

## **Grotesque Maternity: Reading "Happiness" and its Eugenics in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) Nozomi UEMATSU**

"every happy person, is in infinite debt to a woman."  
—D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*.

### **Introduction**

Since Doris Lessing passed away on 17 November 2013, it is worth considering the value of her works, and what pertinence they have to our society today. This paper reads Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988, hereafter *Fifth*) in relation to giving birth to disabled children, and to government's role in controlling the maternal body. In this story, we see a happy and conservative family, with four children, whose happiness is disrupted by the birth of their fifth child, the monstrously deformed Ben. The treatment the doctors give their child, and the strain Ben causes for his mother both reveal society's and the government's attitude towards disability in 1980s Britain: on one hand, the government tries to exclude physical abnormality through family acts and through management of the maternal body; on the other hand, when the disabled child is born, its mother, not its father nor wider society nor government, is burdened with sole responsibility.

As such, *Fifth* can be read as an allegory and criticism towards utilitarian family policies by Thatcherism, through contextualising the story in Thatcher's Britain during the 1980s. Such reading can allow us to see how the blueprint of "happiness" through constructing the "normative family," promised by the government, has an underlying assumption that both maternal and the child's bodies are healthy. After briefly summarising the story of *Fifth*, I will first look at the various family policies administered by Thatcher's government. In these policies, "happiness" through forming a

conventional family is promised and set up as an ideology. Secondly, I will look at the Gothic description of the monstrous, leaky, maternal body in relation to the monstrous baby in Lessing's narrative: as we will see, the ambiguous boundary between mother and monstrous child becomes the site of horror, and leads the mother to be seen as monstrous. Finally, I will explore the politics of eugenics embedded in this ideological "happiness" through examination of Ben's association with vulnerable people, such as gangsters and the disabled, who are, though minor, significant characters in the story and community: disabled and non-normative bodies are described as the origins of difficulties in getting jobs, supporting families and, consequently, fitting in to the model of happiness that society endorses. When one cannot fit into the model of happiness the government desires, Lessing shows in *Fifth* that no help is provided by the government, and the individual is left to take responsibility, and consequently is excluded from society. In the case of giving birth to a "monstrous" child, the responsibility is cast solely on the mother; her body is supposed to be the mediator of society's happiness and, therefore, becomes monstrous if she cannot provide a healthy child for the nation. Ultimately, we will see that this particular issue remains pertinent and pressing to this day, especially in contemporary Japan after the earthquake in Fukushima in 2011, as I will discuss later.

## **1 Lessing, Feminism and Humanism**

Despite the fact that her vast writing themes involve issues regarding women, mothers and children, Lessing keeps an ambivalent distance from feminism.<sup>1</sup> In an interview at the Edinburgh Book Festival in 2008, soon after her winning of the Nobel Prize, Lessing clearly acknowledged her distant relationship from feminism, saying "they [feminists] don't love me. I don't love them either" (Lee, 2009, p. 23). This statement of indifference perhaps shows her scepticism towards second wave feminism and her

refusal to be categorized as "a feminist writer." This ambivalence in Lessing's work towards feminism has been highlighted by a number of scholars. For instance, one Japanese scholar, Suzuko Mamoto (2008, p. 664; my translation), argues that Lessing's attitude towards her writing shows her pursuit is for "humanism beyond feminism":

Lessing's basic stance towards her works as a writer can be clearly seen in her writing style; she refutes the monolithic perspectives of "Ism" [ideology]. [...] [S]he tries to find the way for narratives of happiness from a universal perspective regardless of age and sex. Lessing also tries to find the significance of being a "human being" before being a "woman," "wife" or "mother." What we can see in this attitude is her firm standpoint as a humanist. The pursuit of "humanism beyond feminism" is a prominent leitmotif throughout her writing, regardless of the setting of stories and of changes in her extensive themes.

Mamoto's opinion on Lessing's writing style suggests that Lessing's works are beyond the scope of feminist discourse, which Mamoto reckons posits certain limitation. Indeed, in *The Small Personal Voice* (1994), Lessing also implies that she is a humanist writer (p. 10), not a feminist. It may be that Lessing considered feminism as the discourse that only deals with women, and sought to explore a greater variety of social issues. However, we need to question her assumption here, since humanism is also an ideology, just as feminism is. When we consider the supposed subject matter of humanism, the concept and definition of "human" must be interrogated. Mamoto seems to assume that humanism does not recognise differences between genders. However, what Mamoto does not note is that humanism may rely on the concept of "human being" which differentiates and marginalises certain kinds of body as not fully "human." Regarding

Lessing as humanist is perhaps a valid position. However, it does not provide a full reading of what her texts actually offer. Though Lessing's account of herself as humanist does not appear to interrogate the term itself, her novel *Fifth*, as I will discuss below, apparently questions what it means to be human, and explores the lives of those who are excluded from this society in which "human beings" are required to be, and have, certain kinds of body.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to Mamoto's claim that Lessing finds "the way for narratives of happiness from a universal perspective regardless of age and sex," what *Fifth* describes is not the pursuit, but the enforcement of happiness.<sup>3</sup> In this novel, the very concepts of the human being and happiness are called into questions.

*Fifth* is a short and allegorical novel that describes how a happy marriage and a blissful family construction are destroyed by the couple's brutal fifth son, Ben. Through his physical and psychological torture of his mother, of other relatives and of their pets, the plot of the happy family, applauded by British society especially in the eighties, is debunked and challenged. The narrative is set in London from the 1960s to the 1980s, till Ben becomes a teenager. In the 1960s, Harriet and David, both "conservative" and "old-fashioned" (p. 7) met at their company Christmas party. The narrator suggests that these two were "freaks and oddballs" (p. 9) for their attitude to sex. Living in the sixties, the decade of sexual liberation, Harriet was a virgin and David was reluctant to have a physical relationship with his previous girlfriend. Immediately they fell in love, got engaged, and married the next spring. Soon after their marriage, they purchased a house in London with an abandoned garden, since it had enough space for bringing up "six children at least" (p. 14). Harriet has two other sisters, and her parents "[took] for granted that family life was the basis for a happy one" (p. 12). Her mother Dorothy is a widow and she looked after her grandchildren. On the other hand, David has "two sets of parents" (ibid.) due to his parents' divorce. His father, James Lovatt is a successful boat builder who married

for a second time to Jessica. Their wealth made it possible for David to manage his large family, to pay the living costs for their large house, and for his children to study at boarding schools. Molly, David's mother, married her second husband Frederick Burke, a historian in Oxford. Dissatisfied with both parents' households, David passionately desires a better future home, as his occupation as an architect suggests. He knew the kind of woman he needed for his house: a woman who knew "where happiness lay and how to keep it," since "what he was working for was a home" (p. 13). With rapid pace, they had four children, Luke, Helen, Jane and Paul, who filled them with happiness and joy.

In her book, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed defines happiness as something that we feel good about "achieving." Ahmed analyses that happiness is a social good that we can "gain," "find" and "have." When one's feeling is proximate to that certain specific happiness, the subject feels good. In other words, to be happy, one has to achieve some standard of happiness. Ahmed argues there are some indicators for happiness achievement such as marriage, family construction, and wealth accumulation. These become the "happiness duty, since there is a certain expectation that one has a duty to promote what causes happiness" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 7). "Duty" calls one not only to pursue, but to "follow" happiness, and it works as a collective obligation (Ibid.). Therefore, when an individual in a society cannot find or have happiness, thus revealing a gap between what is achieved by the individual and the aimed happiness as a social good, it is the individual's fault for not being able to follow the path of normative happiness. While Ahmed's argument is compelling, I would further contend that the concept of happiness is a gendered construction, and thus, reproduction and nurturing are represented as precisely woman's happiness. For instance, in the Lovatts' household, happiness is dependent on the mother's ability and capacity to provide the members of the family with comfort. When Harriet gives birth to Ben, she is blamed because she

fails to provide the rest of the family with the comfort she is supposed to provide. Women's happiness/duty in this society, this story shows, is dependent on giving birth to an able-bodied, healthy child. As we will see below, through reading the relationships among Ben, his mother and other disabled characters, *Fifth* articulates the close connection between happiness, the body and embodiment. Lessing's text challenges the "universal" quality of maternal happiness, by showing how the family's happiness is dependent on a woman's body that reproduces the able-bodied child. In other words, in neoliberal societies, happiness is problematically gendered and equated with healthiness, which contributes to the productivity of the larger community.

## **2 Socio-Political Context of the 1980s: The Return to "the Traditional Family"**

With the *Fifth* written in 1988, Thatcher's political policies of the 1980s are deeply and intricately connected to Lessing's novel. As Elizabeth Maslen (1994) describes, Lessing "is always engaged with the world of Now, wrestling not only with those matters which are central debates of the moment at which she writes, but also with issues which ought to be debated, but which the society she writes for is not quite ready to face" (p. 1). Indeed, we will see that the Lovatts' attitudes towards family construction correspond with the family laws administered by the Conservative government in the 1980s. Gillian Douglas explains the importance of the family laws reformed by Thatcher's government in contrast to the ones issued by the previous Labour administration in the 1960s. During the 1980s, the Conservative government administered: The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act (1984); The Surrogacy Arrangement (1985); The Family Law Reform Act (1987); and The Children Act (1989). These Acts are often considered as policies to return to a model of "the traditional family" (Douglas, 1990, pp. 412-413).

In her memoir, Margaret Thatcher articulates her belief in re/forming conventional family values during her time in office. She became increasingly certain that "though there were crucially important limits to what politicians can do in this area," the Government "could only get to the roots of crime and much else besides by concentrating on strengthening the traditional family" (Macintyre, 1993). The chairperson of the Conservative Party in her administration, Kenneth Baker, also claimed that illegitimacy and single-parent families were to blame for rising crime and unemployment in the inner cities (as cited in Douglas, 1990, p. 412).<sup>4</sup> The increase of illegitimate births (27 percent in 1989), high rate of young-homelessness, and the annual number of divorces (about 150,000) were considered as at the root of crime and moral degeneracy, caused by the breakdown of the nuclear family and its values. The conventional family means, in Conservative terms, a nuclear family in which the married parents stay in a healthy relationship, with good control over their children. The Conservatives accused the Labour administration in the sixties of eroding these values. In encouraging the ideal of conventional family, "respect for elders, hard work, thrift, chastity" are protected. As Douglas explains, those Acts administered by Thatcher were the reflection of the governmental concern, and with these laws, divorces became more difficult, and engaging in surrogacy was prohibited. In so doing, parental responsibility for the child's moral as well as physical development was emphasized and rewarded (as cited in Douglas, 1990, p. 419). These policies motivated citizens to engage in marriage, and construct families. Lessing reflects her scepticism towards these policies in *Fifth* through the conventional figures of Harriet and David. Their priority is always making their own traditional family, against the liberal atmosphere of the sixties.

Happiness. A happy family. The Lovatts were a happy family. It was what they had chosen and what they deserved. Often, when David

and Harriet lay face to face, it seemed that doors in their breasts flew open, and what poured out was an intensity of relief, of thankfulness, that still astonished them both: patience for what seemed now such a very long time had not been easy, after all. It had been hard preserving their belief in themselves when the spirit of the times, the greedy and selfish sixties, had been so ready to condemn them, to isolate, to diminish their best selves. And look, they had been right to insist on guarding that stubborn individuality of theirs which had chosen, and so obstinately, the best – this. (pp. 28-29)

As we see here, *Fifth* exemplifies how Harriet and David strongly long for forming the conventional family and treat it as the location where happiness resides. However, “healthy parenting” is ironically revealed in this story as quite different from the idea of child-bearing and rearing equally shared by both mother and father: when the child is not “healthy,” it comes down to the responsibility of the mother.

### **3 Gothic Narrative and Monstrous Maternal Bodies**

When their fifth child, Ben, is born, this happy family life turns into a nightmare. This subversive plot —the fall of the Lovatts’ house— has been discussed by a number of scholars as characteristic of Gothic fiction.<sup>5</sup> I will particularly pay attention to the way maternal desire turns into fear through the intimate physical relationship between mother and baby in this Gothic narrative. Famously, Rosemary Jackson (1981) argues that the fantastic narrative of the Gothic is historically a device to subvert the ideological order and the law of the Father, pushing it into illegitimacy and outside of the value system. In doing so, the fantastic mode briefly uncovers the unseen and the unsaid in culture (p. 4). Following Jackson, more feminist reassessment of the Gothic has taken place. According to Susanne Becker (1999), Gothic writing as a genre has always been about



"rebellion and provocation against the order, control and the powers of restrictive ideologies" (pp. 4-5). As such, the Gothic genre has long been seen to have a close relation with feminism and feminist issues, challenging the dominant patriarchal order. With its focus on monstrosity, both feminist and Gothic interpretations can converge in analysing *Fifth*, especially the figures of the monstrous mother and child. However, whereas the traditional Gothic novels in the eighteenth century are characterised by horrifying landscapes, such as the haunted castle or abbey, the locus of horror in modern or neo-Gothic fiction is not in landscapes: it is on monstrous bodies (Halberstam, 1995, p. 16).

The Neo-Gothic is a revival of the Gothic genre mainly by women writers using Gothic conventions. It is a new movement of gendered writing of quoting, rewriting, sampling, and mixing, as Becker claims. Running from the 1970s to the 1990s, female writers such as Angela Carter, Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood interrogated gender binaries by writing grotesque physical representations. In the discourse of western culture, the body is considered in opposition to the mind, and is often taken as a natural grounding. Moreover the terrain of the body is unreasonably assigned and reduced to one gender, that is, "woman."<sup>6</sup> However, in the neo-Gothic mode, the dichotomy between the body and the mind is challenged and even subverted through writing the grotesque body, as we will see below. In other media, films such as *Alien* (1979) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) exemplify the possibilities for horror in the birth of a monstrous child. In much the same way, Lessing's *Fifth* can also be categorized as Neo-gothic writing, with its depiction of Harriet's monstrous maternal body and Ben, the monster.

#### **4 Leaky Inter-corporeality between Mother and Child**

In *Fifth*, the experience of fear within readers can especially be seen in the description of the ambiguous corporeal relationship between Ben and

Harriet. Margrit Shildrick (2002) discusses this ambiguous relationship through her notion of women's leaky bodies: "Whatever the manifest outcome at birth, the pregnant female body itself is always a trope of immense power in that it speaks to an inherent capacity to problematise the boundaries of self and other" (p. 31). For Shildrick, women have destabilised boundaries not only during pregnancy but also after giving birth: "Women are out of control, uncontained, unpredictable, leaky" (Ibid.).

Harriet's physical and psychological fears in relation to her gothic baby, during and after her pregnancy, play important roles in this novel. Harriet feels "a tapping in her belly, demanding attention" (p. 45) and when breast-feeding she suffers pain from being "bruised black all around the nipples" (p. 66). In this novel, I argue fear in the Gothic narrative becomes effective when the monstrosity of the child oozes through the boundary into the maternal body. In addition, the movement of evilness is not one-way from the monstrous baby to the maternal: monstrosity moves to-and-fro through the boundary, and it is this permeability that provokes terror for the readers. Through this leaky boundary, Harriet also becomes a monster, as I will discuss now, and Lessing makes the mother into "the other" in the eyes of her society.

The leaky physical relation between Harriet and Ben can be seen both during and after her pregnancy. For example, while Harriet "was sitting at the kitchen table, head in her hands, muttering," David, her husband, observes that the "new foetus was *poisoning* her" (p. 41, emphasis added). This horrifying sickness comes from Ben as a seepage through the boundary. As a result of the permeability of this monstrosity, she becomes "frantic, exhausted... She was peevish; she lost her temper; she burst into tears..." (Ibid.). To ease the pain and horror inside her body, she has to keep moving. Through this process, Harriet herself becomes a monster:

Then she took to driving a short way out of the town, where she

walked along the country lanes, fast, sometimes running. People in passing cars would turn, amazed, to see this hurrying driven woman, white-faced, hair flying, open-mouthed, panting, arms clenched across her front. If they stopped to offer help, she shook her head and ran on. (pp. 51-52)

The leaky physical connection between mother and monstrous child can still be seen after her labour. When she breastfeeds, Ben drinks quickly and empties her breast of milk (p. 63). Harriet feels that the monstrous child sucks her breasts so strongly that part of her body is swallowed into the baby:

Ben sucked so strongly that he emptied the first breast in less than a minute. Always, when a breast was nearly empty, he ground his gums together, and so she had to snatch him away before he could begin. It looked as if she were unkindly depriving him of the breast, and she heard David's breathing change. Ben roared with rage, fastened like a leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat. (p. 63)

This process of sucking her breasts and her body suggests the image of another Gothic monster, Dracula. The monstrous baby exploits and abuses the maternal body, and in turn, it is Harriet who becomes a monster. However extraordinary Ben is, the hospital always certifies that Ben is "A normal healthy fine baby" (Ibid.), and the problem is not in Ben, but in Harriet (pp. 124-125). What we can see from this scene, with what I call leaky intimacy between the baby and mother, is that the monstrosity of Ben is denied a social recognition, and therefore, Harriet is in turn deemed as monstrous. She is punished by society, as it were, since she fails to give birth to a healthy child when society requires her to do so. She is forbidden

to achieve happiness, because she fails to contribute to the happiness of other members of the family, the larger community and, ultimately, the nation.

### **5 Motherhood and Society: Proximity and Alienation in *The Fifth Child***

For happy family construction, one is required to produce a healthy child to fully contribute oneself to a larger community and, if one fails to do so, the responsibility for this failure is totally and unreasonably cast onto motherhood. Gamallo (2000) argues that the figure of Harriet who has Ben (the Other) within herself is similar to the figure of a nation within which there are Others such as immigrants. Indeed, there is a figurative similarity between society/nation and pregnant mother, as both of them have the Other embedded within. What Gamallo overlooks, however, is that the mother herself is also, what I term, “the Other who has the other within her.” Unlike the nation, which contains the Other, but is itself the norm, in the case of the mother pregnant with a monstrous child, the mother too is othered, marginalised, and excluded by the nation. Harriet is alienated from society and other members of her family because of her close relationship with Ben. As the difference between Harriet and Ben blurs, the distance between her and her society/family becomes apparent. This begins when Harriet is pregnant and Ben, the foetus, tortures her from within her womb. This physical struggle distances her from the other members of her family:

Appalled at the distance that had grown up between her and her husband, between her and the children, her mother, [...] she was willing them to leave her alone and to reach the baby, the foetus – this creature with whom she was locked in a struggle to survive. [ / ] Oh, how eager everyone was to welcome her back into the family, normal, herself: they ignored, because she wanted them to, her

tenseness, her tiredness. (pp. 52-53)

David claims that Ben is not his child (p. 90), blaming solely Harriet. Medical doctors, who represent institutional power, never acknowledge that Ben is abnormal, saying "It is not abnormal to take a dislike to a child" (p. 67), thus trivializing the matter. Together, they dissociate themselves from the problem caused by Ben, and problematize Harriet, the mother. However, when Ben is finally recognized as abnormal and institutionalised, Harriet saves Ben from the institution in which young "monsters" are hospitalised:

Every bed or cot held an infant or small child in whom the human template had been wrenched out of pattern, sometimes horribly, sometimes slightly. A baby like a comma, great lolling head on a stalk of a body... then something like a stick insect, enormous bulging eyes among stiff fragilities that were limbs. [...] Rows of freaks, nearly all asleep, and all silent. (p. 98)

Harriet feels that, perhaps internalizing society's requirement, it is her "responsibility" to rescue him from this institution, where he will eventually be killed if left. However, her "responsible" action as a parent brings her to a conundrum, as, soon after bringing Ben back from there, she is asked to choose "him or us" (p. 90) by her husband. She feels as if she is "a criminal" (p. 94) and "a scapegoat [...] the destroyer of her family" (p. 141).

It is indeed Ben who is a monster, who turns the Lovatts' happiness upside down. However, since the boundary between the monster and the mother becomes ambiguous, Harriet is considered as fundamentally the origin and cause of this corruption and pollution of home/nation/society. What the monstrous child-mother relationship within society reveals is the demand to produce healthy and able-bodied children. Although in fact,

David also chooses the happy family life, when it turns out their baby is a monster, the responsibility of the choice is thrown upon Harriet.

Happiness is the profit of the community, and a shared asset between the collective and the individual. When it is not achieved, the mother becomes responsible for the failure of pursuing the mutual happiness between the collective and the individual. Harriet thinks that Ben is her punishment for wanting happiness, but the story makes it apparent that she is not to blame. In the story, society does not supply enough safety-nets for Harriet. Therefore, this process of scapegoating Harriet, the mother, ought to be understood as the effect, not the cause, of this operation of ideology. The process here of setting up the close relation between mother and child, and then alienating them as anomalous from society, is arbitrarily performed. This reducing of the responsibility to the individual is precisely the ideology of Thatcher's conventional family policies; it is the dark side of neoliberal individualism, as I will argue in the next section.

## **6 Ben's Body and its Association with Gangs/the Unemployed**

In *Fifth*, Ben, the monstrous child, and his body are described as having numerous anomalous features. He is described as "a real little wrestler [...], a troll, or a goblin" (p. 61), an "alien" (p. 62), "Neanderthal" (p. 65), "the fighting creature" (p. 66) and "a freak" (p. 74). He is not "a real baby, a real little child" (p. 62) and totally different from Harriet's other four children. Lessing herself states that Ben is "a throwback to little people" (Shapiro, 1997, n.p.). His primitiveness is indicated especially through his description just after his birth, which suggests his backwardness, and how he does not fit into modern society:

He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all. He had a heavy-shouldered hunched look, as if he were crouching there as he

lay. His forehead sloped from his eyes to his crown. His hair grew in an unusual pattern from the double crown where started a wedge or triangle that came low on the forehead, the hair lying forward in a thick yellowish stubble, while the side and back hair grew downwards. His hands were thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms. He opened his eyes and looked straight up into his mother's face. They were focused greeny-yellow eyes, like lumps of soapstone. (p. 60)

The description of Ben's body shows his uniqueness and unusualness, and critics read Ben's representation in various ways; he is the monster who represents others in society; he is the other within the mother, as discussed above. Ellen Pifer (2000) argues that Ben cannot be interpreted as the other, but the human being, when he hangs around with gangsters, and blends into the mass at the end of the novel (p. 146). However, I contend that Ben cannot be seen as a "human being," since what Ben reveals through his monstrous appearance is the boundary between those who are approved as human and those who are not. Halberstam (1995) defines the figure of the monster in relation to communities as follows:

The monster itself is an economic form in that it condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisies in one body. If the Gothic novel produces an easy answer to the question of what threatens to national security and prosperity (the monster), the Gothic monster represents many answers to the question of who must be removed from the community at large (p. 3).

Halberstam's explanation can be applied to the monstrous figure of Ben due to his association with the unemployed and gangsters. The Lovatts ask

the unemployed John to do the gardening for them. John ends up being a babysitter for Ben, he picks Ben up with his motorbike and takes Ben to see his other unemployed friends. Later in the novel, a group of gangsters called "Ben Lovatt's gang" (p. 146) occupy the Lovatts' house in 1986, committing robberies and rape. In other words, he represents a range of kinds of "the other" who must be removed from a society. Based upon Halberstam's definition, Ben, the Gothic monster, opens up a reading of *Fifth* as about an assemblage of socio-political threats to a nation. Through the characterisation of Ben, Lessing questions social norms that name certain human beings as appropriate for reproduction, implying that Thatcher's policy reinforces the "conventional and healthy" family unit as a source of happiness.

### **7 Eugenics as National Happiness: Deformity and Disability, Ben's Body and Down Syndrome**

Still, the figure of Ben is extremely ambiguous. The text itself repeatedly questions "What is he?" (p. 66), "Was he, in fact? What was he?" (p. 81), and yet no easy answer is provided. Rather than summarising Ben as the monstrous other who is marginalised in society as we have seen in the previous section, reading Ben in relation to the minor characters in *Fifth* who have disabled bodies provides further insightful social issues that the text raises. This reading of the text in the context of disability studies accommodates Lessing's insights into the way that family happiness relies on a kind of eugenics. In this novel, family unhappiness, such as suffering and burdens, is described as being due to disability. Lessing's text provides the scope and space to question who is human and who is not, and what kinds of bodies are considered appropriate to be reproduced.

Before Ben's birth, Harriet and David experience bliss in having children: "Happiness. A happy family. The Lovatts were a happy family. It was what



they had chosen and what they deserved" (p. 28) as I quoted above. While they are feeling joyful to have a happy family, Harriet's sister, Sarah, suffers from an unhappy relationship with her husband William in contrast:

There was a cloud, though. Sarah and her husband, William, were unhappily married and quarrelled, and made up, but she was pregnant with her fourth, and a divorce was not possible. [...] The cloud on family happiness that was Sarah and William's discord disappeared, for it was absorbed in worse. (p. 28)

William had left Sarah twice (p. 32) and he is labelled by his family as an "unsatisfactory husband" (p. 34). His physical disability is an obstacle to getting a decent job: "he was distressed by physical disability, and his new daughter, the Down's syndrome baby, appalled him" (p. 32). Harriet and David talk behind Sarah's back about their Down syndrome niece, Amy:

Harriet said to David, privately, that she did not believe it was bad luck, *Sarah and William's unhappiness*, their quarrelling, *had probably attracted the mongol child* –yes, yes, of course she knew one shouldn't call them mongol. But the little girl did look a bit like Genghis Khan, didn't she? A baby Genghis Khan with her squashed little face and her slitty eyes? (p. 29, emphasis added)

Harriet evidently associates her sister's downbeat relationship with their child's disability. With William's physical disability that disrupts his employability, Harriet, having internalised the ideology of neoliberal societies, makes a clear connection between happiness and being able-bodied: she thinks Sarah and William's unhappiness causes the birth of the Down syndrome child, and William's limited access to jobs from the market threatens his family happiness and financial stability. Later in the novel,

Ben is born and his physical appearance is significantly different from “normal” children, and moreover his destructive behaviour diminishes their happiness. In short, in their household, happiness/unhappiness is directly related to their physical “normality” and “defects,” and in this sense, family happiness is embedded in the concept of eugenics.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2012) radically reassesses eugenics from its historical usage related to the Nazis. In conversation with Ruth Schwartz Cowan, she articulates eugenics as “a way of shaping human communities or shaping human populations” (Cowan and Garland-Thomson, 2012, n.p.). For Garland-Thompson, the word “human” raises the question of who is to be included in the word “human” and in the community: she asks “what we mean by human, what we mean by flourishing, what we mean by health?” (ibid.) This question seeks to expose what kinds of beliefs and assumptions shape the concept of human. For example, she discusses that Down syndrome is indeed one of the iconic human variations in disability, and trying to erase its existence is the very example of the utopian “World Human Project” (Garland-Thomson, 2012), in which the belief that eliminating people with disability, thanks to prenatal screening technology, will bring a better world, place and future to society. Underlying the Down syndrome argument is the issue of quality of life. There is a prediction that the disabled person cannot be happy, since their health is not sufficient. Behind the word “health,” sufferings and burdens of family are always assumed. Therefore, the politics of disability is based on the ideology of happiness. The application of this ideology of happiness is not limited to families, but also to the larger community. Individuals are required to contribute themselves for the productivity of society.

Lessing insightfully articulates this unwelcoming attitude and system for the less able, and for unusual bodies, and shows its relation to the politics of happiness. After Ben’s birth, Harriet and David experience hardship, burdens and suffering. They cannot cope with Ben and it ends up with the

collapse of the Lovatts. Similarly, William's disability and his unemployment, and Amy's Down syndrome are key examples in the novel of unhappiness in relation to disabled bodies.

## Conclusion

Marriage is exceedingly physical in *Fifth*: as indicated by numerous scenes of Easter and Christmas, Harriet and David are productive and prosperous in child-bearing. They pursue normative happiness, and yet the result of their family construction is not appreciated by the nation, because Ben, the fifth child, is a monster. Furthermore, through an intimate physical relationship with Ben, his mother Harriet becomes monstrous. What Lessing's novel makes clear is that happiness is closely bound up with physicality and with physical activities. Simultaneously, the body which is reproduced through such physical activities has to be normative. The normative body to be reproduced in the family unit has to be reproductive, and employable, i.e., the able body which directly serves for the nation's wealth accumulation. The strong relationship of happiness to the body becomes visible through the description of monstrous bodies in this novel. These monstrous bodies indicate who and what kinds of ability one needs to have to be approved of as a human being in wider society.

*Fifth* can be read as an allegory of conventional family policies during the 80s in Britain, in critical reaction to Labour administration in the 1960s. Patricia Waugh (1995) explains that Britain in the 1960s "witnessed enormous transformations in attitudes to authority, sexuality, censorship, and civil liberties" (p. 5). The "return" to the conventional family and its value is precisely the backlash to the liberal atmosphere of the 60s. The policies described above helped to set up the concept of the conventional family as happiness. In this neoliberal mode, happiness is not a universal attribute, but precisely a matter of economy (the financial ability to feed

the family) and also a matter of “matter”, the physical issues of maternity to produce healthy bodies. *Fifth*'s narrative also starts in the sixties, where Harriet and David cannot fit into the atmosphere, and by the eighties they construct a conventional family. By describing the collapse of their happiness, *Fifth* articulates how the neoliberal concept of happiness assumed in the conventional family laws dismisses the necessity of support systems if the citizen does not have a healthy body. However, Lessing's writing ends up only articulating the unwelcoming attitudes and failing systems of the government. In this sense, *Fifth* is a complete dystopia and does not provide any positive alternatives.

Interestingly, there are two rewritings of this dystopian novel. Lessing wrote the sequel of *Fifth*, *Ben in the World*, in 2000. Contrary to the monstrous representation of Ben in the first series, here he is described as a victim of society. This victimised figure suggests the significance of reading Ben in association with those excluded from society – disabled characters in the family. Three years after *Ben in the World*, Lionel Shriver published *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003). This novel deals with the disturbing relationship between mother and child, their disconnection, and violence by the child. These three publications show strong historical parallels between the 1980s and the 2000s. Lessing perhaps expresses her concern with the governmental emphasis on the revival of conventional family values, and describes its effect twenty years after the publication of *Fifth*.

What we must recognise is that the correlation between patriarchy, ableism and nationalism through the concept of reproduction still has political urgency in our contemporary life. We see this in Japan following the national crisis of radiation leakage, which was caused by the earthquake in Fukushima in 2011 (Kakamu, 2011).<sup>7</sup> This earthquake caused a tsunami, which destroyed the nuclear plants in the prefecture. The consequent radiation polluted soil, water and food, especially around Fukushima, and people are confronted by the real threat of health damage,

among whom the most vulnerable are infants and small children. Simultaneously, this event revealed a lack of governmental support to help those children and their families from pollution. Citizens have started protesting to the government, demanding its prompt action to improve the situation (Okada, 2011). In this crisis, guardians of children are called to greater awareness of governmental influences on their own lives. Will the government take responsibility if the children who are yet to be born are physically and mentally handicapped because of the radiation pollution? Is happiness attainable in this society to those suffering from ill-health as a consequence of radiation? In these ways, reading Lessing's work continues to make us question the way in which power operates on maternal responsibility in the case of disability. It is clear that even now, maternal bodies are mediators of social happiness, and yet, when they cannot (re) produce healthy children to be productive for their societies, there is not enough protection for them. It becomes their sole responsibility to care for their disabled child, pushing them to the margins of, and making them appear monstrous to, their society.

**Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> As is well known, her early work, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *The Golden Notebook* (1962) deal with female protagonists' mental breakdowns. The latter especially is frequently considered as a pioneering work for second wave feminism.
- <sup>2</sup> This is the very issue which Mary Shelley takes up in *Frankenstein* (1818) in the monster's body.
- <sup>3</sup> With regards to the differences between people, is there someone who is yet to be gendered soon after her/his birth? Mamoto seems to consider that there is such a subject, who exists "before" becoming a man or a woman in society. This discursive assumption, however, of setting up a human "before" gendering becomes problematic, as Judith Butler argues in her book, *Gender Trouble* (1991). According to Butler, the subject "who stands 'before' the law, awaiting representation in or by the law [...] is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy." (Butler, p. 5) In other words, assuming there is "a human before gendering" is discursively impossible, given Butler's account of gender performativity.
- <sup>4</sup> According to Douglas, it is said that female teenagers about 16-17 get pregnant so that they can leave home and be housed in council houses.
- <sup>5</sup> For Gothic narrative as a subversive device in *Fifth*, see: Gamallo (2000); Robbins (2009); Pifer (2000).
- <sup>6</sup> See Ortner (1972).
- <sup>7</sup> This earthquake caused a huge tsunami, which killed 15,799 citizens and 4,053 people are still missing. 117,410 houses were destroyed due to this tragedy. (September 2011).

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## グロテスク・マタニティードリス・レッシング 『破壊者ベンの誕生』の「幸福」と優生思想 植松のぞみ

本論文は、作家ドリス・レッシング（1919–2013）の後期作品のひとつである『破壊者ベンの誕生』（1988; *The Fifth Child*）をとりあげ、英国1980年代の文脈に位置づけることで、本作品をレッシングの当時の功利主義的なサッチャリズムの家族政策批判として読解する。特に本稿では、作品中に描かれる登場人物たちの怪奇的な身体表象に注目し、英国社会が提唱する「規範的家族像」とその実現によって約束される「幸福な家族」の青写真が、いかに母体と赤ん坊の健康と健常児主義と密接に関連しているかを考察する。この読解を裏付けるものとして、第一に、80年代の英国保守党が提唱した家族政策に注目し、そこからサッチャリズムが推進した「伝統的な家族」像（核家族、定収入、出産、子育てによって育まれる倫理規範）を把握する。第二に、そういった「伝統的な家族」とその幸福がいかに作中の夫婦、ハリエットとデイヴィッドにおいて内面化されている点、また第5子ベンの誕生によって、その幸福が、破壊されていくさまが、ゴシック・ナラティブの効果により描かれている点を論じる。また第三に、モンスターであるベンが、作品中の主要でない登場人物（障害者、非雇用者等）たちと関連付けられて描かれている点を指摘する。これらの考察により、ベンの怪物的身体と、ハリエットの「幸せな家族」への執着は、レッシングのサッチャリズムが提唱する功利的社会における幸福感の背後に隠された排除の思想への糾弾として読解することができる。この功利的な社会の構成要員は、より生産性の高さと、健康で「健常な」身体を持つことが要求され、また特に「幸福な家族」の形成のために母親たちには「健常児を出産する」ことが求められるのである。

### Keywords:

ドリス・レッシング、優生思想、サッチャリズム、幸福、家族