

**ANTICIPATING APOCALYPSE: POWER STRUCTURES AND THE PERIPHERY IN
DORIS LESSING'S *THE FIFTH CHILD* AND *BEN, IN THE WORLD***

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Abstract: *This article argues that unremitting conflicts between the power centres and the individuals from the borderline spaces of the society characterise Doris Lessing's novels *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. The paper seeks to further the argument by applying Michel Foucault's early work on power and Zygmunt Bauman's theory on liquid, thus postmodern, fear to manifest the implosion of the contemporary civilization that lives on global/local disparities and operates through subversive surveillance.*

Keywords: *elimination of the unregistered other, fear of the unknown, globalisation, intertextuality, resistance*

1. Introduction

As expected, Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and its sequel *Ben, in the World* elicit some quite disparaging and insightful reviews. The unease is evident as Brigitte Weeks admits in her review of *The Fifth Child* that Lessing "is an intimidating figure for readers and reviewers alike" (*The Washington Post*, 1988) Gail Caldwell gripes that this novel sets off messages that "are too garbled" (*Boston Globe*, 1988). Regarding *Ben, in the World*, many critics puzzle over its genre. One debates over the resemblance of it to the plot of a B- movie or 'part horror story, part fable' (*Pittsburgh post – Gazette*, 2000) while another limits it as 'political allegory' appealing 'adolescent readers' (*St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, 2000). Alex Clark comments on Lessing's failing to "explore issues of otherness, of difference and oppression" (*The Guardian*, 2000). It is not intended here to survey such reviews. The mentioning of them here purveys the range and variety of responses that miss or evade talking about what Lessing aims to convey towards the demise of the twentieth century (*The Fifth Child*, first published in 1988) and during the dawn of the twenty first century (*Ben, in the World*, first published in 2000). In her review of *Ben, in the World* Barbara McLean asserts: "Until humanity can encompass and embrace elements of the unexplained in its midst there will be exploitation, pain, sorrow and humiliation" (*The Globe and Mail*, 2000). I am interested in this view and propose to explore how the birth, existence, and self-sacrifice of the fifth child, Ben, the unusual postmodern subject occupying the fictional space of undemonstrative resistance and inarticulate activism at the borderline of the society, bares the vulnerability of the unknown and marginalised other in the face of pervasive control. The

Western patriarchal norms are in symbiotic liaisons with the disciplinary institutions as Foucault would call them. The state is also an oppressive entity that controls through subversive surveillance and faces individualistic and disconcerted resistance. Such contemporary civilization, where the other is suspected, inspected, and if needed, eliminated, feeds on the fear of the apocalypse.

2. The Postmodern Subject

Presence of a certain thematic semblance and its elaboration can be seen in ‘Subjects’, a chapter from Terry Eagleton’s *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), and in Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*—the sequel to *The Fifth Child*. This fortuitous finding and the deliberate mentioning of it here do not suggest that this article would use Eagleton’s ironical scrutiny of the postmodernist subject, ‘whose body is integral to its identity’ (1996:69), as a theoretical base to develop the core argument that Lessing’s novels can be seen as sites of conflicts between systematic regimentation and the individual’s resistance. In the novels, the powerless beleaguered other is manipulated, tortured and abandoned to perish at the peripheral locations of the society. Postmodern subjects inhabit regulatory institutions and the fringes in the novels and can be seen through the critical prism of the revisionist Marxist Eagleton since: “Europeans are no longer embarking on that voyage from the centre of the world either, for centres and peripheries have been redefined” (Bassnett 1998:90-91). Albeit not in the redemptive spirit of postcolonialism as Bassnett here trusts. But centres and peripheries are calculatedly rechristened to serve the unrestrained recrudescence of global capitalist injustice. Lessing, forcibly and candidly, shows her commitment to writing/documenting/fictionally representing issues that always voice the voiceless and embody the forsaken and isolated ‘Other’. The semiotic intricacies are different here, however, as Lessing does not summon a racial or cultural Other. This other, Ben, is born near London, the capitalist centre of the world, of English parents inside the Western society—a genuinely legal, white, British male playing the role of the other when migrant, diasporic and cultural Other(s) are in currency in the contemporary literary scene.

Eagleton observes that the body is “the most recurrent preoccupations of postmodern thought. Mangled members, tormented torsos, bodies emblazoned or incarcerated, disciplined or desirous: the bookshops are strewn with such phenomena, and it is worth asking ourselves why” (1996:69). The answer of this *why* is given by Eagleton: “most fashionable fetish” (1996:69), “a concern for physical health” (1996:69) being “escalated into a major neurosis” (1996:69) “the body fits well enough with the postmodern suspicions of grand narratives” (1996:70) and Foucault defined “latest form of repression” (1996:71); “postmodern cult of pleasure” (1996:71) overlooks “the way in which humans are cusped between nature and culture” (1996:74) as objectification of “our own bodies and those of others all the time” (1996:74) happen through a practice of alienation. Eagleton covers, with a brief recapitulation of the ‘self’ as subject from Hume, Kant to Schelling, Hegel, then Marx, Kierkegaard and Sartre through Nietzsche, the postmodern thought (1996:79). Imbricate in such phenomena, except that of Hume and Kant,

bodies in Lessing occlude the ironical laughter of American postmodern fiction. In these two novels bodies are anguished, enslaved, and suspended between fixation and anxiety. Ben's body, undoubtedly, is the materialisation of his identity.

Ben is the postmodern subject/the other in a postcolonial scene. He experiences the tension between attraction to and abhorrence of incomplete self-images, survives from being amputated or being skinned alive. He escapes imprisonment. Ben also ignites freakish sexuality in prostitutes and motherly affection in the Brazilian girlfriend of an American film maker. Ben, the unrecognisable stone-age primitive, chooses self-sacrifice, making us wonder whether we can call it will to power or the colonised subject's agency. Abdul R. Janmohamed claims:

Colonialist literature is an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of "civilization," a world that has not 'yet' being domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. That world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. (2007:19)

Lessing's novels, opposed to the type Janmohamed explains, are a re-working/re-fashioning of the post-sanitised criteria listed above. Most characters consider Ben an evil and are shocked at his emergence among them. Stuart Hall exemplifies the issue of the other by contextualising it in the framework of postcolonialism:

Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. But this kind of knowledge is internal, not external. It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective confirmation to the norm. That is the lesson—the sombre majesty—of Fanon's insight into the colonising experience in *Black Skin, White Masks*. (2007:436)

Lessing dismantles the myth of the superiority of the Western culture in *The Grass is Singing* (2007). Lessing's attack on the Western discourse and her deliberate re-writing of the binaries signal that she is prophesying, through fictional register, the necessity of a new mode of postcolonialism that represents a movement focused on activism and resistance in opposition to that of ambivalent complicity and hybrid existences. The politics that controls individuals inside and outside their home is considered by the author—a human being, Ben, unusual/different in his looks and behaviour, tries to execute his birth rights—the right to live, breathe, love and be loved. This classic case has been seen through the lenses of the politics of binary before: black/white, rich/poor, coloniser/colonised. Here, the powerful representatives of the Western society position themselves against a single human being—who looks, acts, and behaves in a fashion that living memory fails to categorise.

Lessing has closely observed the ugly workings of the Empire of the near unforgettable past, neo-colonisation in the name of globalisation, and the emergence of re-colonising missions. The *horror* of the contemporary is lithely represented in her fiction. In *The Fifth Child* James comments, as if, on the universally accepted phenomenon: “You’re quite wrong, Harriet. The opposite is true. People are brainwashed into believing family life is the best. But that’s the past” (1988: 28). In *Ben, in the World*, Lessing focuses on the finances. Johnston, a petty drug peddler and pimp, recounts his experience in the treacherous modes of the free market economy: “He had been persuaded by a man on the fringes of respectability to try his luck on the stock exchange—futures. You couldn’t lose, this friend said. There was money, if you kept your head. Well, they had kept their heads but not their money” (2000: 53). Such sentiments and situations find apt voice in Bauman:

The ‘openness’ of our open society has acquired a new gloss these days, one undreamt of by Karl Popper, who coined that phrase. No longer a precious yet frail product of brave, those stressful, self-assertive efforts, it has become instead an irresistible fate brought about by the pressures of formidable extraneous forces; a side-effect of ‘negative globalization’ – that is, the highly selective globalization of trade and capital, surveillance and information, coercion and weapons, crime and terrorism, all now disdaining territorial sovereignty and respecting no state boundary. (2006: 96)

Lessing’s indictment of globalisation can be seen in her portrayal of the helplessness of a British citizen, Ben, who faces mental and physical colonisation in his own country, in neighbouring France and in Brazil. The author seems to have predicted the dire consequences of the postmodern subject in the hands of the *global* long before. Cornelius Collins discusses how Lessing becomes engaged with the gamut of future crises in her novels published in the heyday of Cold War:

This is the prophetic vision she would explore in the sequence of novels following *The Four-Gated City*. Beginning at the level of politics—where in her view derelict leaders failed to respond to their communities’ needs and, as under neoliberalism, consign the future to “the responsibility of individuals”—she also suggest that the crisis has roots in such treasured modern notions as guaranteed progress and technological utopianism. (2010: 227)

These ideas are explored to the extreme in Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*—about and around a deluding backdrop: the crisis and euphoria following the Soviet economic defeat in the Cold War, the absolute control of American-style global capitalism over other economies, late twentieth century wars, and Europe’s continued loss of influence. Lessing’s approach to the consequences of such a time flabbergasts—an untimely, prehistoric baby is born into an English family and gropes through an uncertain, risky nurturing and dies at the dawning of youth; escapes Oedipus-fate being cast away to an institution by his father.

Lessing's creation of a theatre screen like transparent liquidity throughout the narrative in effect helps repeated recreations of the menace. In *The Fifth Child*, the headmistress of the school watches Ben's mother: ". . . with that long, troubled inspection that held unacknowledged unease, even horror, . . ." (1988:100). The reader is seduced to inspect Ben along with other characters as *the alien*. Clearly, Ben falls far beyond the boundary of the Western knowledge. David, Ben's father spells out: "He's probably just dropped in from Mars" (Lessing 1988:74). Harriet declares: "*He's our child*" (1988:74). David comes up with what many men would do to avoid responsibility. "No, he's not," said David, finally. "Well, he certainly isn't mine" (1988:74). As Ben is the other from within the civilisation—he is a new phenomenon and therefore should be destroyed, at least caged: "But everywhere over the world is flung a kind of grid or net of hospitals, chemists, laboratories, research institutes, observation stations, and their functions blur and blend" (Lessing 2000:130).

Ben is parcelled to France without his knowledge. The word 'country' probably does not make much sense to him since he lived in his own country like an outsider. To him England is:

part of park benches and doorways and railway stations, a person might huddle by you all night so close you could feel the warmth coming out and warming you—and then in the morning, gone, and you would never see them again. He was feeling so loose and weightless and unbelonging he could drop through the floor or float about the room. (Lessing 2000:76)

Ben's feeling about his belonging(less)ness, the fact that homeless people like Ben move from bench to bench, is taken further as Ben goes across border; not once, thrice.

3. Power Structures, Subversive Surveillance and Institutions

One of the preoccupations of Foucault is with the seventeenth-century society which wanted to keep the plague and leprosy stricken people at bay. Foucault explains:

By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an 'integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised. It was also organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. (1995: 176 and 177)

From the beginning of *The Fifth Child*, David and Harriet are closely watched by other characters—the eyes of the society. As the novel progresses they, previously victims of their surroundings, start gazing at other people—as if they are objects. David and Harriet are at a party when the novel starts—love at first sight being the awkwardly and too sentimental a thing those days, they decide to get married. From the first paragraph the narrator tells us how Harriet and

David have earned “the unaffectionate adjectives”: “conservative, old-fashioned,” (Lessing 1988:3) and also that “they defended a stubbornly held view of themselves” (Lessing 1988:5).

The narrator further explains why other people consider Harriet and David so unfashionable. “So what was it about these two that made them freaks and oddballs? It was their attitude to sex! This was the sixties!” (Lessing 1988:4). Curiously, a number of characters in *Ben, in the World* consider the fifth child of Harriet and David a freak. Though it was the post-war Britain, Harriet and David seem not to be enjoying the dispersal of the apocalyptic fear that reigned with the rise of Nazi-Germany just a decade ago. Sexual life is openly discussed. People know, belonging to organisations like the office that regulated their lives, that David had a long-drawn out affair with a girl who probably slept with “everyone in Sissons Blend & Co” (Lessing 1988:5). They break up. Harriet also makes her friends “shriek” (Lessing 1988:5). She is a virgin and kept it “like a present wrapped up in layers of deliciously pretty paper, to be given, with discretion, to the right person” (Lessing 1988:5). Intrusion into the sexuality of individuals like David and Harriet seems to be a part of the process of the society-inflicted surveillance.

Doctors, professors and scientists intrude into the lives of people like Ben and Harriet. The victims do not trust scientists and doctors. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben’s grandparents, David’s mother and his stepfather, both Oxford professors, decide to send Ben to an institution from where the two-year-old had to be rescued by his mother. Ben was in straightjackets and was smeared in shit in freezing cold. Interestingly, the authority figures in hospitals, universities and scientific labs are suspicious about, fascinated with and horrified by Ben, who does not seem to be a threat to people who live on the periphery and are not considered important by the society—for example, Rita, the prostitute, in *The Fifth Child* or Teresa, in *Ben, in the World*. The outcast of Lessing’s novels loosely conforms to the category of madman—a category used by the disciplinary societies of the 17th century to silence and oppress non-conformists; as Foucault implies. According to Simon During, Foucault utilises the works of writers like Shakespeare and Cervantes to formulate his argument that: “In them madness lies ‘beyond appeal’; for their characters it leads straight to death, being connected still to a realm which, though social, transcends the human” (1993:34)/ During also suggests that, “*Madness and Civilization* is not interested in providing totalizing explanations of the phenomena it deals with.” (1993:36) Totalising power structures like scientific labs, hospitals, and most significantly the society, in Lessing, alienate individuals who are considered different/other/mad/mutant/alien.

The reader almost calls Ben an alien being influenced by the cruelty of other characters: “They treated him roughly, it seemed to Harriet, even unkindly, calling him *Dopey*, *Dwarfey*, *Alien Tow*, *Hobbit*, and *Gremlin*.” (Italics added. 1988:94) These interpellations seem to be the products of the cultural myth created by age-old fairytales and contemporary Hollywood blockbusters. The torture of interpellation is clear and succinct. Ben’s father cries out: “It’s either him or us’, said David to Harriet.” It is indeed interesting to see how Lessing summoned the catch phrases of 9/11, *either with us or against us*, so long before—back in 1988. The novels permeate with the fear of the other. Lessing, who has dealt with the self/other dyad in *The Grass is Singing* (2007), invokes the rise of the other from within the Western society and shows how

this *different* person is accused of being a non-human and is dehumanised. The fate of Foucault's lunatic/anti-foundationalist/different was incarceration—a form of witch-hunting.

The power at work and the resistance towards its manifestations come together in these two novels as Lessing applies intertextuality to make the reader feel the political undercurrents—the grim premonitions relating to the future. Intertextuality being the helm of the narrative exploits, Lessing aims at the cultural conditions—utilising them to attain stylistical edge and criticising them in the postcolonial seam simultaneously. Hoffmann's dissections of intertextuality in the postmodern American fiction will be of use here as he lists the implications that are brought to bear by the use of such a variant of pluralism/intertextuality in the texts:

The social context and its discourses as the “other”, the outside, the uncontrollable, are objectified as a powerful, intrusive, all-controlling Institution within the text. This method “borrows” material from the social environment, and, for instance, makes the allegedly all-determining, corrupting and exploitative Capitalist System, the great topic of the “crisis theorists”, into a crucial issue of the text, albeit in an abstracted and demonized, dramatized and psychologized form which includes the effect of the power system on people and their response and creates the dialectic matrix of (the System's) power and (the character's) resistance (cf. Pynchon, Coover, Hawkes, Sorrentino, Vonnegut, and others). This interaction has its own ineluctable logic and creates therefore a very strong design for a revival of plot (as something “plotted”), and for the constitution of character as both alienated and resistant, since, to refer to Foucault again, power by inner necessity calls up resistance, in fact would not exist without resistance, which is its other side or alter ego. This dialectic of power and resistance can be radicalized in global terms as anticipation of apocalypse or entropy, and in psychological terms as paranoia — paralleled in the lifeworld by the experience of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the threat of the atomic bomb, and the vision of the impending end of the world, all basic, determining components of the postwar period's zeitgeist. (2005: 74 and 75)

It seems that Lessing conforms to the thematic exploits of the American postmodernist novels. Instead of the nonchalance of their blasting humour she employs the rawness of the real—characteristic of Lessing's novels. She incorporates scathing disapproval of corruption and exploitation of the capitalist system, the dehumanising influence of an unforgiving time—“the greedy and selfish sixties” (Lessing 1988:21). *The Fifth Child* illustrates the early seventies “crimes, . . . shocking everyone” (Lessing 1988:22) as “a telephone box that had been vandalised so often the authorities had given up” (Lessing 1988:22) and there was an ugly edge on events: more and more it seemed that two peoples lived in England, not one—enemies, hating each other, who could not hear what the other said. The young Lovatts made themselves read the papers, and watch the news on television though their instinct was to do neither” (Lessing 1988:22)

On the first page of *The Fifth Child*, the post-war zeitgeist is summed up. The “end-of-year party” (Lessing 1988:3) of three “associated firms” (Lessing 1988:3) got couples dying to flaunt themselves as more of sexual than social animals as Harriet and David watch along, shy

but sociable. The couple is being watched too and being judged as “freaks and oddballs” (Lessing 1988:4) as this “was the sixties!” (Lessing 1988:4)—to generalise, it was a time when sexual exhibitionism marked freedom and progress in the capitalist West.

Harriet and David fail to conform to such a trend and are being ostracized as they chose family over sex. Lessing portrays a society which has become hollow from within and is about to implode. The zeitgeist of the post-war Britain brings in the sexual freedom. People who fail to go wild are considered abnormal (both Harriet and David). The bubble bursts—families start falling apart. The Lovatt’s, however, face the change and buy a home far away from London—a big house where they host guests of all sorts, even the fashionable divorcee. The couple nurtures four children successfully somehow coping with the economic pressures that Britain faces in the bipolar world where it plays the second fiddle to America. Everything changes with the appearance of the fifth child. Crime rises and hell emerges in the heaven of the Lovatt’s. Harriet resists the oppression of institutions like hospitals, like the one “in the North of England” (Lessing 1988:78) where Ben, a child, is almost left to die—this episode straddles over 8 pages, from 78 to 85. (Lessing 1988) Alone Harriet fails to have any noticeable effect on the power structures.

The society seems to be trying to erase the World War II and the loss of overseas colonies from its memory. Queuing behind America, Britain, seeks to salvage what remained of the age of Empire. In such a context, intertextuality being the stylistic trait, Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* shows the effect of outside pressure on people—the pressure of claiming the joys of what life failed to offer during the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps, unaware of the orientalist discourses, Harriet claims that “having six children, in another part of the world, . . . would be normal” (Lessing 1988: 16) and is chastised back by her mother, Dorothy, who represents the strict regimentation of the society and its utter disgust of the satellite colonies: “. . . ‘Harriet, I know you, don’t I?’—and if you were in another part of the world, like Egypt or India or somewhere, then half of them would die and they wouldn’t be educated, either” (Lessing 1988: 16). Irrational fatalism accompanies such blunt stereotypical articulation. Harriet is not immune to the mistrust towards the east. She connects the birth of a baby, “Genghis Khan with her squashed little face and her slitty eyes?” (Lessing 1988:22), to ill luck brought about by the quarrelling of the couple: Sarah and William. As a Genghis Khan like child proclaims ill luck, impending apocalyptic doom is confirmed through the arrival of Ben. Harriet “fantasised that she took the big kitchen knife, cut open her own stomach, lifted out the child . . .” (Lessing 1988:48) and when the child, Ben, is born “there was strain in everyone, apprehension.” (Lessing 1988:48) It seems: “That twenty centuries of stony sleep/ Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle” (W. B. Yeats: 2000).

Ben, in the World narrates the eighteen-year-old Ben’s struggles against a world controlled by the global capitalist system. In the author’s note of this sequel to *The Fifth Child*, Lessing describes a harrowing reality that would even leave the horror film fans aghast: “‘The cages’ were described to me in miserable detail ten years ago by someone who had seen them in a research institute in London. Here they are set in Brazil, because of the exigencies of the plot, but

I am sure no such unpleasant phenomenon exists in Brazil” (2000: *page number is not given to the author’s note in this edition*). Lessing adds: “The authorities have cleared the gangs of criminal children from the streets of the centre of Rio. They are no longer permitted to annoy tourists” (2000: *page number is not given to the author’s note in this edition*). The fate of these children of favelas is succinctly shown in the movie *The City of Gods* (2002).

An American film maker takes interest in Ben who arrives in France with pricy smuggle of drugs and a counterfeit passport—ignorant of such *business*. Through perforated borders Ben is also smuggled to a new market. His journey does not end here. He is smuggled again—this time to Brazil by the film maker who considers him an alien, an exotic creature, not a person:

Alex, who had not for months been able to look at anything or anybody without his mind feeling with bright seductive scenes, saw a sombre hillside under a low louring sky, with black rocks clambering and piling up it, ancient vigorous trees; he heard water splashing and from beside a little waterfall emerged a creature, squat, hairy, with powerful shoulders and a deep chest, which lifted gleaming hostile eyes to see this alien, . . . to see what threat this unknown might mean. (2000:78)

Lessing, deliberately, plays with the politics of signification here—it is Alex who is the unknown danger to the powerless Ben. Lessing focuses on the contemporary world of free-market driven economy and emotionally void functionality where the movie goers expect to watch confrontation between an alien and a super beast. Brazil has sun-bathed-shores and the rain forest. Alex travels through Brazil in search of a perfect location for such a fight. Brazil—a South American economic giant where poor Brazilians live and kill each other in the favelas and tourists enjoy the best money can buy. Hoffmann is relevant again as he shows how in the aftermath of the *zeitgeist* people live expectant of doomsday—for another war which will end everything. An apocalypse is expected. Such cultural conditions are considered by postmodern American writers:

Though these feelings may again be played with and ironized, they bring into the texts the issues of anxiety and pain, loss and death, the existential underside of postmodern fiction, its open depth dimension under the surface of inventions. Mailer writes in “The White Negro”, “our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war”(243); and Alfred Kazin (in his *The Bright Book of Life*) maintains that what Heller, Pynchon, Vonnegut, and others of the postwar period are really writing about, even though their locale is Germany, World War II, New York, or California, is the hidden history of the time, the threatening apocalypse, the “Next War”, “a war that will be without limits and without meaning, a war that will end when no one is alive to fight it”(qtd. in Howard 265). (Hoffmann 2005: 75)

Ben seems to forewarn such an end through war. His fleeing from country to country fails to save him as he is someone, a creature, who is unknown, different, and thus deprived of the rights of fellow humans and is susceptible to brutality.

4. Elimination of the Unknown, the Unknowable

An American scientist traps and cages Ben in Rio de Janeiro. Professor Gaumlach, the American scientist, should not be meddled with since he “was a member of the most powerful nation in the world”. (Lessing 2000: 154) In the scientific laboratory of this professor, people and animals are mutilated and then slowly and painfully submitted to death. The logic is simple—the professor tells Teresa, “This . . . specimen could answer questions, important questions, important for science—world science. He could change what we know of the human story” (Lessing 2000:153). Here, objectification of the subject is done in the name of *world science*—a discourse. Barbara (*The Globe and Mail*, 2000) mentions concisely how the exploitation of the unexplained points to the core problematic in the contemporary civilization—suspicion and fear of the unknown.

Based in the western culture, Lessing’s novels show that the state and its regulatory institutions and the society would rather opt to terminate than try to understand the yet to be explained/understood. This is the message that Lessing offers. Bauman explains that the moral stories of the past would end signalling ‘rewards awaiting the virtuous and the punishments prepared for the sinners’. (2006:28) However, cotemporary moral stories, like Lessing’s, do not offer such reassurance. He explains:

All moral tales act through sowing fear. If, however, the fear sown by the moral tales of yore was redeeming (that fear came complete with an antidote: with a recipe for averting the fear-begetting threat, and so for a life free from fear), the ‘moral tales’ of our time tend to be unmerciful; they promise no redemption. (2006: 28/29)

Unforgiving to the core, both novels proclaim Ben’s punishment in the form of casting away, caging and elimination through state-run/backed institutions. The American director recruits Ben for his next project—a movie on cave men where Ben is the leader. In Rio he leaves Ben in the charge of his girlfriend Teresa. Teresa’s friend, the educated, posh looking one, Inez, works with scientists at an institution. One of them is:

Luiz Machado, a handsome urbane man of forty or so, . . . He ran a department in the institute which investigathed rain forest plants, one of many similar departments, and while somethings like Ben is not in his line, there was another department, ‘the bad place’ in fact, run by someone who would find Ben, a prize.” (Lessing 2000:122)

This *someone* is an American scientist who is feared by the moment Teresa sees him. She decides not to give Ben away. Ben is kidnapped. Teresa, with the help of Alfredo, “not a superior person but someone like Teresa, a large, brown man, with the same dark eyes and black hair,” (Lessing 2000:125), rescues him from a cage as disembowelled, mutilated and deformed animals suffer.

These cages remind of repressive systems Foucault dismantles. The terms of diagnosis and the objectification of the individuals in and by the upcoming human sciences of the nineteenth century like medicine, biology and psychiatry are profoundly repressive according to Foucault. The systems of general categorisation, used by these complex formations of knowledge, fail to acknowledge the differences among individuals or groups of individuals. It is to be noted the system of disciplinary and repressive organisms have survived and seem to have become stronger than ever before since in Doris Lessing's world they claim lives of both humans and animals.

Against such structural and formal menace marginal figures resist. Alfredo and Teresa, insignificant people in comparison to the American scientist, in their effort to save Ben run away from Rio—a city too dangerous to live in. On an expedition up mountains Alfredo discovers cave paintings at a time of the day when light falls on them making the figures almost spring to life. These paintings have people in them who are like Ben. Ben has become too restless to meet people like him. Up mountains where Teresa and Alfredo suffer from the lack of oxygen and numbing cold, Ben is comfortable. He is elated to see those paintings, and talks to them and sings to them and at the height of his excitement falls. As the society fails to understand Ben, puzzles over his origin, mulls hard to explain Ben's reality and is unsuccessful, elimination of the different and unknown seems the only legitimate solution.

5. Fear of the Apocalypse

The construct of the other in the west, often as popular anti-Christ figures, and the fear of the emergence of such creature(s)/individual(s) nearing the time of the apocalypse are in work here. *The Fifth Child* anticipates the emergence, witnesses the birth and coming to adolescence of the other, Ben. In *Ben, in the World*, Ben dies at the advent of a new millennium. Lessing potently recaptures here again another classic case: the tensed, anxious, and almost sickening *wait*—a dark desire for an ending—the awaiting of the apocalypse.

The list of Hollywood movies that pseudo-predict, pseudo-portray and pseudo-fight the apocalypse is long and seems unending. Bauman mentions and quotes Jacques Attali who “pondered the phenomenal financial triumph of the film *Titanic*, which outstripped all previous box-office records of apparently similar disaster movies” (2006: 12). Bauman cogently explains, while referring to Attali, how the West keeps awaiting disaster ‘icebergs’ (2006:12). As the tip of the disaster could only be seen—the unseen chaos being unpredictable. To Bauman the list of such ‘icebergs’ is too many to count. He mentions a few such as: “terrorist iceberg” (2006:12), “religious fundamentalism iceberg” (2006:12), and “implosion of civilization” (2006:12) iceberg. In Lessing's novels other characters wonder how Ben grew up inside Harriet's womb. The fact that she gave birth to four other normal children remains unconsidered. The popular theme of apocalyptic implosion would remain bereft of plot and characters if the lives of Ben and his mother, British citizens having considerable connections and from middle class backgrounds, are not manipulated to the end of the popularly consumed story of apocalypse. Bauman further adds:

Implosion, not *explosion*, so different in shape from the one in which the fears of the ‘collapse of the civilised order’—fears that had accompanied our ancestors at least from the time that Hobbes proclaimed *bellum omnium contra omnes*, war of all against all, to be the ‘natural state’ of humanity—tended to be articulated during the ‘solid’ phase of the modern era. (2006: 12 and 13)

Ben and Harriet are pushed against the wall. They have to fight this war of one against all. Other characters think that there is something sinister; beyond understanding that resides in them that could be harmful to the Western *modernity*. This process of *othering* can be seen in parallel to the treatment of Grendel, “a monster descended from ‘Cain’s clan’,” (*Beowulf* 1999:6), and his mother. In general and quite popularly indeed, readers and critics consider, along with the other characters of the Old English epic *Beowulf* (1999), Grendel and his mother evil. Seamus Heaney in the introduction of his translation of *Beowulf* (1999) explains:

Grendel comes alive in the reader’s imagination as a kind of dog-breath in the dark, a fear of collision with some hard-boned and immensely strong android frame, a mixture of Caliban and hoplite. And while his mother too has a definite brute-bearing about her, a creature of slouch and lunge on land if seal-swift in the water, she nevertheless retains a certain non-strangeness. (1999: xviii)

Interestingly, it is *the reader’s imagination* that circulates the mythic visitations of the monster like figure. This re-visitation of the monster has not been ended but became more powerful and strong with the big-budget futuristic Hollywood productions where time and again the other somehow makes into this prosperous and technologically advanced civilization, creates a huge chaos and then is defeated by *humanity*.

Ben seems to be a miniscule version of the protagonist of *King Kong* (2005) who wins the love of a woman, a struggling actress, and hate of the powerful. However, at the end of the movie this lord of the jungle, the creature who protects the white female in the face of death, is defeated by the supreme US air power. Rod Mengham, while discussing the essay of Kiernan Ryan on novelists Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, explains how contemporary fiction writers react to “the real catastrophe” of “the irreversible social and psychological damage occasioned by the mere existence of nuclear weapons” (1999:2). Heaney’s description of Grendel’s mother can interestingly be read in parallel to the portrayal of Harriet who is huge and frantic when pregnant with Ben. The way she gobbles up food. The way she waits at night for everyone to go to bed and then her frantic pacing up and pacing down. Harriet’s screams also remind us of Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* (1999). The nighttime prowl of both characters and the anguish they go through is almost demonic. The visitations of the demon/alien other is so much present in the contemporary novels and films that Mengham tries to explain the postmodern logic of these cultural productions that endlessly reproduce Grendel(s) in the shape of Ben(s):

Given this contraction of the time available for significant action, and the sense of meaninglessness it produces, we should not be surprised that the last thirty years have seen a remarkable surge in the growth of millenarian and apocalyptic religious sects, since these provide a framework for the disaster which turns it into the most significant event in history, rather than a means of ensuring the failure of history altogether. (1999:2)

Doris Lessing's novels question the history of human progress as Ben's birth challenges the idea of evolution—the fact that Ben could be/is a product of latent and perplex institutions which create/concoct their own version of the progress of human history.

5. Conclusion

Lessing challenges such myth that procreates the glory of the progress of *modern* human history since *modern* people act barbarically. Ben, a different-looking/acting human, is denied life in such a civilisation. Individuals in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World* confront power centres and are controlled by them simultaneously. Powerless and marginalised, these characters could either compromise or die. The problem faced by the Lovatts is difference rather than sameness. The repressive mechanisms of the society demand unquestioning conformity—breach of which is annihilation.

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