While Alex’s driving force in life seems to be money and fame, professor Stephen Gaumlach’s prime mover is an obsessive interest in science. Just as Alex Beyle, he too, enjoys the freedom in this unjust and rough Brazilian society, being a prominent American scientist, always trying to be superior. He shows less consideration for people’s feelings than Alex and Paulo do. His psychological qualities are reflected in his facial expressions and in his looks, which Teresa realizes looking at him. “She could easily see again that big protruding mouth, pushing out words at her while the green eyes stared unseeing, for the man’s attention was all inwards on his obsession” (BW 143). He is obsessed with the idea that Ben is a “throwback” (BW 143). By trying to use him for psychological and physical experiments, he believes that he can find out something about people, who lived long ago. Professor Gaumlach’s friend and colleague in the Research Institute, Luiz Machado, who is responsible for another department, takes a similar interest in Ben. He shares the same basic moral values with this American professor. He is described as “a handsome urban man of forty” (BW 122). He cannot, however, conceal his evil designs on Ben. Teresa becomes suspicious and “the ever-smiling handsome face put[s] all her instincts on alert” (BW 124). On this occasion as well, Teresa’s socially acquired sensitivity makes her feel the threat against Ben, just as she does seeing his colleague. ⁷

Alfredo, who is a subordinate to Luiz Machado and Stephen Gaumlach, has got himself out of poverty by his own means. He has led a rough life among criminals in Rio, where he has committed crimes and finally got involved in a fight with a gang leader, which has forced him to stay away for a few years, but he returns later and applies for a decent job at this institute. Thus, he has learnt how to survive in criminal

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⁶ In the chapter “Feminism Manhood” bell Hooks describes both men and women as victims of patriarchy.
⁷ Teresa’s and Harriet’s traditional feminine psychological qualities are developed in this essay in the section “Harriet Lovatt’s and Teresa Alves’s Power Resistance”.
subcultures and he has managed to escape justice, that is, the official justice defined by the established society, and he becomes a part of the very same society, whose norms he has violated earlier in his life. He is not emotionally attached to the poor people in the favelas, where he originally comes from, but he has adjusted himself to a life among society’s influential and rich people, although he is not respected by them, only accepted. He is described as a “general dogsbody” (BW 125). Alfredo does not actively bring out his masculine characteristics and he reluctantly participates in the rescue operation of Ben. Before Ben becomes kidnapped by Gaumlach and his colleagues, he feels compelled to co-operate with them. He is then very manipulative and persuasive and he makes Ben believe that he is going to meet people who look like him, and who are said to live in a remote area in Brazil. The whole idea with this lie is to make Ben agree to go with Teresa to a secret and hidden laboratory near a place, where Gaumlach locks in all kinds of human beings and animals as subjects of medical experiments. Alfredo is actually against the whole idea of handing over Ben to Gaumlach’s insensitive and ruthless collaborators, but as Gaumlach is a dominating man, as well as he is Alfredo’s superior, the latter does what is expected of him. He is, however, more inclined to develop feelings of love for Teresa than to whole-heartily carry on with what he is expected to do. “Alfredo liked nothing about this situation, only Teresa, and when he told her these tests were not so bad, and gave her a smile he meant as reassurance, it said much more” (BW 131). Alfredo, thanks to his manipulative talents, does not only deceive Ben, who is just obsessed by the idea of meeting folks of his own kind. “And as Ben knew that meeting his people at last was dependent on his agreeing to tests” (BW 127), he accepts to be taken by Alfredo to Gaumlach’s institution. Alfredo also deludes Teresa into believing that it is morally right for her to accompany Ben to Gaumlach’s institution and he does not reveal anything about the horrible experiments in “The Cages” (BW 131), as this place for medical research is called. Thus, Alfredo is really implicated in the principles of his place of work and he plays his part in the patriarchal society he lives in, although he sometimes hesitates to do so. Later, at the time when he and Teresa are co-operating in trying to prevent Ben from becoming an object for medical research, it looks as if he is sharing the same moral values with her, but the logical conclusion of his lies and of his taking Ben to the place of the rock-carvings, which are supposed to represent ancient people, who look like him, really make Ben lose his foothold in reality, both in a figurative and in a literary sense, as he jumps from a high cliff trying to join his
imaginative people.

The male characters described in this section have more or less developed their gender identities in a traditional way. They fit very well in Warren Steinberg’s definition of socially constructed male gender characters. As far as Johnston, Alex Beyle and Stephen Gaumlach are concerned, they are just not male characters in a traditional meaning but they have also developed a modern self and become self-made humans, who do not wish that anybody interferes in their business. It is not feelings but reason that governs their lives. The American feminist critic Eloise A Buker describes the traditional autonomous self of the male gender identity as being free from social commitments that limit expression and maximization of pleasures. This autonomous inner-self should therefore be responsible for the individual’s intentions and motivations, she believes.\textsuperscript{8} Further on, she describes ‘The Modern American self’ as a man, who is an “autonomous, integrated, rational self-made human who claims to be at one with the universe” (80). In the corrupt official Brazilian society depicted in \textit{Ben in the World} and in the English subcultures described in both \textit{Ben in the World} and in \textit{The Fifth Child} such masculine characteristics are more overtly manifested than they are in the established English society with all of its traditional norms and conventions, which \textit{The Fifth Child} describes.

\textbf{Weak Men}

Many of the male characters in the novels can be said to be victims of patriarchal attitudes, which leads to bullying and exclusion from the established society. Ben is not the only male character who suffers from society’s treatment but the members in his gang do that as well. They are not accepted by society, therefore they try to establish themselves as outlaws. Their attitudes are basically of anarchistic sort. Expressions like “Come on the revolution” (TFC 149), and such as “there are laws for the rich and another for the poor” (TFC 149) are used among them. Yet, \textit{The Fifth Child} does not seriously describe them as a threat towards society. Instead, they are depicted as a bunch of ill-mannered young men, who just do not know how to associate with society’s established citizens. Harriet dislikes their attitudes and David cannot just put up with their uncivilized manners. “It happened that he arrived early

\textsuperscript{8} In the chapter “Is the Postmodern Self a Feminized Citizen” p. 80-86 Eloise A Buker describes the masculine gender identity as being free from moral conscience and remorse.
one night and found the gang nine or ten of them, watching television, with beer cans, cartons of take-away Chinese, papers that had held fish and chips, all over the floor” (BW 149). When Ben becomes shut out from his home all the members of his gang are deprived of a cosy place to meet. They have earlier in their lives been rejected by society’s official institutions, schools, and a place of work and then they even become excluded from normal family-life.

Another character who becomes a victim of society’s constitutional oppressive system is the young man who Harriet sees at Dr MacPherson’s institution, where Ben’s family keeps Ben apart from a normal social life. This young man is doing a dirty job as a medical orderly and he takes orders from his superiors without hesitating. He adjusts to the principles of this institution, but he has to repress feelings of anger and desperation. The narrator is very much in the mind of Harriet, describing this young man’s inner feelings as she sees that “there was something desperate about him as if he contained anger or hopelessness” (TFC 97), giving us to understand that he, just as the dominating male character David Lovatt, does not have “access to full emotional well-being” (hooks 31).

Further on, Mary Grindly’s feeble-minded brother Ted, who starts to drink due to psycho-social circumstances, and her other brother Matthew, who becomes physically weak because of the work he does on their farm, are rejected by society. People in common hold prejudice against them, ignore them and let them live an isolated life. Society, represented by the people who gossip about them, think that it is no use to do anything for them, since it is believed that both of them would end up in some kind of an institution anyway, which ironically is called "Home” (BW 17) in the novel. People show their indifference for the life they lead. “No let them the poor things live out their time” (BW 17), is what they think and say between themselves. Ben’s presence on the farm weakens their social positions in society, although he is really needed there, doing all the hard work. “And they had that chap there a kind of yet but he did the work well enough” (BW 17).

Richard Gaston can be characterized as a dominating character as he allows himself to become involved in Johnston’s criminal activities for pure selfish economical reasons, which I have described in the section “Dominating Men in Ben in the World”, but he becomes also a victim of the established society, since he fails to adjust to it after this drug-deal, although he tries. In that way, he can be seen as a vulnerable and weak men as well. He buys a little place of his own, by means of
dishonestly earned money of course, but cannot afford to live a decent life by doing a
good honest work. “And so Richard drifted back into crime” (BW 75).

Teresa Alves’s father, who urges the whole family to move from the poor
region in northern Brazil, faces other problems of psycho-social kinds when he gets to
Rio de Janeiro. He ends up in poverty in the favelas without a chance of getting a
good job. Therefore, he silently accepts her daughter’s new life as a prostitute,
realizing that she is the only person who can give all of them a chance to survive by
providing them with money. “Her father said nothing, her mother said nothing, but
she could read on their faces, which said that she could feed this family of six people”
(BW 105). Teresa’s father is, in fact, the most vulnerable in their family, because he is
no longer the breadwinner of the family and he loses his social network outside the
favelas, which both Teresa and Inez experience when they find him in a miserable
condition during their visit in the favelas. “They found Teresa’s father asleep on a bed
made of plastic strips” (BW 119). Within the context of patriarchy, the masculine
gender role as the breadwinner of the family carries authority within the family as
well as within society as a whole and Teresa’s father has lost that role. His reluctant
acceptance of his daughter’s life in the mercy of different kinds of dominating men
and the state of mind of this young man at Dr MacPherson’s institution, who is not
able to express how he really feels inside, show that there is a conflict between these
two characters’ inner sense of morality and their instinct for survival, compelling
them to accept society’s unofficial and official norms and rules. In this way, society’s
oppressive socio-political system, which is based upon traditional masculine attitudes
and patriarchal norms, makes both Teresa’s father and this young disillusioned man
suppress their dreams and their inner sense of morality. Furthermore, society’s
attitude towards Mary Grindly’s two brothers and towards Ben mirrors the patriarchal
society’s fear of and its contempt for people who are not normal. They are despised
and badly treated because they are different from others, in that their physical and
psychological characteristics deviate from normative masculinity. The fate of these
male characters emphasizes the rigidity of patriarchy, which shows that it does not
only disfavour women, but men as well, who live under poor socio-political
circumstances, which is what bell hooks points out (25).
Strong Women

The short description of what Harriet does in working life does not suggest any expectation of a professional career. “Harriet was in the sales department” (TFC 9). She is, however, a well-educated woman, with a college degree, being “a graphic designer” (TFC 11), but the epithet “career woman” (TFC 11) does not appeal to her. She is a working class woman at heart, but through her marriage with David she climbs into his social class. She is old-fashioned, which in the novel is not a life style associated with upper class life. Her out-of-date view upon marriage with a lot of children and a husband providing for her is against the modern ideas of the time she lives in, “the greedy and selfish sixties” (TFC 29), as this time is described in *The Fifth Child*. Self-realization through love affairs and through a disorderly life in general are accepted and quite normal just as divorces are, but it is the life style of the privileged upper class people in society. Harriet goes against all this, which proves that she is strong in a psychological sense and she is quite able to resist the criticism by her workmates, who disregard and pity her. They refer to her as the “poor thing” (TFC 10), and her own family questions her for her choice of lifestyle and David tries to make her abandon her fifth child, so she constantly has to argue against them.

David’s mother Molly stands up for a marriage on equal terms with her husband and she does not want to be looked upon as a housewife, since “she was standing up for a life where domesticity was kept in its place, a background to what was important” (TFC 35). In this sense she can be said to be an emancipated woman. She feels free in her intimate relations as well. She divorces the rich and powerful James and marries the intellectual Frederick. She is, however, liberated from masculine oppression in a selfish way and she does not care about other women’s situations near her. She does not mind seeing Dorothy as a kind of unpaid governess in her son’s home, so she is, in fact, a part of this ‘greedy and selfish sixties’.

Her daughter Deborah has tried to liberate herself from a traditional English lifestyle through a materialistic and disorderly life. She is described as a girl “who could easily have been Jessica’s daughter and not Molly’s” (TFC 26) and Jessica is described as “a noisy, kind competent woman, with the cynical good humour of the rich” (TFC 12). This suggests that both Jessica and Deborah are rather shallow and cynical characters. The latter, who lives a luxurious life supported by her father, cannot be characterized as a mature young woman, yet she is psychologically strong,
in that she does not let anybody decide what she should do. Dorothy Walker is another strong female character. Her working class pride and her sense of responsibility for her daughter make her take care of David’s and Harriet’s four children before Ben is born. She is involuntarily deeply involved in their family matters and she becomes a kind of unpaid modern governess in their home, which is a job that she feels obliged to take on, since other female members of their big family are very self-centred and prefer to stay away from David’s and Harriet’s life, when things start to become complicated, and just pay them visits during the big feasts or when it suits them. Then, they turn up from various parts in England or from abroad, as a few of them promise to do when Harriet is sick and pregnant with her fifth child, “Deborah from the States and even Jessica had promised to put in a brief appearance” (TFC 47).

Mary Grindly in Ben in the World is a little bit selfish and manipulative, making Ben believe that one half of her savings belongs to him. Unlike Deborah in The Fifth Child, she is mature and hard working, which she has to be in order to run the farm by herself. She puts her faith in God and believes that Ben’s coming to her farm has to do with God’s kindness. Thus, she is rational, decisive and conservative, which are all psychological qualities normally associated with men’s traditional behaviour, according to Warren Steinberg’s interpretation of Freud’s theories. Moreover, she is in control of her social situation within her own little family, even if she is disregarded by the society outside it. Ellen Biggs is another female character, who holds a very special position in society. She is old and alone but she is strong enough to care about others. She tries to help Ben by feeding him and directing his life. In her social isolated situation she creates a world of her own in which she feels free to do what she believes is morally right. Living under poor economical circumstances, she cannot do so much for Ben, but she becomes fond of him. Unlike Rita, she establishes a respectful relation to him, based upon responsibility and emotions, yet she cannot read his mind better than Johnston’s girlfriend does, but she strengthens her motherly caring identity by taking care of Ben without seeing much of his inner feelings of fear or of sentimentality. Instead, she looks upon him as something quite different from herself. “She knew he was not human: ‘not one of us’, as she put it” (BW 11).

Teresa in Ben in the World is absolutely the strongest woman of all the female characters described in the novels. She manages to escape poverty in the poor favelas
by becoming a prostitute and she succeeds in getting herself out of that business by establishing an intimate relation to Alex Beyle, who takes her on for a job in the film industry. She really tries to resist masculine power in patriarchy by preventing Alex to use Ben’s queer appearance in one of his film-projects, and by trying to prevent the American professor Gaumlach from using Ben as a guinea pig. Moreover, she never really becomes a victim of real male dominance or masculine abuse, since she breaks away from the oppressive Alex and establishes a sincere love relation with Alfredo, who shares the same experiences of a poor childhood with her. However, as a couple they eventually adjust to the principles of patriarchy and they complement one another in the traditional sex-gender system, which will be discussed in the section “Harriet Lovatt’s and Teresa Alves’s Power Resistance”. As far as Harriet is concerned, she tries to live a life different from that of the current fashion of her time and she questions the norms of her society, but she remains dependent upon her family’s benevolence. Her rebellious action, taking Ben back home, does not improve her social situation, but complicates it instead.

Mary Grindly becomes a victim of society by taking on the responsibility for her brothers and by trying to make a living for all of them. Molly and Deborah, on the other hand, really take advantage of their social positions and Molly, in particular, tries to dominate over weaker characters. Both of them fight for the right to live as independently as they possibly can, and Molly has, in fact, an equal relation to her new husband Frederick and a dominating role in her relation to her ex-husband James. James’s new wife Jessica and James’s and Molly’s daughter Deborah cannot see their own lives in an overall social context, because of their upper class perspectives and their disorderly lives, therefore they remain passive or neutral in the family quarrels between the Lovatts and the Walkers.

Molly and Jessica do not really have the ambition to make a career in working life, at least society does not expect that. They acquire their social status in the relations to their male partners. In spite of this, they are not deprived of influence in their intimate relations, which Molly’s concern about David’s and Harriet’s dream about a happy family life shows. She is very determined and decides for her ex-husband James what he should do about David’s and Harriet’s dream about a luxurious old-fashioned Victorian house, which is to support their son and their daughter-in-law financially. Jessica in her turn urges James to be fair to his daughter Deborah, although Deborah is not her daughter but James’s and Molly’s. “You’ll have
to do the same by Deborah" (TFC 20), she insists. Contrary to Harriet, the female characters Molly, Jessica, Deborah and Harriet’s daughter Angela adopt the life style in vogue, which liberates them in a selfish and in a shallow way from oppressive male dominance, but it is not an emancipation in the true sense of feminist ideology, because the durable underlying structures in this relative modern society are of patriarchal character and they reside all the time within the boundaries of this system as victims or as oppressors. Nevertheless, they spare themselves the inner conflicts and scruples, which cause Harriet so much trouble and make her break down mentally when she cannot argue against David’s and her clan’s decision to send Ben into an institution.

The female characters in the families described in *The Fifth Child* are all placed in the home sphere, at least emotionally and in their vision of a normal life. Harriet definitely is, and her decision to become a housewife is encouraged by Dorothy, who feels obliged to support her daughter by doing household work in Harriet’s and David’s house, although she does this reluctantly. Even if she is against her daughter’s old-fashioned view upon marriage, she prefers the mother role to a career in working life. None of these mentioned female characters do really call the patriarchy of their societies into question. Harriet protests first of all against her family’s and her workmates attitudes towards life and she chooses and proposes an old-fashioned life-style to challenge the values of her time as a way to liberate herself from society’s social pressure, but this choice makes her dependent on others, first of all upon James and her husband David, but she becomes also dependent upon other strong characters like her mother and David’s mother. Most of all she rebels against David’s and James’s insensitive attitudes towards Ben in a similar way as Teresa in *Ben in the World* opposes Gaumlach’s and Machado’s cynical view upon people who deviate from normative behaviour and looks, and who are completely defenceless like Ben Lovatt. All these female characters are psychologically strong, in that they are determined and decisive and some of them challenge unintentionally the patriarchy of their society in question, as Harriet and Teresa do. Others try to take on responsibilities in spite of difficult social circumstances as Mary Grindly and Ellen Biggs do. A few of them become completely crushed by society in a psychological way. Ellen Biggs dies from age or from loneliness, while Mary Grindly seems to die from physical exhaustion.

Outside the realm of the Lovatts, the Burkes and the Walkers in *The Fifth*
Child, there are a few female characters, who defend the principles of their society by executing their office in a very rational way, without showing feelings of empathy as the psychiatrist Dr Gilly and the headmistress Mrs Graves do. They are both rather insensitive characters, who approach Harriet’s psychological dilemma in a mechanical and in an unemotional way and both of them have a strong influence on Harriet and her family, since they represent society’s official knowledge in psychiatry and in education, respectively. They hide themselves behind bureaucratic rules of procedure, without showing any signs of empathy in matters of Ben’s social and psychological situation, which indirectly leads to society’s mistreatment of him. In a discussion between Harriet and Dr Gilly about Ben, this doctor reveals her lack of empathy and her indifference to Harriet’s untenable social situation. “The problem is not with Ben but with you” (TFC 124), she first tells Harriet in an unscrupulous way, without considering that it might hurt Harriet’s feelings. Then, in the same conversation, when Harriet asks Dr Gilly to take a closer look at Ben, who is with a nurse in a room next door, this female psychiatrist demonstrates her social power in professional life by the way she communicates with her subordinate in the adjoining room. “Dr Gilly considered this, then spoke into her machine” (TFC 126). A little later, she becomes irritated as Harriet urges her to diagnose Ben. She refuses to admit that she is unable to understand him. Instead, she tries to keep Harriet at a distance and avoids entering any deeper into a psychological analysis of Ben’s state of health. “Dr Gilly’s pose was wary, offended, she was calculating the time left to the end of the interview. She did not answer” (TFC 126). In a similar way and for the same reason, Mrs Graves does not want to speak in an honest way with Harriet. As Harriet tries to make her say what she really feels about Ben, she keeps her thoughts to herself. “She was frowning, as if some annoying thought were poking at her, wanting attention, but she did not feel inclined to give it any” (TFC 120). One can say that these two authoritarian characters exercise power in an intellectual way, which underpins the germinating hostile attitudes towards Ben within the whole clan of the Lovatts, Burkes and Walkers. bell hooks admits, that “[w]omen can and do participate in politics of domination as perpetrators as well as victims, that we dominate, that we are dominated” (hooks and Rhode 186).

Lessing shows that patriarchy as a socio-political system is not only sustained

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9 bell hooks discusses women’s roles in the patriarchal structures from different perspectives in *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference.*
by the attitudes and the activities of traditional powerful men, but that it is also
underpinned by dominating and strong women, who have acquired traditional
psychological masculine qualities, like Molly, Angela, Dr Gilly, Mrs Graves and
other female characters in *The Fifth Child* have. The description of the strong female
characters in the novels suggests that they can be both oppressed and oppressors in
society due to their positions in complex social hierarchies.

**Weak Women**

David’s cousin Bridget has a naive and simplified image of family-life. She admires
David and Harriet and she has a romantic view upon marriage. In her view, David and
Harriet embody marital happiness, which she energetically expresses when she talks
about her own future prospects in their presence. “When I get married, this is what I
am going to do. I’m going to be like Harriet and David, and have a big house and a lot
of children” (TFC 37). As the relation between Harriet and David becomes tense and
all relatives stay away from the big Victorian house, she sees Harriet in an awful
mental condition, which makes her break down as well. “She too, wept and said she
had always known it was too good to last, and went back home to her mother, who
had just remarried and did not really want her” (TFC 48). Harriet’s sister Sarah’s
social position at the bottom of the clan’s hierarchical system of order, and her
marriage to what her sister calls the delinquent William, who has left her twice but
come back, weaken her self-confidence. Both Harriet and David look upon their child
with Down Syndrome as a punishment that they deserve, which is provoked by their
unhappiness and their quarrelling, although they do not say this openly. Feeling that
their family is prejudiced against them, Sarah experiences self-contempt and tries to
joke about her marriage. “Sarah joked dolefully, that she and William attracted all the
ill luck in the clan” (TFC 29). The young delinquent and disillusioned woman, who is
supposed to take care of the children at MacPherson’s institution is described in
depreciatory terms by the narrator. This woman reveals her lack of commitment as
well as her lack of self-esteem. When Harriet observes her she is in company with a
young male colleague. “Both looked tired and uncertain” (TFC 96), according to the
narrator’s description of them. Rita, who lives on the dark side of society, together
with Johnston, has had a hard childhood, just as Teresa has had, but unlike her, she
does not relate to her own family in an emotional way, nor does she manage to
liberate herself from the life as a prostitute by her own means, but remains dependent upon Johnston’s criminal activities for her survival. She does not have this psychological drive which Teresa has, instead she sometimes contemplates suicide in her difficult social situation. Her physical state of health reflects her psychological weakness. “Her skin was bad. Her hair when not dyed silver-blonde, was coarse limp black mess: you had only to touch it to know she was sick” (BW 56).

Teresa’s mother becomes a victim of the socio-political circumstances in her society. Her feelings for her children and for Teresa in particular, hold her up and without Teresa’s financial help she would certainly not survive. Teresa’s friend Inez, although her socio-economic position in society is quite the opposite of Teresa’s mother’s situation, does not have control over her own situation. She has a narrow outlook on life. She does not know so much about the living conditions for the poor people in her own country and nothing about how Teresa has managed to escape poverty. Her upper class net-work protects her from becoming abused and used like Teresa has been, but her future prospects in working life are confined to an unpretentious post at Luiz Machado’s laboratory and to a few jobs in various TV productions, thanks to Alfredo and her father’s contacts. She feels, in fact, that her life is governed by others. “She saw herself as doomed to predictability” (BW 118). In spite of her education, her upper class background and her ambition to know more about people like Teresa, she remains a little helper in the male-dominant culture.

Social Status and Power in *The Fifth Child*

In *The Fifth Child* Lessing illustrates how the social hierarchical order between the families determines the power relations between the characters within the whole clan. We learn, that “Harriet scaled rather lower than David” (TFC 24), which implies that David’s parents James and Molly have higher social status than the Walkers have, that is, than Harriet and her mother Dorothy Walker have, than Harriet’s two sisters Angela and Sarah and their families have.

James and his new wife Jessica are upper class people by virtue of their financial situation. James manifests his superior social position by assuming the financial responsibilities for his son’s and his daughter-in-law’s dream about an old fashioned life in a luxurious Victorian house, although he and Jessica lead a rather disorderly and modern life themselves. They are both described as shallow characters,
who pretend that they are not culturally or geographically attached to England. They believe in self-realization through a materialistic and luxurious life. Their money compensates for their lack of cultural refinement and it places them on the same social level with David’s mother Molly and her new husband Frederick Burke, who lead a modest life in Oxford. Molly, who was an upper class lady before she divorced James, keeps her status in her new relation to Frederick, since he is an academic. As far as David is concerned, he inherits his social status from his father. From an external point of view, this is what defines Harriet’s social standing as well, even if she emotionally feels that she is closer to her mother’s social class.

By contrast with the Lovatts and the Burkes, the Walkers are described as every-day people. They are less educated, do ordinary jobs and they have all been to ordinary schools. Harriet does not spontaneously establish herself as an upper class woman among the Lovatts, because of her close relation to her mother and to her sisters, but from a socio-economic point of view she is of course a Lovatt. The English class system with its hierarchical social order places the Lovatts and the Burkes on top and the Walkers at the bottom of the clan’s social ranking list, which, in fact, illustrates a general social system of class order of patriarchal character, like that in the real English society of the sixties in which class education, money and traditions were highly valued.

Within the Walkers, Dorothy is definitely the most dominating character followed by Harriet, there between comes Harriet’s sister Angela and at the bottom of the Walkers social ranking list are Sarah and William. Above all of them are then the Lovatts; with James, Jessica, David, David’s sister Deborah together with the Burkes, that is, Molly and Frederick. Molly is the strongest character among them. She is the one who first of all makes her ex-husband James agree to help David and Harriet financially with their Victorian house. She is also the character who is the most aggressive in trying to send Ben into an institution.

In consequence of the English class system, there is a continuous tension between the Walkers on the one hand and the Lovatts and the Burkes on the other hand, if we assume that Harriet is emotionally a Walker, which manifests itself in the social intercourse within the realm of the whole clan. The characters then often reveal their class affiliation in very implicit ways. A case in point is Molly’s and Frederick’s reluctance to socialize open-heartily with the Walkers, when the whole clan gets together at the annual big feasts in David’s and Harriet’s house. “They allowed that
they were enjoying themselves” (TFC 24). In plain language, this would then mean that they descend to trifle with the Walkers for a day or two, without actually getting much pleasure out of it. Through their attitudes towards the Walkers they maintain their higher social standing. Further on, James ignores Dorothy’s worries about David’s and Harriet’s dream of a lot of children and he just makes a humoristic comment about it. “Good God”, ‘said James admiring, but awed’. “W’ll it’s just as well I make so much money” (TFC 35). His attitude in this matter confirms his dominating patriarchal role within the whole clan of the Lovatts, the Burkes and the Walkers, although it is rather implicit.

On another occasion, Harriet tries to argue with James, who pretends that he does not favour traditional family life. She then asks him why he keeps coming to their house. No sooner does she say this, than she realizes how precarious her social position is in their relation and her mother feels obliged to apologize on her behalf. “No of course you don’t mean it”, ‘said Dorothy’. “You’re overtired” (TFC 36), which she expects James to overhear. Thus, both Dorothy and Harriet subordinate themselves socially to James Lovatt and to all others of the Lovatts and the Burkes, by the way they socialize with them. In a discussion about David’s and Harriet’s future, however, Molly, in particular, emphasizes her social affiliation in a very explicit way by criticizing Harriet’s choice of “ordinary schools” (TFC 38) for her children. Molly favours “posh schools” (TFC 38), which is what David and his sister Deborah have got. She then speaks on behalf of the Lovatts and the Burkes and by that she tries to draw a distinct line between her upper class background and the Walkers working class background. Listening to Molly’s attempt to make Harriet understand that Ben has to be diagnosed as an abnormal child, Angela defiantly exclaims, “Typical upper class ruthlessness” (TFC 87), which is just a remark to show her dislike of Molly’s class and her attitude, but she silently agrees to what Molly says, so it is not a dispute or a disagreement in matters of morality.

There is also an on-going family conflict within the Walkers. As a result of this, the mother-daughter relation between Harriet and Dorothy becomes strained. The main reason is the class-barrier, which is inevitably built up between them. When Harriet is expecting her fifth child and Dorothy is doing a lot of unpaid domestic work, the latter feels degraded to something below her dignity. “I do the work of a servant in this house” (TFC 42), she sarcastically says to David, feeling hurt and used by the upper class families, the Lovatts and the Burkes, but she does not argue in this
matter with James Lovatt or with Frederick Burke. Instead, Dorothy expresses her dissatisfaction within the realm of David’s and Harriet’s family. Further on, Harriet has a very patronizing attitude towards her sister Sarah’s husband William. She refers to him as “the delinquent husband and father” (TFC 33), because he is often out of work and when he is not, he does unqualified work.

Harriet’s sister Angela is described as “the successful sister” (TFC 87), which is supposed to describe what Harriet feels about her sister, whose marriage seems to be just perfect. Harriet’s other sister Sarah is envious of her and criticizes her for wanting to have more children than she has, and so does William, who in his turn expresses feelings of anger, envy and shame by criticizing Harriet’s choice of an old-fashioned life, which he does in order to assert himself among his superior relatives, to whom he feels inferior. “William interrupted her, taking command – expressing what they all felt, and Harriet knew it” (TFC 33). He says, in fact, what everybody feels about Harriet, except of David who shares his wife’s view in this matter, which he does as long as he believes that he has the whole family situation under control.

Through conflicts within and between the social classes, the class system as such both manifests itself and it also becomes strengthened. In The Fifth Child, the power-relations between the characters become shaped in the disputes between the families, and finally the strong and dominating characters make everybody agree to their proposals to normalize the social intercourse in David’s and Harriet’s luxurious Victorian house. It appears to be the upper class female character Molly Burke assisted by her husband Frederick Burke and her ex-husband James Lovatt, together with the determined female working class character Dorothy Walker, who initiate the social attitudes, which eventually become standard norms within the whole clan. It is actually Molly and Dorothy who point out the dignity of the problem with Ben. They share the same opinion in the matter of Ben’s exclusion from David’s and Harriet’s family, which they express by almost the same choice of words. “But one thing is obvious: if something isn’t done, then it’s going to be catastrophic” (TFC 88), Molly says to everybody. Dorothy in her turn emphasizes the gravity of the whole situation and describes it from her own personal point of view, since she is deeply involved in the practical work in her daughter’s family. “It is catastrophic” (TFC 88), she exclaims. Dorothy then feels that she gets moral support from the upper class families. By that a feeling of togetherness establishes itself within the whole clan and it strengthens Molly’s and Dorothy’s influence on all other members within their clan,
which makes everybody believe that Ben is the major problem to all of them. In this way, Molly and Dorothy obtain social power within the realm of the whole clan, across the social class-barrier, by supporting one another, which makes it easier for all other members of their families to support them in the rejection of Ben. One may, therefore, conclude that it is the consensus within this small community rather than the disputes, which leads to Ben’s exclusion.

It is quite obvious that this social constellation is dominated by characters who are rational and insensitive, not necessarily males, but very resolute characters, who fit well in Freud’s theory about people who are oriented towards the ‘instrumental/active dimension’ of the human psyche, which is an important psychological conception that I have discussed in the section "Freud, Patriarchy and Feminist Ideology". *The Fifth Child* in particular, clearly shows in what way such characters establish social rules, norms and attitudes, which engender a feeling of togetherness compelling everybody to think in the same way.

**Social Status and Power in *Ben in the World***

The only nuclear family described in *Ben in the World* is Teresa’s family in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, yet there is a complexity of intimate relations or close relationships, which, from a socio-economic point of view, correspond to the solid or the dissolved nuclear families in *The Fifth Child*.

The first relation of emotional kind, which Ben experiences outside the realm of his own family, is that between him and the elderly English lady, Ellen Biggs, which comes about because he needs someone to guide him in life, since he is excluded from the established society, being badly treated by his workmates and missing a home of his own. She takes care of him, partly because she is alone too without a family, partly because she likes Ben and feels sorry for him. Yet, it is not really a mother-son or a grand-mother-son relation that is developed between them. Instead, it is more like a mistress-pet relation. “She enjoyed hearing him laugh; it was like a bark. Long ago she had a dog who barked like that” (BW 9). In this relation, this strong female character dominates over Ben, who is a much weaker character, whose life for some time is entirely dependent upon her benevolence and kindness.

Later in the novel, Ben becomes a part of another quite different group of characters, when he meets the prostitute Rita and her boyfriend Johnston. He really
becomes the odd man out in his intimate relation to Rita, who is dependent upon Johnston. Yet, she becomes attracted by Ben’s abnormal masculine animal-like appearance and very soon she becomes addicted to him, but it is only in a physical way, so she neither respects him, nor does she love him. “Being helpless in those hairy hands […] it thrilled her” (BW 39), is what she feels being together with him. In spite of Rita’s relation to Ben, Johnston remains the dominating character among them and he decides what Rita should do, so he uses both Rita and Ben for his own purposes. It is quite obvious that Johnston by force of his traditional masculine drive as a criminal manages to control Rita’s life, which he does because of their unequal social relation, in which Rita becomes victimized in a double sense, as a prostitute and being also at the mercy of him. Without Johnston’s support and her participation in his criminal activities she feels that “she probably wouldn’t last long” (BW 56). This may be the reason why she is able to use Ben, both physically in her strange intimate relation to him, and also psychologically by becoming a party in Johnston’s immoral use of Ben in criminal activities, although she sometimes seems to pity him.

The relations between Alex Beyle, his colleague Paulo, Teresa Alves and Ben constitute another social constellation of characters in the grey area between the established and the criminal society. Alex is the one who dominates in this group, which he also does among his associates in his group of film makers, actors, assistants and other friends. “Alex was the one they all turned to, watched: they waited to hear what he thought” (BW 96). Teresa is definitely an outsider among those people, coming from a poor region in northern Brazil, having her family living in poverty in the favelas, and being also an ex-prostitute. She does not really have a love relation to Alex, but it suits him to have her working for him and it is very convenient and practical for Teresa to have somebody caring for her. What Ben thinks about this unequal relation tells us very well what it is all about. “He liked her very much, but knew she belonged to Alex” (BW 94). Thus, intuitively Ben’s feels that Teresa is psychologically oppressed by Alex. Alex, assisted by his friend Paulo is the dominating character in this little group and Teresa and Ben have to adjust to his view upon making business, but unlike Rita, who is unable to exert influence on Johnston, Teresa tries and also manages to protect Ben from being used by Alex.

Yet another, more complex constellation of characters crystallizes itself when an intimate relation between Teresa and Alfredo comes about and a number of characters becomes involved in Ben’s fate; a real big social group establishes itself,
and it is the interest in or the concern for Ben that brings them together. Through Alfredo, Teresa becomes acquainted with his friend José and another of Alfredo’s friend, named Antonio. All three of them share a similar social background as they come from the same poor region in northern Brazil and have worked in the mines there. They could all be defined as working class. Alfredo and José live under better economical circumstances in Rio working for Professor Stephen Gaumlach and this other scientist, Luiz Machado, than they did before, but their social positions as assistants or helpers to these well-educated and dominating characters are unpretentious. Antonio is still in the mine-industry but has got a more qualified job than earlier. The female character Inez becomes a part of this group, since she works as an assistant in Luiz Machado’s laboratory. This man, just like Gaumlach, is interested in Ben for pure scientific reasons and by becoming a friend of Teresa, Inez gets involved in Teresa’s concern for Ben as well.

Within the last mentioned social constellation a real hierarchical order of preference is developed, in which Ben has to place himself at the bottom, while Gaumlach and Machado are totally dominating by force of their higher social positions in society, their higher education, and by being Alfredo’s, José’s and Inez’s superiors in working life. In this social context “professionalization as a strategy of occupational control” (Witz 42), which Anne Witz discusses, is maintained and upheld in the private sphere as well by these two dominating male characters, since the professional and the private sphere seem to merge in this social constellation.

In spite of Inez’s higher social class and her education, Teresa’s experiences of life make her stronger than this upper class woman, therefore she never lets herself become subordinated to her. Teresa and Alfredo become socially strong together, thanks to their relation on rather equal terms. Both of them try to go against the oppressive characters Gaumlach and Machado as they refuse to co-operate with them. Inez does that as well by becoming a friend of Teresa. The former also benefits in this social constellation by her social background, having a father who is a university professor, which in its turn extends her social network of which Alex and his friends in the film industry become a part. Luiz Machado, who is both Inez’s friend and her superior, does not like to see Teresa and Inez becoming friends. Through her friendship with Inez, Teresa violates the social norms by not respecting Inez, who has higher social status than her and happens to be born into the upper class society, while Teresa’s class affiliation is quite the opposite of that. Their friendship makes it
difficult for Machado and Gaumlach to accomplish what they have in mind, that is using Ben for medical experiments.

However, in the end of the novel both Antonio and Alfredo show their loyalty towards Gaumlach, who is the most dominating, the most ruthless and the most insensitive character in Ben in the World, as they feel obliged to inform him about what has happened to Ben after their rescue-operation of him, which they do in spite of the fact that Alfredo has been sacked by this ruthless scientist. Thus, in a psychological sense Gaumlach and Machado regain power over all of them, thanks to or because of Alfredo’s and José’s loyalty towards their superior. By that, the patriarchal system of order is sustained or restored among them in this anarchistic and corrupt society.

**Harriet Lovatt’s and Teresa Alves’s Power Resistance**

In a study on marital relations in Lessing’s Children of Violence, Ingrid Holmquist refers to Agate N. Krouse, who makes a distinction between ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ feminism. Krouse refers to the latter category in trying to define Doris Lessing’s contribution to literary feminism. Holmquist also quotes Krouse, who asserts that “Lessing shows little interest in the discrimination of women in work, education and politics, but she does give thorough analyses particularly of the destructive influence of the traditional marriage on the female psyche” (Holmquist 24). I believe that this is quite true especially for Lessing’s depiction of the women in the traditional English society in The Fifth Child, where she does not really give a picture of them as discriminated in work or as being less educated than men. There is, however, in both The Fifth Child and in Ben in the World a special category of weak and vulnerable men and women, who have low social status in general in society, which seems to be caused by the patriarchal system, especially by the institution of the family. There are also many strong and dominating female characters in the novel, who are described in terms of traditional masculine qualities, which I have discussed in the sections “Strong Women” and “Social Status and Power in The Fifth Child”, which will be further analysed in the section “Ben’s masculine Identity”. It is, however, within the family as one of society’s most important institutions that Harriet Lovatt suffers in

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10 Ingrid Holmquist refers to Agate N. Krouse’s The Feminism of Doris Lessing, 1972 p.19, who she also quotes.
The Fifth Child and where she starts to rebel against society’s patriarchal system. This institution forms her life and it eventually compels her to adjust to society’s expected female gender role. The dream and the image of such a traditional institution become also a place of refuge for Teresa Alves in Ben in the World, when Ben becomes a problem for her and Alfredo. With respect to Lessing’s description in The Fifth Child of the destructive psychological process that Harriet has to go through within her marriage under the destructive influence of her husband and of other people around her, who relate to her as a wife and a mother, I agree with Krouse, who suggests that Lessing rather illuminates women’s state of psychological health in marriage than she discusses women’s liberation in a socio-economic sense. In The Fifth Child Lessing describes how Harriet’s fluctuating mental state of health is caused by David’s emotional insensitiveness and this has, as The Fifth Child shows, a ‘destructive influence’ on her psyche, which is what Krouse discusses in general terms in The Feminism of Doris Lessing, by referring to Lessing as an ‘implicit’ feminist.

Harriet does not really fight for self-realization outside the realm of her family. In her quarrels with David she seems to be disengaged from any thoughts or any ambition of making a career in working life. Even if Lessing describes Harriet’s psycho-social situation as a housewife in The Fifth Child, at the same time as she touches upon the possibility of such a future life for Teresa in Ben in the World as well, she does not authorize women’s liberation in a traditional sense. Besides, Lessing does not really describe the typical career women Dr Gilly and the headmistress Mrs Graves in The Fifth Child in favourable light. Moreover, Lessing does not really politicize or propose simple solutions to women’s dilemmas in society, which traditional feminist writers often tend to do in their novels. In this respect she can be said to be an ‘implicit’ feminist writer, as Krouse phrases it.

Harriet’s psychological state of health, her defiant attitudes towards the modernity of her time and her ambivalent relation to her fifth child form a pattern of behaviour, containing both rebellious and submissive elements, which can be derived from her social situation in her marriage with David. Her social affiliation becomes a little ambiguous as she becomes squeezed between her mother’s working class pride and David’s upper class attitude. Harriet’s feeling of being an outsider can be described and explained in terms of tradition and class, which makes her perceive the
world from the ‘standpoint of alienation’,\textsuperscript{11} which she does because she is working class at heart at the same time as she has to adjust to the upper class manners and habits. Besides, she favours an old fashioned life style, which is a view upon life she only shares with David. Naturally, such circumstances complicate her social situation, but they also help her to see the absurdities in life and it makes her question society’s authorities. She has the “experience of double vision” (Gilligan 23)\textsuperscript{12}. Nevertheless, Harriet gives priority to family life and tries to take on the practical responsibilities for the upbringing of their children, which makes her dependent upon James’s and David’s financial support.

Harriet’s dislike for the modern society which she lives in makes her maternal from society’s point of view, and this epithet makes it difficult for her to live with David on equal terms. “You are not maternal [...] It’s not your nature. But Harriet is” (TFC 19), David says to his mother, which shows that David believes that Harriet is different from his mother in matters of motherhood and housework. It makes David think that he bears the main responsibility for his family, who in his turn is supported financially by his father and mother and morally directed by Harriet’s mother Dorothy. Harriet’s attempt to liberate herself from David’s patronizing control by trying to love her fifth child, and by her attempt to resist her mother’s authoritarian upbringing does not make her call the underlying conservative patriarchal values in her society in question, since she after all favours the traditional marriage and an old fashioned life. She is, in fact, basically adjusted to the patriarchal system of order, although it is in an old-fashioned way of course.

There is, actually, a tension between Harriet and David from the beginning of their relation and it becomes intensified when nobody but Harriet seems to accept Ben as a rightful member of their family. Motherly feelings makes Harriet go against David’s and the rest of the family’s decision to send Ben into an institution. “He is a little boy” (TFC 90), she says to David and tries to make him accept the new family situation by adding; “He’s our child” (TFC 90). Harriet’s emotional reasoning, which is a sign of her traditional female psychological qualities, does not knock holes in David’s argument concerning the suffering of their other four children, due to Ben’s abnormal behaviour. David tries to make Harriet believe that there are no other

\textsuperscript{11} Christine Sizemore uses this expression describing Lessing’s narrative technique. The term is explained in the section “Ben’s masculine Identity”.

\textsuperscript{12} Carol Gilligan borrows this term from W.E.B Dubois, when she describes women’s dilemmas living in patriarchy in Who’s Afraid of Feminism 1997:23
options than sending Ben away. By delivering her with an ultimatum: “It’s either him or us” (TFC 90), he makes it look as if Ben were the other part in their family dispute, who could negotiate with them on equal terms.

At first David manages to keep Harriet from interfering in his taking care of Ben in his own rational way, although she is all the time against the whole idea of excluding Ben from their normal family life, but she feels obliged to agree to what David says, because their marriage is at stake. Shortly after that Ben has been taken away, Harriet’s indulgence towards David is turned into gratitude for what he has done. “She was weeping with the shock of it, and with relief, and with gratitude to him, who was taking all the responsibility” (TFC 92). However, a little later she starts to rebel against both her own family’s and society’s treatment of her son. This passion for social justice arises from guilt and not really so much from love of Ben. “It was not with love or even affection, that she thought of him […] it was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights” (TFC 94). Harriet reproaches herself “for not being able to find one little spark of feeling” (TFC 94), and she knows that it is because she is unrighteously afflicted with guilt for having given birth to an abnormal child, for trying to raise it and for trying to keep it within the family.

Eventually, her feeling of guilt, her bad conscience and her sense of morality make her liberate herself from David’s and from her family’s psychological oppression and she drives all way up to the institution where Ben is kept and where he is expected to die. Through this rebellious action, Harriet threatens society’s norms and rules represented by many of the characters around her, like David, Molly, Frederick Burke, James Lovatt and different representatives of society’s care institutions, schools etc., who have adopted traditional masculine attitudes towards life. Her passion for social justice manifests itself in her commitment for bringing Ben back home and for trying to keep him there, but as he becomes an adolescent and society starts to fear him, Harriet is unable to defend him. The family conflict between Harriet and David culminates when David does not get the expected promotion at the same time as he has to do a lot of practical job in their household, which makes him feel like a “nursemaid” (TFC 42) in his own house and he tends to believe that Ben is the biggest problem in his life. In a quarrel between him and Harriet, David completely disassociates himself from Ben in an emotional way by describing him as someone who has “just dropped in from Mars” (TFC 90). He blames Harriet and Ben for having split up their family. In that way he throws off his own responsibility for
Ben, without any signs of guilt or self-reproach. “We have no children Harriet. Or, rather I have no children. You have one child” (TFC 150), he tells Harriet, insinuating that her concern for Ben is not compatible with a traditional family life; the kind of life they both had expected when they first had got married. Facing the psycho-social realities in her life, Harriet allies herself to David and participates actively in the exclusion of Ben from their family, by that she adopts David’s view and vision of a perfect family life.

After she has gone through a deep psychological crisis in her marriage to David, because of the quarrel with him about Ben, she has to accept the will of other strong characters within the clan. However, it is not a complete submission to traditional patriarchal norms, but she readjusts herself to David’s vision about family life, which is based upon such principles, and she seems to relapse into the train of thoughts she had when she first got married, feeling subordinated to David. “Harriet had seen her future in the old way, that a man would hand her the keys of her kingdom” (TFC 13).

The relation between Teresa Alves and Alfredo in Ben in the World is in analogy with that between Harriet and David in The Fifth Child. Alfredo becomes the dominating part in their relation, but it is not so clearly shown in the beginning of their relation, since their social backgrounds are similar, but they differ in that Teresa is emotionally attached to her past through her intimate relation to her mother, which is clearly shown in the episode where she together with Inez visits her mother in the favelas. “At the moment of parting she embraced Teresa […] and she wept, and so did Teresa” (BW 120). Alfredo, on the other hand, does not have such a sentimental relation to his earlier life in the favelas. Instead, he is better adjusted to his new life, from a patriarchal point of view, of course.

Although Alfredo does not like what his employers are planning for Ben, he plays his part in this affair, whose ultimate goal is to capture Ben and lock him up in “The Cages” (BW 131), which is but a subdivision of Stephen Gaumlach’s research institute, where this professor hopes to find out what Ben is. As Alfredo hesitates to accomplish the whole task, that is, to deliver Ben to his superiors, Teresa is confronted with Luiz Machado and with his colleague Gaumlach, who try to make her agree to send Ben away. These men represent “the educated clever all-knowing world of knowledge” (BW 135) in her imagination of the world, which she is not familiar with. This meeting with the authoritarian representatives of a society, who she fears,
makes her defiant and it provokes feelings of detestation of them. In the hostile discussion between them, Gaumlach claims his moral right to use Ben for medical research, while Teresa insists that Ben has the right to decide for himself.

From a gender point of view this matter is brought to a head as Teresa’s female sensitiveness makes her argue against this rationally thinking professor, who believes that human rights can be neglected in his research, if the purpose is to make scientific progress, which will be of benefit to a large number of people in the future. In short; his view upon life is that the end justifies the means. Teresa cannot accept this cynical approach to life, but she talks instead about Ben in terms of human qualities and reassures Gaumlach that Ben is a British citizen and not a strange object for research. Teresa does not only become defiant towards Gaumlach and Machado but she rebels against the cynicism of the society she lives in, but nothing prevents them and their rough society from kidnapping Ben.

Unlike Harriet in The Fifth Child, Teresa uses psychological violence when she later organizes the rescue operation of Ben. She threatens to kill her best friend Inez, who, she suspects, ought to know where Ben is, which makes Alfredo feel compelled to participate in the rescue operation of Ben. In spite of the pressure Alfredo’s superiors put on him, he refuses to take further orders from them, and naturally he loses his job, but in his mind he remains loyal to his superiors Gaumlach and Machado. In the search for Ben, an intimate relation between Teresa and Alfredo is developed. The new situation brings Teresa and Alfredo closer to one another and both of them realize that their rebellious mission is going to demand a lot of sacrifice from them.

Later, when they are about to help Ben to find his people, that is, the rock carvings, which are supposed to represent them, Alfredo declares to everybody that he and Teresa are going to marry. Then, Teresa experiences a similar inner conflict as Harriet does in The Fifth Child, when David delivers her with an ultimatum by telling her, that “[i]t’s either him or us” (TFC 90). They know that their concern for Ben has a price and they must make a choice between sacrificing a part of their lives for Ben or to live in a normal harmonious love relation. Teresa reflects on Alfredo’s proposal. “And Teresa was thinking, How about Ben? Alfredo won’t want me if he thinks I must look after Ben” (BW 168). In the end of the novel Teresa shows strong feelings of empathy and is about to cry when she realizes that Ben has fallen off, or jumped from the cliff in front of them. It is however a feeling of relief that overshadows this
sentiment of guilt and Teresa clearly expresses what both of them feel inside. “Yes, ‘said Teresa. And added,’ And I know we are pleased that he is dead and we don’t have to think about him” (BW 178), she says to Alfredo and José.

The relations between the above mentioned male and female characters in their intimate relations become strained as the social hierarchical order between them is reversed. When Harriet and Teresa demonstrate that they, under specific circumstances, can be even more determined and rational than David and Alfredo are, that is, they demonstrate their masculine characteristics, neither David nor Alfredo can really accept this new kind of inverted hierarchical order in their relationships for too long. As Harriet and Teresa try to act independently of their counterparts’ will, David and Alfredo cannot play their expected dominating masculine gender roles within their intimate relations, which is what compels Alfredo to participate in Teresa’s rescue operation, although he does this reluctantly. Doing so, he subordinates himself to her, in a similar way as David feels that he has to do when Harriet brings Ben back to their home. In these situations Teresa’s and Harriet’s dominating psychological qualities are not complementary to David’s and Alfredo’s socially constructed dominating masculine identities, and this is what complicates their relationships. However, when Harriet eventually rejects Ben, she adjusts to David’s and society’s expectations, just as Teresa does when she realizes that Ben is going to be a problem for them. No doubt, society’s basic sex-gender system establishes itself in the hierarchical order between the male and the female characters in their intimate relations. Eloise A Buker explains this psycho-social phenomenon.13 “As men play the autonomous self and women the dependent self, American society attempts to symbolise a complete individual through compulsive heterosexuality that fuses the two selves to create a whole human being” (Buker and Hekman 82).

Molly Burke, whose female characteristics and social status are described in the sections "Strong Women" and "Social Status and Power in The Fifth Child", has a very patronizing attitude towards people around her and she also tries to be dominating in her relation to her ex-husband James Lovatt, which makes it difficult for both of them to complement one another in the traditional sex-gender system. She demonstrates decisive and rational masculine characteristics in her taking command of James, which seems to be of a permanent character, since it results in a divorce

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13 In the chapter “Is the postmodern Self a Feminised Citizen” Eloise A Buker talks about the difficulty to become a whole human being in a marital relation.
between them. On the other hand, Harriet’s and Teresa’s attempts to direct the lives of David and Alfredo respectively, are of a temporary character, which is conditioned by specific social circumstances in connection with their feelings for Ben. As soon as they cease to perform masculinity, that is, as soon as they tend to be less decisive and less determined than their male counterparts, they become more accepted in their intimate relations. In her descriptions of these relationships Lessing shows that inequality is preserved between men and women in marriage as long as society is based upon patriarchal principles, which is what Buker asserts talking about marriage as a symbol of a ‘complete individual’, which of course is in contrast with what she and other feminists authorize, that is, a marriage in which each individual should be complete.

Molly does not really have to take any risk when she challenges her ex-husband after their divorce, since she more or less strengthens her social position in society through her marriage to Frederick Burke. On the contrary, Harriet and Teresa take great risks of losing everything that they have struggled for in life by opposing their counterparts, that is, Teresa’s dream about a decent life away from poverty and Harriet’s dream about an old-fashioned life with a lot of children. It seems as if such an attitude towards injustice in society has with Harriet’s and Teresa’s inner sense of morality, which sometimes seems to guide them in life, making them question society’s norms from time to time.

An essay on power and gender structures within a traditional nuclear family or within a similar social constellation is basically a study of intimate social relations between the male and the female sex in general in society. Such relationships of different kinds, which are not necessarily of marital characters, which Ben in the World shows, constitute one essential social fundament in society, which is important for the patriarchal society’s maintenance and for its development. Kathryn Sweeney uses the term “micro processes of power” (127), in order to describe how the social power relations within the family affect the macro structures of power in society and she uses the term “societal power” (128), which she defines as family members’ ability to influence decisions within the family. For a further understanding of how social power is incorporated in the social structure, Karlene Faith argues, that “[p]ower is a process that characterizes virtually all social relationships, both between individuals and between larger social units” (Faith, Radke & Henderikus 6). She talks in the same text about women in general in such processes, and claims that “power
resistance is a key feature of strategic power relationships in society” (45)14

In the light of such a view upon the relations between the male and the female characters within the families and within similar such constellations it will be easier to understand how Harriet’s and Teresa’s resistance comes about in specific social situations. Let us accept, what Karlene Faith affirms, namely, that “[r]esistance is itself an exercise of power as projections of alternative truths” (Faith, Radke and Henderikus 74). Harriet’s and Teresa’s ‘alternative truths’ are obviously intuitively and emotionally perceived by them, but not socially concretized as an alternative to their traditional female gender roles in society.

Some of Harriet’s and Teresa’s social activities, under specific circumstances as they try to protect Ben from becoming psychologically and physically abused, indicate that they seem to be governed by a kind of “communtarien self” 15, which is “self-sacrificing” (Buker & Hekman 82), but in spite of this they are more or less compelled, already from the beginning of their lives to adjust to the principles of the patriarchal system. Both of them are, however, very sensitive characters and they try hard to connect with people in an emotional way and in doing so they rely more on feelings than on reason, which at first makes them claim Ben’s integration in society. However, they are not socially authorized to do this, considering their rather low social positions in society. Both of them have to repress much of their female sensitivity and their inner feelings of social justice, when their male counterparts and society as a whole start to exert influence on them. It is therefore quite logical that they become obliged to readjust to the order of their patriarchal society, whose system they eventually actively prefer to participate in.

Harriet and Teresa tend to be very self-sacrificing, when they have a bad conscience about their own roles in society and in situations when they feel bad about the mistreatment of others. Then, they believe that they can do something about it and use their female ability to express feelings and emotions, but it takes also a lot of traditional masculine determination and rational thinking in order to carry a thought into action, which they manage to do in their rescue-operation of Ben. It is only in their commitment for Ben that they really manage to resist the impact of patriarchy, but not even then do they really call society’s social order as such in question,

14 K. Faith develops the idea about power relations within families and refers to Focault in Morris and in Patton:1979:55
15 Eloise A Buker uses this expression in Feminism Identity and Difference, in the chapter “Is the Postmodern Self a Feminised Citizen” p 82, describing female gender qualities.
although they question the treatment of him. Thus, they do not seriously try to liberate themselves from male dominance in society in the true sense of modern feminist movement. Yet, their attitudes and their social commitment for Ben make them less victimized than The Fifth’s Childs’s weaker female characters like the schoolgirl Bridget, like Harriet’s sister Sarah or like this young woman at MacPherson’s institution in northern England, who are all more or less compelled to accept society’s authoritarian people, who tell them what to do, but not why, just as Rita and Inez have to do in Ben in the World. However, one can say that Harriet and Teresa, in particular, are strong female characters, in that they try to resist patriarchy rather than they manage to challenge it, which shows, that “resistance weakens processes of victimization” (Faith, Radke and Henderikus 39), as Karlene Faith affirms.\footnote{In the chapter, “Resistance: Lessons from Focault and Feminism by Karlene Faiths”, Faith refers to Focault in Morris and Patton, 1979:55. Sage Publication London Thousand Oaks New Dehli}

**Ben’s masculine Identity.**

As Harriet and Teresa have a kind of double perspective in life, it helps them to understand what kind of person Ben might be. The literary critic Christine Sizemore refers to the African-American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who uses the term “outsider-within” (Sizemore, Saxton and Toby 60)\footnote{Christine Sizemore develops her theories in the chapter “Virginia Wolf and Doris Lessing as urban Novelists in Mrs Dalloway, and The Four-Gated City”}, explaining some people’s double perspectives of life. According to Sizemore, such a psychological quality characterizes Lessing’s authorship and it affects the depiction of her characters and the world around them. I assert that it is quite evident that Lessing ascribe such psychological qualities to both Harriet and Teresa. Both of them are ‘outsiders’ as well as they are sufficiently ‘within’ society in order to understand Ben’s psychological dilemma, under certain circumstances.

Further on, Sizemore affirms that Lessing uses “the stand-point of alienation to observe the city in her authorship” (59), which I claim is true for her depiction of Ben’s perception of the world in both novels. He ends up in unfamiliar social contexts, which is what alienates him from his family and from his gang of young boys in England. He observes and experiences life in a state of foolishness. Unable to understand his own feelings, he often reacts irrationally and violently to things he
does not understand. His inner feelings are only recognized by a few of the novels’
characters, who have experienced the feeling of being outsiders in society, as Teresa
and Harriet have. Ben is the character in these novels that Lessing uses in order to
explore and experience the world from an alienated viewpoint.

Pam Morris refers to De Beauvoir, who points out that we can only acquire a
sense of self in opposition to what we are not. “Racial and social groups gain their
sense of group-identity by defining themselves against ‘others’ who are perceived as
different” (14), Pam Morris argues. This view upon the acquisition of a group identity
is in analogy with Freud’s theory about people’s acquisition of gender identities,
where one dimension of the human psyche is defined as opposite of the other one. In
Lessing’s novels both the male and the female characters manifest, strengthen and
redefine their gender and their social group identities by ascribing physical or
psychological qualities to Ben Lovatt, which they do not recognize within themselves,
which in both novels often are non-desired human qualities, sometimes associated
with threatening masculine characteristics or similar unpleasant human qualities.

The social environment, the characters sense of social affiliation and their
gender identities determine how Ben is perceived. It is therefore quite natural that Ben
is differently described by different characters in different social situations. As he
does not really feel that he has an identity in his own right, it is defined and perceived
by others. In that way, Ben’s identity becomes created and recreated throughout these
two novels by different characters, who develop their own gender identities in relation
to him. He is not really recognized as an accepted masculine individual by anyone in
society, therefore he never gains a real sense of self, which is what makes it difficult
for him to adjust to a normal social life. Yet, he tries hard to acquire a group identity,
especially when he participates in a gang of young unemployed boys, where a young
boy, named John, is a leader and later when he becomes a gang leader himself, due to
some peculiar social circumstances. In want of an identity of his own, Ben, on one
occasion, even tries to adopt the false identity in his passport, which he does in an
emotional way, just as a strategy of survival, when he is worried about becoming
completely alienated. The reader gets a presentiment of what Ben might feel inside, as
the narrator penetrates his mind and puts words to his feelings. “That passport now
seemed all that stood between him and being nothing […] Ben Lovatt from Scotland,
thirty-five years old, a film actor?” (BW 79).

In Brazil, Ben begins to feel as if he does not belong anywhere. “I don’t have
any people. I’m not like my family – at home. They are all different from me” (BW 126), he tells Alfredo, where upon the latter affirms that he has seen people like Ben. It is, however, which I have mentioned in the section “Dominating Men in Ben in the World”, an imagined group of people, which is an idea that has arisen from Alfredo’s world of imagination, inspired by some ancient rock-carvings in a remote part of Brazil, illustrating ape-like creatures, who, he believes, have lived in the past. This strengthens Alfredo’s own feeling of being a man in control of the situation at the same time as it arouses hopes in Ben about a social affiliation somewhere else. “Ben’s response was such that what Alfredo might have been going to say next simply fled from his tongue. Ben was leaning forward, his eyes all gratitude, tears were rolling down into his beard, and he was pressing those great fists together: he seemed to have been lit from within by fires of joy” (BW 126). Listening to Alfredo’s lies, Ben loses himself in a world of imagination and he definitely breaks with the real society’s manners, habits and traditions, which he for so long time has tried to be a part of.

A little earlier in Ben in the World, when Teresa comforts Ben by promising that Alex is not going to use him for his film project, he does not believe her. “His anger was threatening to come roaring up out of him and into his fists; he wanted to hit and to bite and destroy – mostly Alex” (BW 99). As Teresa experiences the world from an outsider’s point of view, but not in a state of alienation like Ben, she is able to identify herself with him. She is therefore able to show motherly feelings towards him and tries to comfort him as she feels, that “this was a child she was holding, or at least a child’s misery” (BW 99).

On another occasion, in the same novel, when Ben feels alienated and homesick in Brazil, Teresa really tries to understand why he behaves like “an obedient child” (BW 112), and concludes that, “[p]eople behave as they are treated” (BW 112). She recognizes Ben’s sentimental feelings and his longing for home within herself, since she shares this feeling with him of having lost or been separated from a family. “Teresa wanted to go home too, and just like Ben, hardly knew where the place was she could rightfully call home” (BW 104). A little bit later bit later in the novel, reflecting on what professor Gaumlach and Luiz Machado have said about the scientific importance of using Ben for medical tests in order to find out more about the ancient time of mankind, Teresa’s passionate concern for Ben grows stronger. “She did not care about those old people. She loved poor Ben” (BW 144).

As far as Harriet is concerned, she tries to see Ben as a normal child from time
to time, who needs to be loved and respected, but her family and society as a whole exert more and more pressure on her and eventually she cannot resist. When Ben is just a child she feels sorry for him, although she cannot love him. “Poor Ben, dear Ben” (TFC 69), she says, trying to evoke motherly feelings within herself, but she is so afflicted with remorse for having given birth to an abnormal child that she never gets the chance to really develop sincere feelings for him. Rita, as well, who is marginalized in society, seems to have a presentiment of what Ben might feel inside. Arguing with Johnston, who just believes that Ben is weird, “[s]he insist[s] that Ben after all [is] nice, he [is] just a bit different from other people, that’s all” (BW 45).

Richard Gaston, who is born into the criminal world, shows feelings of compassion when he is about to leave Ben in France. The narrator tries to penetrate deeply into his mind and assumes, that “perhaps his near-tears on leaving were recognition that their situations in the world were similar” (BW 75). His inner feelings of sympathy may suggest that he is able to identify himself with the disregarded Ben Lovatt, being excluded from the established society himself.

However, most of the time Ben remains this ‘other’ person in the view of the novels’ characters, including the above mentioned ones, who judge him for various reasons. The most dominating male characters, such as David Lovatt in the established well-organized English society or such as the dominating criminal Johnston in the English society’s subcultures perceive Ben as a repugnant freak and his own mother defines him as something different from what she had expected. Even before he is born, when Harriet is in a state of extreme stress and feels obliged to take care of all her relatives at Christmas, she imagines what he might be. “She imagined pathetic butched creatures, horribly real to her” (TFC 52), which implies that she believes that Ben is going to be different from her four other children. Later in the novel, when Ben is born, Harriet’s sister Sarah gives Ben other more depreciatory epithets. “That Ben gives me the creeps. He’s like a goblin or dwarf or something” (TFC 68), she tells her sister, which in her opinion makes him different from her own children. Moreover, Ben’s undesired masculine characteristics are in sharp contrast to the expected feminine characteristics of Sarah’s baby daughter, which emphasizes Ben’s frightening masculine characteristics. While Amy is said to be “full of love and kisses” (TFC 81), it is said about Ben that he “could silence a room full of people” (TFC 76). It is also believed that he is different from his brother Paul, even if he, just as Ben, is a problem to his family. “Paul was even more difficult than Ben. But he was
a normal ‘disturbed’ child, not an alien” (TFC 129).

Harriet and her sister Sarah ascribe epithets to Ben, when he is just a little child, which are intimately associated with fantasy characters in children’s books or other monsters in scary old fairy tales, which implies that Sarah and Harriet sees him first of all as someone or something that is quite different from their other children. Sarah’s choice of epithets as “goblin” and “dwarf” (TFC 68), and Harriet’s feeling of having a “Neanderthal baby” (TFC 65) and then “an angry, hostile little troll” (TFC 69), make their other children seem more normal in comparison with Ben’s seemingly unreal and inhuman qualities. Compared to him all other children of the Lovatts and the Walkers are perceived as normal.

In a state of almost complete alienation in France, when Ben is abandoned by Johnston’s criminal friend Richard Gaston before he meets Alex Beyle, people around him allow themselves to fantasize freely about what he might be; “a mental patient[...] a rich person [...] a heavyweight wrestler” (BW 79), but what Ben hears are even more depreciatory epithets as “bête” and “cochon” (BW 83)\(^{18}\), which he does not understand, but it makes him feel different from other people and he feels that society lets him down.

In both novels Ben feels like an ‘outsider’, who eventually becomes completely rejected by the established society and finally excluded from its criminal subcultures as well. He observes and perceives the world in a state of alienation, since he has not the intellectual faculty to understand his own social situation. His own sense of being different from others is, however, confined to his external physical traits as the episode in Rio shows, when Ben is alone and broods over his peculiar looks. “Why are my eyes so different” (BW 113), he wonders in his loneliness.

Ben experiences society’s institutionalized oppression within his own family, as well as within society’s school system and also within its care institutions. From society’s point of view, he embodies all the physical and psychological qualities, which make him an unwanted child and this is the reason why his family believes that it is morally right to send him into this institution in northern England. Society’s horrible cruelty, which Ben becomes a victim of in MacPherson’s institution in England, is given account of in a very surrealistic way, which indicates what Harriet feels and experiences seeing him there. It also emphasizes society’s detestation of

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\(^{18}\) Bête and cochon are French words; the first is a depreciatory term meaning a fool, and the second designates someone who is swinish or filthy.
Ben. His physical state of health does not only reflect his inner psychological mental condition, but it mirrors, in fact, society’s and his own family’s image of him.

The novel’s description of Ben’s state of health seen by his own mother in the institution in England exposes the awful psychological and physical violence in this place. “His pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything – walls, the floor, and Ben – was smeared with excrement” (TFC 99), but it is the consequence of Harriet’s and her family’s decision to keep Ben away from home. Society’s constitutional violence prevails in this place and seeing it in the shape of her own son’s miserable condition, Harriet becomes shocked and even more determined than ever to bring Ben back home.

When Ben is brought back by Harriet to their family and he eventually becomes an adolescent, society’s formal institutions judge him even harder than his own family does, although a few of the characters, who represent such vital social institutions, at first try to understand his character and pretend to recognize his characteristics as something culturally familiar. Dr Brett, who has been a friend of the Lovatts for a long time, assumes that Ben is just a hyperactive child. He tells Harriet with a sense of resignation, “that’s how they are described these days, I believe” (TFC 77). Being unable to diagnose Ben’s state of health, he refers to Dr Gilly, who is an expert in such matters. She is a female psychiatrist, who just like Dr Brett officially claims that Ben “is within the range of normality” (FC 125), but unofficially she admits that she does not understand what he is. The spontaneous conversation between her and Harriet, which follows after the formal talk between them, reveals both her and Dr Gilly’s attitude towards Ben, since they talk about him in almost the same way as his family did when he was just a child and words like “dwarves... goblin...hobgoblins...throwback” (TFC 127), are used sarcastically in the description of his character, when Harriet discusses him as a problem with society’s institutions.

The headmistress, Mrs Graves, at Ben’s school is another representative of society’s formal institutions, who judges Ben in a similar way. She is obliged to inform Harriet that Ben has “gone berserk” (TFC 121), and that he has attacked a young girl. She does not understand Ben better than Dr Gilly or Dr Brett do, she just concludes that Ben “doesn’t seem to fit in with the others” (TFC 120). Harriet really experiences society’s fear of her son as she is about to leave the psychiatrist after their conversation about him. “On the doctor’s face she saw what she expected: a dark fixed stare that reflected what the woman was feeling, which was horror at the alien”
Leaving Mrs Graves, she feels what she thinks as well. “She saw how the headmistress watched her, with that long troubled inspection that held an unacknowledged unease, even horror” (TFC 121). Thus, it is basically society’s fear that excludes Ben from a normal life. Jokes and sarcastic comments about him confirm the official society’s underlying condescending attitudes towards him.

Growing up Ben becomes a threat to his own family and David fears Ben’s psychological and physical development. “He’ll be a sexual being” (TFC 136), he says to Harriet, which insinuates that Ben is going to be a man, but different from him, to whom must be ascribed undesired masculine characteristics, because Ben is in David’s opinion this ‘other’, very different from himself. As a strategy for the upbringing of Ben, Harriet pays John, who is a kind of a young gang leader, to take care of him by keeping him away from their house during the day. In this way, Ben is gradually pushed into society’s subcultures, which are unfamiliar both to him and to his family, but he tries hard to adjust to his new social situation. However, Ben eventually learns, when this deal is over, that he is not, and has never been accepted by John’s friends, since he is then greeted with impolite and depreciatory expressions by them, like “Hi, it’s Dumbo. Hello, Dopey” (TFC 134). In the search for an identity of his own Ben starts to associate with boys in his own situation, young men out of job, who are not really accepted by the established society and he eventually becomes a leader of a small group of rebellious young men, which makes him a nuisance to his family, who believes that he is a threat to society as well. The novel asserts that there is “a layer, like a sediment of the uneducable, the inassimilable, the hopeless, who move up the school from class to class, waiting for the happy moment when they can leave” (TFC 144-145), which is hinting at Ben and the members in his gang.

During a riot in North London, in which Ben is seen in a news feature on TV by his family, a robbery takes place, which makes Harriet suspect him of being involved in it. Seeing the boys in Ben’s gang pulling out wads of notes when they are back home, makes Harriet not only see her son as a disturbed young man but also as a criminal. In his parent’s view he then becomes a part of that ‘other’ society, which in the beginning of The Fifth Child is described as the opposite of the established English society, which David’s and Harriet’s family life in their big Victorian house, described as “their fortress, their kingdom” (TFC 30), is supposed to protect them from. “it seemed that two peoples lived in England, not one –enemies, hating each other, who could not hear what the other said” (TFC 30).
In *The Fifth Child*, Ben’s violent characteristics are emphasized as it is believed that he has killed the family pets, has frightened his own brother Paul, and has been accused by the schoolmistress for having molested a young schoolgirl. It may then seem as if he is deprived of normal human feelings, but *Ben in the World* shows that he has an emotional life in him and that he possesses, in fact, unexpressed feelings of love for his mother, which are awoken in his mind from his acquaintance with Ellen Biggs after that he has been shut out of his home. “His mother, he wanted to see his mother. Because of the kindness of that old lady, he had remembered that other kindness” (BW 23). Unfortunately, his first cruel separation from his mother, the final break with her and then the emotional and physical separation from Ellen Biggs, Mary Grindly, Rita and Teresa make him repress feelings of sentimentality. Instead, he eventually develops feelings of anger and fear, which become quite evident by the end of *Ben in the World*. Such a development of his psychological state of health can be seen already at the beginning of the novel when this Johnston leaves him at the airport in England, where an official notices Ben’s grin and believes that it is the grin of a celebrity, but the reader learns, that “[i]t was from terror” (BW 60). Later in the novel, when Ben refuses to participate in Alex’s film-project, his fear and anger become evident. “Ben could feel the rage, fed by sorrow, strengthening in his shoulders, his arms, his fists” (BW 88). Later in *Ben in the World* in a state of alienation he develops rather primitive masculine characteristics.

Karlene Faith claims, that “masculine identity is reproduced by repressing the feminine and when boys separate from their mothers they reject feminine qualities within themselves” (Faith, Radke and Henderikus 67) 19. Discussing the same issue, Warren Steinberg asserts that a male child has to recognize traditional female characteristics in other women as well as within his own psyche in order to acquire a proper gender role, if not, the child may develop an inner neurotic conflict (27). Thus, in Faith’s view, the acquisition of a traditional masculine gender role presupposes the repression of traditional feminine psychological qualities, such as the faculty to express feelings and emotions, which, according to Steinberg’s interpretation of Freud’s theories, designates women’s psychological characteristics in general, which I have discussed earlier in the section “Freud, Patriarchy and Feminist Ideology”. Faith discusses masculinity in a descriptive way, describing how men acquire their masculine gender roles in order to fit in the patriarchal society, without describing the

19 Karlene Faith refers to Silverstein and Rashbaum 1994:223
consequences for men’s inner sense of well-being, while Steinberg, by referring to Freud discusses the same issue in prescriptive terms, suggesting that there is a possibility for a change in the relations between women and men, if men would just recognize feminine characteristics within themselves. However, there is none among the male characters described in these novels, but Ben, who seems to develop an apparent inner conflict, although many of them obviously reject or repress traditionally feminine psychological qualities within themselves. On the other hand, there is not one single male character in the novels, who can be said to have “access to full emotional well-being” (hooks 31), which, according to bell hook is the primary reason to why men suffer in the patriarchal society.

What is it then that makes Ben different from other male characters in their relations to their female characters? Like most of the strong and dominating male characters described in these novels, who just like him cannot understand feelings of love and passion in other female characters, Ben is different from them, in that he is neither emotionally nor intellectually able to manipulate his female counterparts. Besides, his sense of being an ‘outsider’ in society combined with his intellectual incapacity makes it difficult for him to associate with people around him, whoever they may be. Therefore, he becomes more and more excluded from normal social life and this is what eventually alienates him from reality.

As soon as he gets a chance to establish a closer intimate relation with anyone of the novels’ female characters, as he does on one occasion, when he is a leader of his gang of young unemployed boys, he fails to express sincere feelings of love and of passion. Then, he is only interested in this girl’s body, but not her mind, “for when he was face to face with her the raging angry need to posses and dominate was silent” (BW 38). The word ‘face’ may in this context represent the young woman’s mind and soul. Ben’s ‘silence’ in this respect implies that he intuitively feels that there are other deeper feelings, quite different from the aggressive, violent and dominating emotions, which he experiences from time to time in his relations to young women. Obviously, he represses them and therefore he is unable to express them in a proper way. The more rejected Ben becomes, the more difficult it becomes for him to recognize feelings of passion and love within himself; consequently he fails to understand expressions of such feelings in other women as well. It seems, at least as far as the male characters in the novels are concerned, that repression of feminine feelings alone does not induce any serious inner neurotic conflict, but bullying, society’s disparaging
attitudes and a feeling of not belonging anywhere are what finally provoke some kind of an inner psychological crisis, which is what seriously affect Ben’s mental state of health.

Being unable to recognize Ben’s psychological characteristics within themselves, many of the characters around Ben try to objectify his deviating masculine characteristics and some of them relate to him in a similar way as many male authors in classical literature do to their female characters. Shoshana Felman describes this phenomenon. “With respect to woman’s madness, man’s reason reacts by trying to appropriate it: in the first place, by claiming to ‘understand’, it, but, with an external understanding which reduces the madwoman to a spectacle, to an object, which can be known and possessed” (Felman, Warhol and Price Herndl 15). Dr Gilly and Mrs Graves, who can be said to represent society’s patriarchal reason, approach Ben from such an external point of view and he becomes reduced to a ‘throwback’, which eventually makes him feel like such a one. Alex Beyle and Paulo see him first of all as an object of interest for their film project, Rita sees him as a sexual object and Gaumlach claims to possess him for medical research.

What most of all characterizes the characters’ relations to Ben, with the exception of a few among them, mentioned in this section, who try to understand his inner feelings and who, on rare occasions, manage to identify themselves with him, is that they cannot see him as a human being unless he is not defined as a ‘throwback’. This pervasive metaphor for the repugnant threatening masculine psychological and physical characteristics tells us less about Ben’s state of mind or looks than it does about the logic of the patriarchy, which excludes him from society. When Ben is about to be rescued by Teresa and her friends from professor Gaumlach’s Research Institute in Brazil, his mental health is represented by the state of semi-reality. “Ben sat up and howled” (BW 146) and then a little later as he slips out of Teresa’s arms like a pet or as “a poor helpless defeated creature who now - surprising them - made a leap out of her arms and out of the window and into the dark” (BW 147). This description of his psycho-social condition suggests again that the characters around Ben see him as an inhuman creature, and it makes Teresa pity him. She gets the feeling of taking care of a defenceless and scared family pet, which is similar to Ellen Biggs’s feeling for Ben earlier in the novel. In spite of their kindness towards him, they reveal their prejudiced view upon people who do not fit into society’s accepted social model.
By the end of *Ben in the World*, when Ben starts to socialize with the materialized figure from the rock-carvings, which is supposed to be a female character, his bestial and primitive characteristics become accentuated and he is then seen by Teresa, Alfredo and José as a primitive sexual masculine character. “Ben stood forward, and stroked the outline of a female who seemed to be smiling at him. Then he bent forward and nuzzled at her, rubbing his beard over her, and letting out short cries that were greetings” (BW 175).

The idea of Ben as a ‘throwback’, which many of the characters bring up in order to designate, or in order to understand his masculinity assumes a concrete physical shape in the depiction of his relation to this imaginative female character, who comes to light out of the rock carvings, who both Alfredo and Teresa believe that they witness. The whole episode is, actually, in allusion with a prejudiced view upon gender identities being “rooted in timeless truths often connected to some deeper, almost spiritual, mythology” (Whitehead 33).

The description of Ben’s excess of physical masculine characteristics makes him different from Alfredo and José and it makes Ben different from what Teresa believes that Alfredo is. Thus, Alfredo’s masculine gender identity establishes itself by contrast with the primitive masculine characteristics, which all of them imagine that they see in this ‘other’ male. Most of the psychological qualities that are ascribed to Ben all through these novels, designate in fact the dark side of masculinity. bell hooks describes this psychological phenomenon talking about how any society based upon the system of patriarchy legalizes its own violence by pointing out individuals or groups of people who are different from others, making out that they are a threat against it. “By making it appear that the threatening masculinity—the rapist, the terrorist, the murderer—is really a dark other, white male patriarchs are able to deflect attention away from their own misogyny, from their violence against women and children” (hooks 129)

**Violence**

Lessing’s two novels illustrate that different forms of violence are natural elements in the formal as well as in the informal society. One aspect of it refers to the psychological violence of constitutional character, represented by society’s institutions, especially by that of the family. Psychological violence permeates the
plots in both novels and it is essentially represented by society’s official institutions in *The Fifth Child*, by the free market forces in *Ben in the World* and by the dominating characters’ attitudes towards weaker ones in both novels. Another aspect of it refers to the methods used by the criminal characters in the novels, who violate the norms and the rules of the established society for different selfish reasons. *The Fifth Child*, in particular, shows that psychological violence often originates within the realm of the normal family. As far as physical violence is concerned, it is sometimes described as irrational expressions of behaviour like Ben’s aggression towards his family’s pets, his and his gang’s participation in violent riots or as the young criminals’ molest of Ben in the streets of Rio. Yet, another aspect of it is the depiction of the institutionalized physical violence in professor MacPherson’s Institution in *The Fifth Child* or of that in this Research Institute in Brazil, described in *Ben in the World*, for which Stephen Gaumlach and his colleagues are responsible.

Violence in a general meaning is performed and upheld by many of the dominating characters in the novels, whether they represent the institution of the family, society’s public or private institutions or criminal groups in general. It sustains criminal social structures in society’s subcultures as well as it preserves the traditional system of patriarchy in the established society. Both novels clearly give us to understand that psychological violence is a built-in social mechanism in society, which is underpinned by the attitudes of the characters in the private sphere and carried into effect by society’s private and public institutions or by its criminal organisations, where it becomes more brutal and changes into physical violence.

**Responsibility**

In accordance with a postmodernist view upon social responsibility, neither those who overtly oppress Ben and other weak characters, nor those, who on rare occasions sympathize with him, should have a ‘self’ with an inner core of conscience or morality. This will not liberate all of them from moral responsibility, because “cultural patterns do not determine choices, but only provide parameters for them” (Buker, Hekman 86), as Eloise Buker phrases it. I have earlier in this essay tried to show that Harriet and Teresa seem to have a sense of decent morality, since they have experienced the feeling of being disregarded in society. It is not really an inherent feeling of empathy, but they have an inner core of social awareness, which seems to
be socially acquired, in accordance with Freud’s theories about the acquisition of gender identities. Their experiences of being both rejected and accepted by society may have shaped their gender identities, making them develop and express feelings of empathy, which is in accordance with Freud’s theories about socially acquired female gender identities, which I have mentioned in the section "Freud, Patriarchy and Feminist Ideology".

As far as Gaumlach and Machado in *Ben in the World* and Dr MacPherson in *The Fifth Child* are concerned, they have not developed any sense at all of compassion for others and the cultural contexts do not limit their freedom of action so much. Thus, they can be said to embody masculinity in its most extreme form in their self-assumed roles as important scientists in society, which entitles them to be dominating and to be regardless of other people’s feelings and they do not have a bad conscience about their treatment of socially weaker people, since they seem to lack feelings of empathy. Drawing on Freud, their psyche is really extremely “oriented toward the achievement of goals through the manipulation of the object world” (Steinberg 23). They are not restricted by society’s conventions, rules or traditions, which makes it possible for them to develop a self without showing consideration for other people, which is what Eloise Buker talks about, describing dominating men’s psychological development in the patriarchal society. The equivalent men in real life to the novels’ characters Gaumlach, Machado, MacPherson, and to others of the same kind are of course responsible for their decisions and activities. According to Buker’s further philosophical reasoning about the relation between the individual and society, we may conclude that Gaumlach’s and Machado’s society does indeed “provide parameters” (Buker, Hekman 86) for them, if we just assume that common masculine attitudes among men as well as among women are what constitute “cultural patterns” (86) in society, which all together can be said to represent society’s patriarchal ideology. Such an assumption raises of course questions about society’s liability in a general sense, regarding the ill-treatment of vulnerable people like Ben, within the framework of society’s official institutions.

By just a little bit of understanding about patriarchy as a social system of order, one can easily conclude that society with all of its formal and informal institutions ought to bear the main responsibility for the oppression of weak and marginalized people, even if people like Dr MacPherson in *The Fifth Child* or like professor Stephen Gaumlach in *Ben in the World* have the entire moral responsibility
on the personal plane. However, responsibility is almost never ever assigned to society as a whole or to its institutions, only to individuals, as Eloise Buker points out (86). If society should assume the responsibility for its own unethical actions, which is almost unthinkable in my opinion, a lot of irresponsible and immoral people in various social institutions would then be held jointly responsible for the mistreatment of discriminated people, and it goes without saying, that such public self-criticism would then shake the patriarchal system of order to its very foundations.

Considering society’s responsibility, *The Fifth Child*, in particular, shows the connection between the individual, the family as an institution, society’s school-system and its care institutions with respect to the mistreatment of marginalized people like Ben. The treatment of him and of all other frozen-out children in society’s care institutions would not be possible without the approval of the children’s parents and the recommendations given to them by society’s teachers and psychiatrists. The attitude of the young man at MacPherson’s institution in *The Fifth Child* illustrates how family and society interact in this respect, as he describes the ‘normal’ parent’s disdain for their abnormal children. “When people dump their kids here, they don’t come and see them after”, (TFC 97), he says to Harriet, making it sound like a self-evident fact of life.

**Conclusion**

*The Fifth Child* shows the disintegration of a modern society, which tries to hold on to its traditional values, although the socio-economic circumstances change. The characters around David and Harriet project their own idealized image of a happily married life on to them, although most of them live differently. The novel also shows that the relations between the male and the female characters within each family, the relations between the individuals of different families, the characters’ sense of social affiliation and the social order between the families all together shape the attitudes of the characters and form the accepted conventions and norms in society.

Lessing’s depiction of Ben’s exclusion from society and that of the psychological and physical cruelty within society’s institutions give us to understand that any society with a patriarchal system can, under specific circumstances, allow its citizens and its institutions to commit awful acts of cruelty and injustice towards innocent people. Further on, Teresa’s and Harriet’s readjustment to society’s
expectations of their female gender roles, after their rescue operation of Ben, reflects
gender roles in general within traditional marriage in the real society, where 'society
attempts to symbolise a complete individual through compulsive heterosexuality',
which I have discussed in the section “Harriet Lovatt’s and Teresa Alves’s Power
Resistance”. This does not necessarily mean, which I have tried to show in this essay,
that women are oppressed or socially inferior in all such constellations, but women
can, as The Fifth Child shows, have an equal or even a dominating role like Molly
Burke has in her relations to ex-husband and to her new husband. As far as inequality
and injustice are concerned in general, the sensitive and caring characters, who are
often women in the novels, become used and oppressed by the rational and insensitive
characters, who are either ruthless male characters as Stephen Gaumlach and Luiz
Machado, which Ben in the World shows, traditional and dominating characters as
James and David Lovatt in The Fifth Child, who are well adjusted to the established
society, or rather insensitive female characters as Molly Burke, Dr Gilly and Mrs
Graves in the same novel. Upper class characters, who consistently are determined at
the same time as they lack feelings of empathy, are able to dominate over characters
in lower social classes, who try to express feelings and emotions. In this way Molly,
James, David manage to exert influence on Harriet, Dorothy, Sarah and William,
although both Dorothy and Harriet are strong female characters in a psychological
sense, but their social status is lower than that of James, David and Molly.

In Ben in the World, Gaumlach and Machado dominate over Teresa, Ben,
Alfredo and others in a similar way by force of their traditional psychological
masculine characteristics and by virtue of their higher social positions in society. Both
novels show that traditional masculinity and patriarchy, defined in the Introduction,
and society’s class system, especially described in the section "Social Status and
Power in The Fifth Child" form a social pattern of hierarchical order, which is shaped
within the realm of traditional families or within similar social constellations. On
society’s macro-level such small communities in the novels, all together, constitute
society’s patriarchal system as a whole.

The official English society described in The Fifth Child shows that
patriarchy as such exerts pressure on strong characters like James, Molly and David,
just as it affects the attitudes and activities of Dr Gilly, who represent the institution of
psychiatry, of the headmistress Mrs Graves, who represents society’s system of
education and of Dr MacPherson, who represent society’s institutionalized keeping of
unwanted children. In the criminal English society, described in *Ben in the World* and in the official Brazilian society depicted in the same novel, the real dark side of patriarchy rises to the surface. *The Fifth Child*, in particular, shows that oppression and bullying in society derive from groups of people and from all kinds of institutions, which constitute the socio-political structures and not only from the attitudes of a few odd people, who want to assert themselves.

Lessing shows us that it is not necessarily men in a biological sense, who are dominating and strong in society, but women who have acquired traditional male qualities can be that as well, as the female characters Molly and Angela are, or as Harriet and Teresa are under certain social circumstances, although their social positions are not so strong. Moreover, Lessing’s novels also show that influential women, who have acquired traditional rational insensitive psychological qualities like Dr Gilly or like the headmistress, Mrs Graves, have, are just as able as traditional men like James and Frederick to preserve patriarchal values in society.

The societies that Lessing describes are based upon a sex-gender system, which originates within all kinds of intimate relations, allowing dominating people, mostly men like Johnston, Machado, James, David, but also women, like Molly, Angela and Dorothy, to oppress weaker people, often women who are rather weak like Bridget, Sarah and Rita or weak men like Ben, Ted, Matthew or William.

Thus, Lessing’s novels emphasize the complexity in the power relations between social classes, between children and grown-ups and between the male and the female gender roles in a society. Lessing neither advocates women’s liberation in the sense of feminist ideology in these novels, nor does she propose an alternative to a society, which is based upon something else than patriarchy. Even so, she shows her faith in humanity by demonstrating the consequences of society’s belief in rational decisions and in normative behaviour, showing us how it can lead to abuse of vulnerable people.

The relation between the rational and the irrational as well as that between reason and feeling are central to these novels. The rational and reason are represented by the dominating characters’ determination to organize their lives in practical ways, which in *The Fifth Child* demands Ben’s exclusion from his family and from the established society. In both novels the irrational and feelings are represented by the emotions of characters, who suffer from patriarchy, as Ben, Harriet, Teresa and others do. Unlike Ben, Harriet and Teresa are able to turn their suffering and their inner
conflicts into rebellious activities, which disturb society’s normal order. As far as Ben
is concerned, he is neither able to rebel against society’s norms and conventions in a
constructive way, nor can he subordinate himself to society’s authorities, besides his
sexual masculine characteristics and behaviour threaten most of the novels’ female
characters at the same time as the male characters refuse to see such masculine
qualities within themselves. Instead, they often distract attention away from their own
hidden disposition in this respect, by ascribing all kinds of disparaging characteristics
to Ben, who, in fact, incarnates the feeling of being an ‘outsider’ in society. The
relation between him and other characters calls attention to the psycho-social
mechanisms, which bring about and sustain society’s patriarchal system of order,
through exclusion of vulnerable people, who do not fit in society’s conventional
structures. In particular, Lessing describes the psycho-social processes in the lives of
a few archetypal men like David Lovatt, Frederick Burke, James Lovatt, Stephen
Gaumlach and Luiz Machado, whose dominating attitudes are experienced by the
exceptional female characters Harriet Walker/Lovatt or Teresa Alves. Ben is
archetypical too, in that he can be said to represent the kind of people in society, who
never really become accepted, while Harriet and Teresa may be seen as
representatives for women in society who are its victims as well as its oppressors, just
as many of the other described characters in the novels are, who are denied access to
‘full emotional well-being’, which I have discussed in the section “Traditional Men in
The Fifth Child”, and who feel obliged to conform to society’s principles. Lessing
manages in these novels to combine the psychological complexity of the male and the
female gender roles/identities with both class affiliation and a sense of being outsiders
in society, which she brings to her portrayals of Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt and Teresa
Alves. All of them threaten society’s patriarchal order in different ways and in
different social situations, which is a natural consequence of the power struggles
within their societies, within their families and within their intimate relations. Their
gender identities, people’s attitudes towards them, their class affiliation and their
families’ social positions in society determine their future prospects, which are socio-
economic realities, by which their lives are governed. Even if traditional masculine
dominance is not consistent all through these novels, masculine power abuse prevails
more often than not in the described societies, which I have tried to illustrate in terms
of feminist ideology and its criticism of the patriarchal society.
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Appendix

Characters in *The Fifth Child* and in *Ben in the World*, described or mentioned in the essay.

**Characters within The Lovatt Clan In *The Fifth Child***

- James Lovatt: middle aged entrepreneur, divorces Molly
- Jessica Lovatt: young woman, married to James
- Molly Lovatt/Burke: middle aged female character, married to Frederick
- Frederick Burke: middle aged academic
- David Lovatt: son of James and Molly
- Deborah: daughter of James and Molly
- Harriet Walker/Lovatt: married to David, same age as he
- Ben Lovatt: youngest child of David and Harriet
- Paul: one of David’s and Harriet’s child
- Dorothy Walker: widow and mother of Harriet
- Angela: Harriet’s sister
- Sarah: Harriet’s sister
- William: married to Sarah
- Bridget: cousin of David
- Amy: Sarah’s and William’s daughter

**Characters outside the Lovatt Clan in *The Fifth Child***

- John: a young boy, who associates with Ben
- Dr Brett: a male doctor and a friend of the Lovatts
- Dr; Gilly: a female psychiatrist
- Mrs Graves: the headmistress of Ben’s school
- MacPherson: responsible for a psychiatric institution

**Characters in *Ben in the World***

- Mary Grindly: a farmer
- Matthew: brother of Mary
- Ted: brother of Mary
- Ellen Biggs: an old lady, with whom Ben becomes acquainted
- Johnston: a criminal
- Rita: a prostitute and girlfriend of Johnston
- Richard Gaston: a criminal and a friend of Johnston
- Alex Beyle: an American film-maker
- Teresa Alves: a young Brazilian girl, an ex-prostitute and friend of Alex
- Alfredo: a young Brazilian man, Teresa’s boyfriend
- José: friend of Alfredo, works in a mine
- Antonio: a colleague of Alfredo
- Stephen Gaumlauch: an American scientist, Alfredo’s and Antonio’s superior
- Luiz Machado: a Brazilian scientist
- Inez: a young upper class Brazilian woman, works for Machado