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*A Study of The Fifth Child and Ben in The World by Doris Lessing*

In the Light of

Julia Kristeva's Psychoanalytic Concepts

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**I n T h e N a m e O f G o d**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates Kristevan psychoanalytic and social factors, influential in the construction of different characters in the two novels of *The Fifth Child* (1988) and its sequel *Ben in The World* (2001) by Doris Lessing. It is an attempt to illustrate how all characters of the novels, especially Ben, become successful in completing Kristeva's psychic cycle. The characters' failure or success in making their 'thetic break' by the help of 'imaginary fathers' is the main concern of the researcher. Being obliged to live in a society which is replete with mirrors, the subjects are afflicted with the lack of stable identities. Unfortunately, the lack entails the entrance of a stranger in society; thus, all the features of such a person among other residents of society are searched meticulously. At first step, the researcher does her best in analyzing all characters, particularly Ben, psychoanalytically. The second step taken by her is to find traces of Kristeva's society of spectacle in Ben's community. The pivotal fact that makes such a study a new one is that, unlike other studies that focus upon just Kristeva's internal psychoanalytical notions, the research concentrates on the social factors fundamental to identity formation. From the researcher's perspective, it is not only internal factors, but also external and social ones that make a subject different from other ones.

Key words: Thetic Break, Imaginary Father, Love, Stranger and Society of Spectacle, Subject in process.

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# **Chapter One**

## Introduction

### **1.1. General Background**

In this research, it has been attempted to study Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and its sequel *Ben in The World* in the light of Kristeva's psychoanalysis. Different notions of Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories such as the 'Semiotic Chora', 'Negativity', 'Stasis' and 'Dialectic' between the two ('semiotic' and 'symbolic'), 'Thetic Phase', 'Subject-in-Process', 'Rejection', 'society of spectacle' and 'imaginary father' will be discussed in the novels.

*The Fifth Child* is a significant novel by Doris Lessing, which first was published in the United Kingdom in 1988 and then was translated into various languages. It is the story of a middle-class family, who are searching for constructing an ideal life, but after the birth of their fifth child, who seems to be a genetic drawback, their happiness is shattered to pieces; the family, especially the mother, entangles with many difficulties for keeping

Ben with her. *Ben in The World* (the sequel to *The Fifth Child*) portrays what happens to Ben, as the protagonist of the novels, while entering the world. The novel, so marvelously, shows the complexities of coping with a cruel and indifferent world.

The theoretical framework of the study is provided by Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories and is focused on the following notions: the formation of the 'subject' under 'symbolic' influences, the psychoanalytic notions of 'semiotic' and 'symbolic chora', 'thetic break', 'revolt', 'stranger' and 'society of spectacle', 'sacrifice', 'forgiveness', and 'love'. The focus of attention is on the development of Ben's psyche, as a central character. This study would not be complete without tracing the process of psyche development in other characters, particularly, female ones.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in The World* can be better understood by focusing upon some of Kristeva's concepts such as 'foreigner', 'subject-in-process', 'sacrifice', 'forgiveness', 'society of spectacle', 'love' and 'psychological revolt'.

*The Fifth Child* and *Ben in The World* are studied through the framework of Ben and female characters' psychoanalytic relations. The research seeks to illustrate why the relation seems strange. Are all the female characters of the novels as 'subjects-in-process' entangled in 'symbolic chora'? Are they the same Kristevan 'rebels' who revolt against all the repressive powers of symbolic society?

The long psychic travel of the novels' characters for shaping a 'symbolic' self, or their failure in it is investigated deeply.

### **1.3. Objectives and Significance of the Study:**

#### **1.3.1 Hypothesis**

Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World* can be better comprehended by concentrating upon some of Kristeva's concepts such as 'love', 'subject-in-process', 'stranger', 'society of spectacle', 'imaginary father' and 'thetic break'.

The probability of the application of above mentioned concepts to the two masterpieces can be traced. In both the novels, it has been attempted to show different levels of psychic formation in different individuals, of course, the main focus will be on Ben. The researcher will investigate whether or not the loss of mother is considered as the main cause for the emergence of different events in individuals and their society. Drawing Kristevan social concepts such as 'society of spectacle', 'rebels', 'stranger' and 'love', it is intended to illustrate how internal psychoanalytic factors can entail various social catastrophes in a society.

This study will also point to the analysis of latent desires, manifested in different characters' adulthood. How the individuals' failure to complete their 'thetic break' and to find their 'imaginary father', can lead to romantic relationship in their lives. How the creation of any lack in psychic cycle completion, can pave the way for Kristevan power to manipulate the individuals. These are the significant notions of the study; therefore, recognition of the power's various tricks in abusing subjects, and its tools to take the individuals' real subjectivity away are the main focuses of the research.

### **1.3.2 Significance of the Study**

Every literary work can be studied through diverse approaches, and each approach has its own merits, but sometimes a special approach has a great significance. Reading Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and its sequel *Ben in The World* can yield fruitful results. By concentrating upon the novels' characters and penetrating into their subjectivity, one is able to explore the inner worlds of subjects and the degree of their dynamism, in the hope to achieve a deep understanding of man.

Doris Lessing's characters seem to be living their lives in a way very different from each others. Each of them has his own lease of life, and consequently their behaviors are so diversified. What are the reasons for all the differences? This is what makes this study significant. It is aimed at showing how these characters are, why they are like this, and why their society behaves each of them in a different manner? At first sight, one can remember Kristeva's point of view towards human being, in which outer actions of speaking subjects have an inner root in their unconscious. In other words, individuals become who they are as a result of taking part in a diverse variety of signifying processes, so that, the role of outer factors such as society can also be influential.

In a nutshell, it may be concluded that by exploring the inner sides of individuals in a society, one becomes able to detect the roots of some social illnesses and eradicate them.

### ***1.3.3 Purpose of the Study***

Based on aforementioned hypothesis, the main purpose of the research is the better comprehension of Kristeva's psychoanalytic and social concepts, by applying them to the two masterpieces of Lessing; probably the Kristevan concepts will become more comprehensible. Social concepts of the critic, influential in psychic formation, such as 'society of spectacle', 'power', 'stranger' and 'love' will be better understood by the analysis of different characters, especially, Ben, Harriet and many 'others' in the novels. Dissecting characters in this new approach and penetrating through their psyches to find the main reasons for the various actions and reactions of subjects can help readers with understanding their world and society.

Another purpose of the study is the investigation of different individuals' relations with each other; of course, the main focus is upon Ben's relation with his mother and other females and outcasts. The events happening in the subjects' adulthood are searched deeply, to find the psychoanalytic reasons for them; if Ben's suicide and other characters' deeds are the results of mother's loss, it is really important. It is hypothesized that the main cause for all the events happening in individual's life has been rooted in his psychic cycle; even Kristeva's social notions such as 'sacrifice', 'stranger', 'love', 'marriage' and 'exile' have not been excluded from the study.

### 1.3.4 *Research Questions*

Considering Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in The World* in the light of Kristeva's psychoanalytic notions, the following questions seem challenging:

- ❖ Why do Harriet and other female characters such as Teresa, Rita and old woman behave differently towards Ben? Why are they attracted to him?
- ❖ Why is Ben rejected by all members of his family and at the same time his society? Is not he just a little, retarded boy?
- ❖ What is the reason for women's sheer obedience to their patriarchal society in the first parts of the novels, and their turning into revolutionary women at the end of the story?
- ❖ Do David, Dorothy, Johnston, Richard, Alex and other members of 'symbolic chora' feel any guilt or responsibility? Can their feeling be discussed in terms of Kristeva's 'society of spectacle'? Does their drowning in society lead to their resurrection and rebirth?
- ❖ Why are the novels loaded with aliens such as Ben, Jean, Harriet, David and Rita?
- ❖ What is the psychoanalytic significance of the scene of Ben's suicide?

### ***1.4 Review of Literature***

The current research is a Kristevan psychoanalytic study of Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and its sequel *Ben in The World*. The following works are some of the useful studies done on Doris Lessing's literary pieces:

“Existentialism, Realism and Novel” is a PhD dissertation by Ong, Yi-Ping from Harvard university. In the study, he works on some realist novels and the way that realism is represented in these novels. The main focus is upon Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962). He asserts that there is a very close relationship between existentialism and literature. The study examines the relevance of existentialist form to the realist novel, in that the researcher not only shows empirical and sociological aspects of the world, but also represents the contingency of experiences for the representation of reality in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*.

Another useful research done on Doris Lessing's novels is by Matthew, Oliver, a PhD student of the university of Wisconsin-Madison. The thesis provides some explanations about the techniques which some writers such as Lessing use, to reframe the British national imaginary and to support British imperial identity. In the dissertation, the researcher seeks to show that Lessing uses the image to create a reversal of the cliché perspective, for example, in many other writings the foreigner is described as monstrous, while in Lessing's works the concept is completely different. The writer puts that Lessing



displays a conflict between a desire for national revival and a strong desire for self-punishment . By using the technique ,she achieves two aims: the first one is to deepen the understanding of how the narrative of decline functions within national imaginary, and the second one is a perfect comprehension of how the grotesque can be a pivotal agent for social changes .Regarding the former case and in the researcher's notion, Lessing in her novels criticizes social turbulence created by the loss of empire , and consequently her writing style, especially her narrative, can be a starting point for national reversal.

“Remembering Home: Nation and Identities”, is an article written by Susan Watking. The article's main theme is that Lessing's novels are appropriate enough to be explored from post-colonial point of view. Her article's main focus is upon the concepts of race and identity in discussing Lessing's recent novel, *The Sweetest Dream* (2001).The researcher shows how Lessing uses a different notion of home, nation and city in this novel. She also interprets memory as useful and productive for both individual and community, of course, when it is turned into a ‘rememory’. The researcher believes that Lessing, by deconstructing the always used notions, wants to break the boundaries between different methods of writings .She implies that Lessing's fictional works are more fictional than factual ones; because, they permit individuals and nations to make sense of their pasts.

“Sexual-political Colonialism and Failure of Individuation in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*”, is an article published in *The Journal of International Women's Studies*, written by Sima Aqazadeh. The article concentrates on Lessing's first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1959), in which the researcher analyzes its female character, Mary Turner, psychoanalytically .The researcher illustrates that the novel is the portrayal of Mary's failure in confronting her psychological and cultural past which has been shaped by colonial experiences. From the researcher's point of view, the main character of the

novel has been developed through a white woman colonizer; moreover, her gender role as a woman has been colonized in a patriarchal society. The article discusses how factors such as gender, class and race cause the failure of Mary's individuation; in other words, the study focuses upon Mary's attempts in achieving her own sense of self in the process of her individuation and death.

"The Limits of Consciousness in The Novels of Doris Lessing" is a very useful article written by Sydney Janet Kaplan, in which the levels of consciousness existing in the novels of Lessing are explored. The researcher's main claim is to demonstrate the annihilation of feminine consciousness in the novels of Lessing. One of the novels is *The Children of Violence*. The research suggests that Lessing deliberately has chosen Martha to dissect an individual's psyche in its relation to collective consciousness. She believes that nearly all female characters of Lessing's novels take journeys and go in quest of reality; the protagonists question the values of their society and live lonely in it.

The fact that the protagonists' identities are determined by all the outside factors causes them to search for freedom similar to all other protagonists of Lessing. Since Lessing always tries to show the individuals' consciousness in a language system, the readers can observe the uselessness of human attempts in the face of all social obstacles.

The researcher claims that Lessing portrays human consciousness in all her novels, especially, in *The Golden Notebook* (1962); because, the structure of the novel shows its protagonist consciousness so clearly; both are so fragmented. Anna's consciousness is split into several colorful notebooks. The writer believes that the novel has a function of a split and fragmented society and as a result a fragmented consciousness.

In the researcher's opinion, the protagonists of Lessing always find themselves in the face of an alien world with unusual elements. Some of the unknown forces which attract

the individuals' attention are nature and sexual relationship. Lessing, in the *Four-gated City* (1969), uses the element of sexuality to show a psychological unity of man with the outside world.

Regarding the explanations, the article concludes that the subjective consciousness which Anna has in *The Golden Notebook* loses its power in the novel; although, the protagonist sometimes feels the moment of individuation. The researcher suggests that in the novel of Lessing, other subjects' pulses remain beating in their body, so Lessing shows a consciousness versus a whole one in her novels. In one part of the literary work, human is considered as a pulse in the life of sun; thus, it is claimed that Lessing by using the metaphor indicates the link between a single consciousness and the consciousness of the world.

Tonya Krouse has written the article of "Freedom as Effacement in *The Golden Notebook*: Theorizing Pleasure, Subjectivity and Authority". The article revolves around the structure of the novel, and its main focus is upon the idea whether Anna, as the protagonist of the novel, is a real woman or just a writer. Accordingly, the main focus of the readers becomes if Anna is a real author or just a fake character.

The article discusses that in order to know more about the novel's narrator, readers must consider it as a text related to those novels which came before and after it in the 20th century. Also one of the main features of the novel is that it looks back at modernism and looks forward to postmodernism; hence, it displays the modernist aesthetic concern for unity. The dual attitude towards the novel makes it difficult for critics to call it a modernist, postmodernist or even a feminist novel.

In the study, the concept of freedom is prominent in *The Golden Notebook*. It suggests that the novel enumerates freedom in two kinds of definitions: on the one hand, freedom is

defined as a break of individual from all social codes and on the other, it is implied as the chaos following. The article specifies that Anna's freedom is the first one; it means that the heroine is as a fragmented one and at the same time a fragmenting element in the world, consequently unity in the novel is considered as a mirage.

In this article, the researcher states that for the facts mentioned above, she is not able to categorize the novel, as either modernist or postmodernist one, nor does the text imply a real feminine world or even an antifeminine one. In her attitude, Anna's freedom is not her unification in society. The researcher proves that Anna, as the real sense of freedom, is obtained through the effacement of subjectivity in the literary text.

In one part of the study, the researcher focuses upon the narration and comes to the conclusion that, in many sections of the novel the narrator is effaced; in the sense that the protagonist has a kind of self-effacement. The author clarifies that the feature is a vital one in the novel, in a way that one can interpret Anna's self-effacement in two ways: either Anna is a dissident, who is the victim of her patriarchal society, or she is a complicit scapegoat in her society. In her viewpoint, Lessing has rejected these two interpretations by resisting any categorization of the novel.

All Anna's social and personal experiences such as her sex and pleasures have been described by detail. She believes that Anna in the novel desires to write her body; although, it is not as a sign of her power as an unified subject, but the kind of unity enacts her effacement, and as a consequence readers become confused whether Anna writes her body or not?

The self-erasure is a nice method of Lessing to create freedom for the writing subject who is in power. Another attitude is that, the self-erasure of Anna in the novel gives more authority and power to readers, as Harold Bloom writes in his book *Anxiety of Influence*