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**The Intersection of Disability Concern and Feminism in Doris Lessing's
The Fifth Child (1988) and its Sequel *Ben, in the World* (2000)**

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Abstract

This piece of research studies the intersection of disability concern and feminism in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) and its sequel *Ben, in the World* (2000). To achieve my aim, I have used Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theory "*Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*". In her theory, Garland-Thomson provides four fundamental and interpreting domains that can be explored through the feminist disability approach to a text: *Representation, the Body, Identity* and *Activism*. The appropriateness of this theory is explained by the fact that Lessing seeks to bring equality and justice by integrating the disabled people and transforming women's condition in society. In my analysis of this topic, I have divided my discussion into three sections. The first section comprises the disability concern highlighted by three disabled characters Ben, Amy, and Matthew Grindly and the perception of their disability in society. The second section consists of the celebration of mothering and maternity as important factors that differentiate women from men, the changes of the body, including pregnancies, as real marks of difference, and women's resistance to counter patriarchal stereotypes of their inferiority. These four prominent factors are portrayed by the female characters of the two novels including Harriet Lovatt, Mrs. Biggs, Mary Grindly and Teresa Alves. The last section deals with intersectionality and the interaction between disability and feminist issues. Lessing insists on the mutual fates of the disabled and women as they both endure marginalization by society and difficulties in their bodies. In addition, this part is concerned with the sympathy of women with the disabled, which is reflected through the integration of the disabled by the female characters. After analyzing the two novels, it is revealed that the integration of the disabled people stands for the transformation of the feminist concern in society as it is demonstrated by Lessing's works.

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I. Introduction

The 1980s was a prominent period in British literature as new contemporary topics of study emerged. It was the moment during which the problem of speaking for those who were voiceless and marginalized by society, including disabled people and women, became an eminent topic of writing and research for many scholars and writers. Out of this new interest emerged Feminist Disability Studies, which was influenced by the age of emancipation of the 1960s. During the latter period, many people including youths, blacks, and women, opposed and rejected the conventions that prevented their freedom and rights. In the past, throughout most of Western history, women were considered as inferior to men in all the positions of life. Thus, they were denied the right to vote, to study, to work or to participate in public spheres. Yet, even in the recent years, they still suffer from the inferiority position as they are otherized and marginalized by society. Similarly, the disabled people are regarded in the same inferiority position and are marginalized and seen as ‘the other’. However, in the eighties many scholars and writers started to take into consideration the feminist and disability issues. Among the well known writers who dealt with this problem, there is Doris Lessing in her prominent novel *The Fifth Child* (1988) and its sequel *Ben, in the World* (2000).

Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World* have been the center of interest for many critics. In his thesis (2010) *Discussing Disability through Postcolonial Perspectives in Doris Lessing’s The Fifth Child* (2007) and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (2006), William J. Penson focuses on the marginalization of the colonized and the disabled. Penson suggests: “*The Satanic Verses* and *The Fifth Child* can be read with a postcolonial view of the marginal, subjugated ethnic position, and that this can be supplemented with a reading of marginalized disability.”¹ It implies that the colonized and the disabled are given voice in these works.

In addition, Hung, Shu-Ming in “*The Transformation of a Body, Created in Different Positions: The Position of a Body in Doris Lessing’s The Fifth Child and Ben, in the World*” emphasizes his study on Ben’s marginalization as ‘Other’ because of his disability; he argues: “*Ben, the protagonist in The Fifth Child (1988) and Ben, in the World (2000), is presented as an outsider in society, largely, at least initially, because of his distinctive appearance and behavior.*”² The statement claims that Ben’s difference as a disabled child engenders his marginalization by society. Besides, Sivakamasundari Arumugam in “*Monster, Anxiety of the Human: A Study of the Two Novels of Doris Lessing*” stresses on the disability of Ben as a feared ‘Other’. The author claims: “*The family thinks Ben disturbs their peace, and even feels that Ben is a real threat to his other “normal” siblings.*”³ In other words, Ben is seen as a danger for his family. Moreover, Björn Sundberg in his thesis “*Patriarchy and Masculinity in Doris Lessing’s the Fifth Child and Ben in the World*” studies Lessing’s novels in the light of the patriarchal system as an aspect of oppression within society and argues:

both *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World* deal with social dilemmas in general, they inevitably also shed light upon the oppressive mechanisms in society, based upon traditional masculine values and attitudes, which all together constitute society’s patriarchal system.^{3a}

The above statement claims that Lessing’s novels present aspects of patriarchy which are considered as oppressive systems upon those people like women and the disabled who are described as ‘weaker’ in society.

1. Issue and Working Hypothesis

One should not ignore what the critics above wrote about Lessing’s novels *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. However, the first three works limited their investigations to the disability concern and ignore the feminist issue in the two novels. All of the first three critics agreed on Ben’s disability and the disturbance he brings to the family and society. His disability constitutes a social category. Therefore, the limit is that, as a social category, he can

be compared to other social categories like gender. Concerning the last critic, it bounded its study on the patriarchal system in the feminist perspective and ignored the convergence between the subjected categories as women and the disabled in both Lessing's novels.

The purpose of my work is to deal with disability concern and feminism in the eyes of Doris Lessing. It aims at exploring the intersection of both disability and feminist concerns in her novel *The Fifth Child* and its sequel *Ben, in the World*. In the former, Ben as a disabled child stands for his mother. However, in the latter, he stands for other women. It means that the disabled people represent women as they have a shared fate of being subjugated and marginalized by society and are in need of being recognized and freed from social restrictions. Accordingly, the author is very cautious about disability and feminist issues by seeking to bring justice and equality into society. In fact, Lessing favors the integration of the disabled people and the transformation of women's conditions within society by recounting both Ben's and Harriet's stories.

As a matter of fact, in my work, I intend to study disability concern and feminism and how they are intersected in Lessing's novels. In her works, she portrays disability concern throughout the characters of Ben, the autistic child, Amy, the Down's syndrome child, and Matthew Grindly, the crippled man. In addition, she highlights the feminist issue throughout the two novels by the celebration of femininity through mothering and maternity, the changes of the body, and women's resistance. Consequently, both disability concern and feminism are intersected in Lessing's novels *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. It is reflected through her insistence on the common fates of the disabled people and women. It means that both the disabled and women are marginalized and excluded from society, and both of them have difficulties in their bodies.

To deal with this issue, this study will be based on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory* (2011). In her theory, she encourages

the use of feminist theory that would intensify disability studies. She approves the link and the intersection between what she calls the ability/disability system with sexuality, (race, ethnicity, and class).⁴

In addition to an introduction, methods and materials, and a conclusion, the discussion of this research paper is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the disability concern which is reflected through three disabled characters and the perception of their disability by society in the two novels. The second section analyses the feminist concern that comprises mothering and maternity, the changes of the body, and women's resistance which are portrayed by the female characters of the two novels. The third section examines the intersection and the interaction of both disability concern and feminism and how the author insists on the common fates of the disabled and women.

Endnotes

¹Penson William J., Discussing Disability through Postcolonial Perspectives in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (2007) and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (2006) (M. A. Thesis, Leeds Metropolitan University, 2010).

²Hung, Shu-Ming, Intersubjectivity in the Fiction of Doris Lessing (PhD Thesis, Durham University, 2012).

³Arumugam Sivakamasundari, *Monster, Anxiety of the Human: A Study of the Two Novels of Doris Lessing* (PhD Diss.). Viewed on 15 February 2014.

<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wcontent/uploads/2012/08/amasundarimonpaper.pdf>

^{3a} Björn Sundberg, 'Patriarchy and Masculinity in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben*, in *The World* (Uppsats, kandidat, Akademin Fôr utbildning och ekonomi, 2011).

⁴Garland-Thomson, Rosemary, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 13-47.

II. Methods and Materials

1. Methods

a. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*

Feminist disability studies is a term coined by the scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in her theory of *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*.⁵ She uses feminist disability theory to approve the link and the intersection between feminist studies and disability studies. According to her, disability studies and gender studies belong to the larger field of identity studies. Therefore, women and the disabled are similarly defined in association with this domain of identity studies. Feminist disability theory functions to remove the associations of “*subject position of women*”⁶ and investigates “*the identity disabled in the service of integrating people with disabilities more fully into our society.*”⁷ In other words, feminist disability studies works to revise and eliminate the stereotypes associated with both women and the disabled in order to incorporate them fully within society.

Moreover, Garland-Thomson develops two main concepts that she calls ‘integration’ and ‘transformation’ in her theory. As both the disabled and women are similarly marginalized and dominated in society, they need to be fully integrated and recognized as complete citizens. According to her, integration refers to the whole inclusion, recognition and acceptance of the disabled that “*has been excluded and subordinated*”⁸ in society. However, “*Transformation suggests re-imagining established knowledge and the order of things [...] in order to gesture toward the explicit relation that feminism supposes between intellectual work and a commitment to creating a more just, equitable, and integrated society.*”⁹ In other words, transformation implies the removal of the stereotypes associated with women’s inferiority in society. Instead of excluding and marginalizing the disabled and women from the ‘norm’ of society, it is required to understand more closely what is meant by ‘human

diversity.’¹⁰ Garland-Thomson vindicates “*integrating disability as a category of analysis and a system of representation [that] deepens, expands, and challenges feminist theory.*”¹¹ In other words, feminist theory is improved and transformed through the integration of disability as a system of representation. Garland-Thomson puts forth the ability/disability system in which she states: “*disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, excess, or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body.*”¹² The disabled people like women are not naturally abased in position, but it is a culturally invented thought about their disabled body. Therefore, she identifies the “*ideological categories*”¹³ associated to the concept of disability such as “*sick, deformed, crazy, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, mad, abnormal, or debilitated.*”¹⁴ These associations are classified as unconformable to “*cultural standards.*”¹⁵ Thus, the disability system works to maintain and confirm “*such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent.*”¹⁶

Garland-Thomson sets up four basic and interrelating domains that can be explored through her feminist disability theory: *Representation, the Body, Identity and Activism*. In this sense, she suggests that the integration of disability theory reflects the transformation of feminist conditions in society. In terms of representation, she analyses the Western thought about both women and disabled people and concludes that both are represented “*as defective departures from a valued standard.*”¹⁷ Based on her study of stereotypes, she affirms that “*housewives [and] disabled people*”¹⁸ are considered as “*similarly incompetent*” and “*inherently inferior.*”¹⁹ It mentions how an ordinary woman as a housewife is seen at the same inferiority position as the disabled persons. Furthermore, women and the disabled are portrayed as subjects of “*discriminatory practices*” such as “*infanticide, selective abortion [...] hate crimes, racial profiling, and neglect.*”²⁰ Garland-Thomson recognizes that “*Understanding how disability functions along with other systems of representation clarifies*

how all the systems intersect and mutually constitute one another."²¹ In addition, women are portrayed as "*subjected to what Michel Foucault calls 'discipline.'*"²² It means that women are easily submissive to men's instructions. Therefore, it is the aim of the feminist disability theory to review these representations as untrue and incite people to reshape and remove them from their thoughts.

The body is another fundamental domain in Garland-Thomson's theory. Thus, "*both women and the disabled have been imagined as medically abnormal - as the quintessential sick ones.*"²³ Therefore, the beauty system and normalcy are seen as the ideal norms to be accomplished "*through self-regulation*" and "*consumerism.*"²⁴ However, unmodified bodies are perceived as "*unnatural and abnormal*"²⁵ by the cosmetic surgery culture, while the surgically modified bodies "*are portrayed as normal and natural.*"²⁶ Accordingly, programs of cure have been set up in order to remove disability. Garland-Thomson states: "*such a program of elimination has often been at the expense of creating a more accessible environment or providing better support services for people with disabilities.*"²⁷ Said differently, the program of cure established by culture requires normal and easy conditions of life for the disabled people. In this context, the concern of 'the body' becomes a central issue in Lessing's novels like the changes that the females' bodies undergo due to pregnancy, for instance, which is a real mark of difference between women and men.

As determined by Garland-Thomson, identity represents another major domain in her theory, which is closely related to that of representation. Thus, women's identity is drawn from its occupation of multiple positions in society. Women are culturally represented as inferior to men in all the positions of life. In addition, Garland-Thomson writes that the disabled women are culturally stereotyped as "*asexual, unfit to reproduce, dependent and unattractive-as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty.*"²⁸ Disabled women are seen as not normal human being. Similarly, disabled people

are seen as the ‘other’ because they are identified as ‘worthless’, ‘incapable’, and ‘unlovable.’²⁹ It results from the lack of understanding of what is known as disability. Therefore, womanhood is a central issue in feminism since it represents some elements as real marks of distinction between women and men such as pregnancies, mothering and maternity; women are productive and because of their pregnancies, they undergo bodily changes.

The final domain in Garland-Thomson’s feminist disability theory is activism. The latter is a form or a manner of making people familiar with disabilities such as marches, protests, and engaged literature like Lessing’s writings. Exposing disabilities in the media constitutes an effective way of making people know its meaning. Therefore, Garland-Thomson sets up two “*cultural practices that function in activist ways.*”³⁰ These are: “*disabled fashion modeling*” and “*academic tolerance.*”³¹ Both practices “*promote equality*”³², which is the aim of activism.

Accordingly, the major concepts that can be used in this research paper are: *representation, the body, identity*, and the concept of *intersectionality*. Representation implies how both women and the disabled are represented as inferior in society. Therefore, this representation shapes their identities. Then, the body involves the difficulties and changes that women’s and the disabled people’s bodies undergo and which marginalized them. Finally, the ‘intersectionality’ concept implicates the relation between women and the disabled as they similarly share the same fate of oppression and sufferings in society. In fact, her theory is based on this notion of “*intersectionality*”³³ between the disabled and women’s identities, their marginalization and the call for their integration and transformation within society.

2. Medical Concepts

Before presenting my ‘materials’, it is interesting to introduce some medical concepts which helped me in achieving the present work. Therefore, as a student in a department of English, the following medical concepts will help the reader to get familiar with my elements like: disability, autism/ Asperger’s syndrome, and Down syndrome.

a. Disability

The term ‘disability’ is a medical concept that is used in the field of disability studies. It is physical, psychological, or communicative. However, many scholars distinguish between the terms ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’. According to Dan Goodley, ‘disability’ is “*the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.*”³⁴ ‘Impairment’ is “*the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment.*”³⁵ In other words, ‘disability’ is the limitation and the rejection of people with physical deficiencies in the range of normal movements by society. Nevertheless, ‘impairment’ is the restricted ability within an individual to perform a particular activity due to either a physical or mental deficiency.

b. Autism/ Asperger’s Syndrome

Autism is a type of disability which affects children’s communicative system. However, autism’s specialists distinguish between autistic variations also known as ‘autism spectrum’. According to Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), ‘autism spectrum’ constitutes “*a group of similar conditions, including autism, atypical autism and Asperger’s syndrome.*”³⁶ In addition, as determined by Heather Stone, “*autism spectrum ranges from highly verbal, high-functioning individuals with superior intelligence, to*

nonverbal persons with low IQs.”³⁷ In other words, autism spectrum varies from a person to another depending on their communicative and intelligence systems.

Asperger’s syndrome is a type of autism defined as “*an eponymous neurodevelopmental disorder on the autistic spectrum named after the Viennese pediatrician Hans Asperger.*”³⁸ Therefore, Asperger’s syndrome is a developmental disorder characterized by “*impairment in social interaction.*”³⁹ As maintained by Ann Brendel, some of Asperger’s syndrome symptoms are as follows:

- Improper or very few social interactions.
- “Robotic” or repetitive speech.
- Awkward movements and/ or mannerisms.⁴⁰

Said differently, autistic children generally have difficulties in social relations, language acquisition, and behaviors.

c. Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is a medical term used to refer to “*the common name for a genetic anomaly, trisomy-21- nondisjunction of the 21st chromosome during meiosis, resulting in a zygote carrying an extra 21st chromosome.*”⁴¹ In other words, Down syndrome is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of extra parts of 21st chromosome. In this context, the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) states: “*Instead of the usual 46 chromosomes present in each cell, Lejeune observed 47 in the cells of individuals with Down syndrome.*”⁴² The term is named after the British physician John Langdon Down, who relates the anomaly with what Michael Bérubé calls “*phenotypical facial features such as epicanthal folds in the eyelids and flattered noses.*”⁴³ Down syndrome people are characterized by some unusual facial traits relating to the eyelids and noses. Bérubé adds:

Down syndrome is associated with mental retardation as well as a wide range of systemic health problems, ranging from congenital heart defects to childhood leukemia to a vastly increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease in later life.⁴⁴

Said differently, Down syndrome is characterized by particular health difficulties such as mental delay, blood cancer, and Alzheimer disease.

3. Materials

a. Summaries of the Novels

The Fifth Child (1988)

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) narrates the story of Harriet and David Lovatt, an old-fashioned couple who have the ideals of love, happiness and a large family. The novel is based on the 1960s Victorian family life in England and describes the birth of four normal children and the disabled protagonist, Ben, the fifth child, who destroyed and shattered the dream of a large happy family. Being different from his siblings, Ben displays the features of autism and does not fit in his society. Because of his difference, Ben is marginalized and isolated by all his family members except by his mother, who always tries to integrate and socialize him. In addition, because his disability is not known and identified, Ben is taken to an institution by his father where he is treated as a 'monster'. However, Harriet brings him back home and tries to re-integrate him within the familiar and social environment. Lessing ends the novel by asking questions related to Ben's reactions when facing the world outside the family. It resulted in a sequel to the novel entitled *Ben, in the World*.

Ben, in the World (2000)

In this sequel to *The Fifth Child*, Ben is described as an adult, eighteen years old facing the world and seeking for his own place. Ben is represented as a grown up adult, who has kept the social imperatives that he learned from his mother. Therefore, Lessing portrays the different people's reactions towards Ben. Although he meets some kind people who accept him as he is by integrating him in society, he is rather trapped by the majority of those who took profit from his disability. Thus, he is taken to France as a drug carrier, to Brazil as a film star, and then treated as a laboratory deviant being by scientists who want to sacrifice

him to the hands of science. Similarly, he is driven to an institution nicknamed “the bad place”, where he is captured in a cage and treated like an “animal”. Nevertheless, Ben is rescued by Teresa Alves, who cared after him and acted as his mother. After that, fulfilled by the joy to meet his own kind, Ben went with Teresa Alves and a friend to her named Alfredo to the mountains in order to reach his dream, which finally turned into a nightmare. However, after realizing that his own kind existed only as pictures on the mountains’ rocks, Ben fell in a psychological coma and committed suicide.

Endnotes

⁵Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 13.

⁶Ibid, 14.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid, 15.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid, 17.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid, 17, 18.

¹⁷Ibid, 18.

¹⁸Ibid, 19.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid, 21.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid, 22.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid, 24.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid, 26.

²⁸Ibid, 30.

²⁹Ibid, 35.

³⁰Ibid, 36.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid, 14.

³⁴Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), 113.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶SIGN, *Autism Spectrum Disorder: Booklet for Parents and Carers*, (2008). Viewed on 6 March 2014.

<http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/pat98parents.pdf>

³⁷Heather Stone, 'Autism Spectrum', *Encyclopedia of Disability*, Ed. Gary L. Albrecht, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 128.

³⁸Kenneth J. Aitken, 'Asperger Syndrome's, *Encyclopedia of Disability*, Ed. Gary L. Albrecht (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 127.

³⁹Ibid, 128.

⁴⁰Ann Brendel, *Autism Speaks: Asperger Syndrome and high Functioning Autism Tool Kit*, (2010). Viewed on 5 April 2014.

http://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/family_services_docs/AS-HFA_Tool_Kit.pdf

⁴¹Michael Bérubé, 'Down Syndrome', *Encyclopedia of Disability*, Ed. Gary L. Albrecht (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 518, 519.

⁴²The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS), *Down Syndrome*, 1. Viewed on 6 March 2014.

<http://www.kcdsg.org/files/content/About%20Down%20Syndrome.pdf>

⁴³Bérubé, *Down Syndrome*, 519.

⁴⁴Ibid.

III. Results and Discussion

After having summarized Lessing's novels *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World* through the perspective of Garland-Thomson's theory of '*Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*', it is clear that Lessing calls for the integration of the disabled into society in the same way as she vindicates the need for transforming social representations of both women and the disabled people. Her concern with disability is reflected in Ben the autistic child, Amy the Down syndrome child, and Matthew Grindly the crippled man, and the perception of their disability by society in the two novels. In fact, their disability is perceived by some people as either a mark of difference, which causes their otherness and marginalization in society or as a factor of sympathy, which encourages others to accept and integrate them fully within society.

Lessing's feminist concern is realized in her focus on real factors that differentiate women from men such as the celebration of femininity through mothering and maternity, the changes of the body, including pregnancies as real marks of difference, and women's resistance and self-affirmation to counter patriarchal stereotypes of women's inferiority. These four prominent factors are portrayed by the female characters of the two novels including Harriet Lovatt, Mrs. Biggs the old woman, Mary Grindly and Teresa Alves. Lessing does so to revise patriarchy.

The two novels display intersectionality and the interaction between disability concern and feminism, and the author's insistence on the reciprocal fates of the disabled people and women as they both endure marginalization and oppression by society and difficulties in their bodies. In this concern, the integration of the disabled and the transformation of women's conditions in society can be considered as what Garland-Thomson calls '*activism*'⁴⁵, which seeks to achieve equality and justice in society.

1. Disability Concern

The disability concern is highlighted throughout three ‘disabled’ characters in the two novels. Lessing uses these disabled people as a metaphor for all the disabled people of England and their perception by society. *The Fifth Child* comprises two disabled characters: Ben, the autistic child, and Amy, the Down syndrome child. In my present dissertation, I focus more on Ben, the autistic child, as he seems the center of my work that Lessing uses as an illustration of the ill-treatment of all the disabled people. In fact, the perception of Ben’s disability starts from when he was already a foetus in his mother’s womb, nearly three months pregnant. Lessing claims: “*This new baby had yet not shown signs of independent life, but now David felt under his hand, quite a hard movement.*”⁴⁶ The movements of the foetus suggest that it is not an ordinary pregnancy because a normal foetus of three months does not show signs of movements. The foetus’s difference is also perceived through its hyperactivity that makes Harriet always tired and sick. Lessing asserts: “*she could not sleep or rest because of the energy of the foetus, which seemed to be trying to tear its way out of her stomach.*”⁴⁷ Thus, the energy and the hyperactivity of the foetus present signs of a sort of disability which distinguish between the fifth pregnancy and the four other ones. Therefore, even though Harriet feels that the fifth pregnancy is different and difficult from the other ones, she decides to keep the foetus and give birth to her fifth child.

Lessing presents Ben as an ‘abnormal’ child because he demonstrates some abnormal behaviors at his birth. In fact, the absence of crying by Ben at his birth is not a normal reaction for a newborn but an alarming symptom of some malfunction. Lessing writes: “*He was not crying [...] He had not cried since he was born, except for a first roar of protest, or perhaps surprise.*”⁴⁸ According to Esposito, de Falco and Venuti “*Crying is part of a first communicative system infants use to express their needs and communicate with their environment.*”⁴⁹ Said differently, crying is the first sign that the newborn protests in order to

claim his needs and normality. Therefore, Ben's absence of crying at his birth suggests that he is not an ordinary newborn.

In addition, Ben's disability displays the symptoms of a type of autism known as Asperger's syndrome. Since his birth, Ben has difficulties to fit in his family and society. Because of his disability, he protests some strange behaviors that are recognized as autistic features. Eric Zander defines autism as "*a neurodevelopmental disorder.*"⁵⁰ In other words, autism is the disturbance and the dysfunction that affect some parts of the human brain. Thus, Emily Clark argues: "*Many of the behaviors that Ben exhibits are identified characteristics of autism, a cognitive disability that has been increasingly identified and studied in the last few decades.*"⁵¹ Accordingly, in *The Fifth Child*, Ben does not understand the social interactions that surround him. The author starts by describing Ben as someone who does not recognize his mother when he opened his eyes for the first time. Lessing states: "*He opened his eyes and looked straight up into his mother's face [...], but there was no recognition there.*"⁵² Besides his lack of understanding of the social interactions, Ben does not show any feeling or relationship towards his parents and his siblings. Lessing claims: "*Never, at once, did he subside into a loving moment.*"⁵³ It means that Ben is incapable of showing any feeling towards his family. In this context, Mark Osteen suggests three fields of impairments: "*social interaction, language acquisition and use, 'imaginative' interests and behaviors.*"⁵⁴ In fact, children with autism usually have difficulties in social communication and interactions. Zander writes:

the infant may have difficulties using and understanding eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, intonation...Many children with autism show no social or emotional reciprocity and do not spontaneously share their joys with their parents nor seek them out for comfort. Children with autism are not always interested in children of the same age...⁵⁵

The quotation above states that autistic children have difficulties to fit in society and understand the social interactions. Therefore, they do not usually demonstrate any social

relationship either with their parents or with the children of their same age. Ben as an autistic child does not conform to his society and does not display any affection for anyone of his family.

Moreover, in Lessing's novel Ben is represented as a late talker, and when he starts to speak, he either uses sentences like "*I want cake*", "*I want that*", "*go for a walk now*"⁵⁶ or directly repeats what his siblings say. I cite Lessing:

"Hello, Ben," one would say. "Hello," Ben replied, carefully handing back exactly what he had been given. "How are you, Ben?" Helen asked. "How are you?" he replied. "No" said Helen, "now you must say, 'I'm very well, thank you', or, 'I'm fine.'" Ben stared while he worked it out. Then he said clumsily, "I'm very well."⁵⁷

The quotation above implies that because of his disability, Ben has difficulties in his use of language as he repeats exactly his siblings' words. Therefore, his difficulty in language acquisition identifies him as an autistic child. In this context, Zander argues:

Persons with autism have a delay or a lack of language development... some only use single words. Others use many words and speak correctly, but mostly repeat stock phrases or things others have said regardless of the situation.⁵⁸

It implies that autistic children usually have dysfunctions in their communicative systems that cause their deficiencies in language acquisition. Therefore, to complete the language shortage they generally keep repeating what they hear among other persons. In this perspective, Kristin Bumiller states:

These children were unable to speak and possessed unusual characteristics like "unresponsiveness, resistance to physical affection, obstreperousness, inability to express emotion, and unexplained crying and physical changes such as rigidity and deformity."⁵⁹

The expression above implies that autistic children fail in their communicative system which causes them some difficulties in their language acquisition either in expressing themselves or understanding others' expressions.

However, 'abnormal' children in England at that period were described as "*extraordinary*" and "*absolutely not ordinary*"⁶⁰ such as Ben in *The Fifth Child*. In addition,

they were represented as hyperactive children and were not recognized as autistics or different by doctors because they could not acknowledge their disability. Therefore, Ben is described as a hyperactive child by Dr. Brett who does not want to admit his difference and abnormality. Lessing writes: "*He's a hyperactive child—that's how they are described these days.*"⁶¹ He always says to Harriet that he is a healthy child and everything is normal with him. Lessing asserts: "*He's physically normal for eighteen months. He's very strong and active of course, but he's always been that.*"⁶² Indeed, Dr. Brett claims that Ben is in good health condition, and he has always been an active child since his birth.

Due to their disabilities, the disabled people are marginalized from the very beginning of their birth such as Ben in *The Fifth Child*. Lessing claims the need for the integration of the disabled into society by distinguishing between those who reject and marginalize them and the rare few who try to integrate them fully into the family and the social environment. In this context, Garland-Thomson suggests a fundamental concept in her feminist disability theory which is "*representation.*"⁶³ Thus, Ben is seen by the majority as an abnormal child since his birth. Lessing says: "*This one is a real little toughie....He's a funny little chap.*"⁶⁴ It means that at his birth, Ben was identified as different from his family.

Because of their physical differences, the disabled are perceived as 'others', and are quickly rejected by society. In this context, Garland-Thomson uses another important domain in her theory which she calls "*the Body*"⁶⁵ and identifies physical disability as "*bodily differences*"⁶⁶ that some people are born with. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's difference is quickly noticed in his physical appearance. Lessing asserts: "*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.*"⁶⁷ Therefore, Ben is rejected by his family members from the first sight except his mother who tries to protect him. It is illustrated when he was "*always quickly handed back*" to his mother by everyone.⁶⁸ In other words, due to his disability no one carries

Ben a long time in his arms. In addition, Barbara Almond argues: “*This baby is feared and pushed away, before birth and after.*”⁶⁹ In this context, Hung, Shu-Ming writes: “*Ben’s body appears to be very different from that of the ordinary or normative body, and his more “primal” perception and action disturb the normal interaction between self and others.*”⁷⁰ It means that Ben’s physical appearance is noticed as different from the usual standard body, and he is distinguished as the other from his first behavior.

The disabled people in England at that time were perceived as monsters and strangers. Therefore, Lessing uses Ben as a representation of all the disabled people in order to evoke and incite people to change their behaviors towards them. According to her analysis of the Western thought, Garland-Thomson identifies that the disabled are represented “*as defective departures*”⁷¹ from the norm like Ben who is seen as a supernatural being in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. Arumugam states: “*In both, the Fifth Child and Ben in the world, Ben, is clearly established as a “monster” within his family.*”⁷² Lessing states that Ben is seen “*like a troll, or a goblin or something...this alien.*”⁷³ Arumugam adds: “*Ben is described as abnormal, Monster, Dopy, Dwarfey, Yeti, Alien Two, Hobbit, and Gremlin- clearly not a normal child.*”⁷⁴ At his birth, Ben is seen like a stranger, not the one whom the doctor and the family members expected to see.

In *Ben, in the World*, Lessing presents Ben as an adult of eighteen years old. However, because of his disability he appears older than he is. Lessing writes: “*he was wearing a jacket too big from him-who must be at least forty.*”⁷⁵ His disability makes him appear older like a man of forty, so people do not believe that he is really eighteen. Therefore, Ben as an adult undergoes the same perceptions as when he was a child. He is observed as ‘the other’ outside the family life as Lessing makes him face society. Lessing asserts that even though Ben appears older than his real age, his behaviors have indeed changed from when he was a child as he behaves normally. Lessing argues: “*He picked up a spoon and used it, conscious of*

every movement, being careful, eating tidily, though it was evident he was very hungry.”⁷⁶ In other words, Ben acquired the normal behaviors, which make him a normal person. In addition, Lessing portrays how the disabled are seen as “*departures*”⁷⁷ from the human norm. In fact, Ben as an adult is described as a ‘deviant human’ since he behaves on the basis of instinct. It is illustrated through his sexual behaviors with a prostitute named Rita. Lessing says: “*She has told him it hadn’t been like being with a man, more like an animal. You know, like dogs.*”⁷⁸ He is also represented as “*a hairy ape.*”⁷⁹

Besides, the disabled are hated by society as they are not accepted for their differences. Garland-Thomson claims that the disabled people are portrayed as subjects of “*hate.*”⁸⁰ In *The Fifth Child*, Ben is hated by everyone in his family, especially by his siblings after he had broken Paul’s arm. They quickly formed a feeling of hate towards him and ignored him. Lessing claims: “*they had discussed Ben and knew what to think about him.*”⁸¹ Anna Casablancas comments: “*everybody sees him as fearful, he is called names as “the nasty little brute”*”⁸² *and treated without any love or tenderness.*”⁸³ In other words, Ben is seen as a danger, and everyone behaves unpleasantly towards him. Because of his disability, everyone fears him and considers him as a threat to the family. It can be related to what Willie V. Bryan calls “*the fear of the unknown*”⁸⁴ as everyone ignores the type of disability from which Ben suffers and does not know how to interact correctly with him. Arumugam argues: “*The family thinks Ben disturbs their peace, and even feels that Ben is a real threat to his other ‘normal’ siblings.*”⁸⁵ Therefore, Ben is considered as a danger to his family as they ignore his disability.

In addition to suffering from contempt and hatred, the disabled are confined and isolated far from other people. In fact, confinement and isolation seem to be the sole solution assumed by society to get rid of all the disabled people in society. Therefore, they are either isolated in specific rooms devoted to them by their family or thrown away and confined in

other places far from any social interaction or environment. The autistic people are excluded from any familiar festivities or other social activities due to society's failure to understand their identity. Bumiller suggests: "*This understanding of autistic identity counters social constructions that dehumanize, especially beliefs that justify their exclusion from activities enjoyed by "normal" people.*"⁸⁶ In this way, the disabled are the victims of society who endure different sorts of ill-treatment by their families in particular and by society in general. Peter Blank claims: "*In many cases, the person was closeted away, at home or in an institution, and had little interaction with general society...*"⁸⁷ It implies that the disabled people are often isolated and confined from society.

In *The Fifth Child*, Ben is always isolated far from the family members especially during the Christmas holidays where all the family members and other relatives celebrate the festivities. In addition, Ben is constantly confined in his room under control by the adults mostly like a prisoner because bars were put on the window for fear of throwing himself outside. Lessing asserts: "*Now Ben was almost in his room, like a prisoner.*"⁸⁸ Indeed, he does not participate at the festivities like all his siblings and cousins but is always imprisoned like an animal during the day and the night for fear of hurting his brothers and sisters. Garland-Thomson claims in her theory that subjugated bodies such as the disabled are marked as "*monsters... ungovernable, intemperate, or threatening.*"⁸⁹ Furthermore, to get rid of Ben, everyone in the family except Harriet agrees to take him to an institution in northern England, which is like a prison confining different disabled children waiting for their death. Casablancas states: "*The institution turns out to be nothing less than a center of confinement before an early death, where all types of afflicted children are waiting to die.*"⁹⁰ In other words, the institution is a detention place where disabled children are locked up till their death, like Ben who is imprisoned in that institution in Northern England.

However, Harriet disagrees with the decision because she knows that Ben will not survive at this place. She tries by all the means to convince David to change his mind, but he refuses. Lessing says: *"He's a little child," She said. "He's our child." "No, he's not," Said David, finally. "Well, he certainly isn't mine."*⁹¹ It means that David does not assume his responsibility as a father because he rejects and denies his proper son. Indeed, since Ben's birth, David's temperament changed; he becomes an impassive father and manifests a feeling of hate towards his own son. Accordingly, the day after their decision, Harriet could not react because she was not consulted on the decision of taking Ben to the institution. In fact, Lessing portrays the Lovatts' Family as a patriarchal family, where any sort of decision is taken by the father who represents the head of the family. Therefore, wives have no right to take part in any decision or act alone without consulting their husbands. They are, then, dominated by male authority. In this perspective, Helen Meekosha claims: *"Gender, as a relationship between sexes in societies, is usually seen as operating hierarchically - men being more powerful and dominant, while women are less powerful and weaker."*⁹² In other words, society differentiates between the sexes as men are always portrayed as more powerful than women.

However, to claim her rights as a woman and the rights of her son, Harriet decides to take him back from the institution. It is a way of condemning the institution and its ill-treatments of the disabled people. Indeed, Harriet decides to impose herself and her position as a woman and mother. Once there, she could not bear what is happening to her son and decides to bring him back home due to the horrible condition where he was living. The author describes the institution as a horrible and infernal place, which confines every sort of disabled children treated as monsters. Lessing writes: *"She was at the end of a long ward, which had any number of cots and beds along the walls. In the cots were-monsters."*⁹³ In this way, the institution is like a prison which keeps disabled children thrown away by their parents. The

institution represents how the disabled children in England were ill-treated at that time and imprisoned like monsters in cages far from their families and society. In *Ben, in the World*, Ben as an adult endures the same sufferings as when he was a child. He is taken to the institution known as “*the bad place*” or “*the cages*”⁹⁴ by the American professor Gaumlach for the sake of sacrificing him into science. In addition, He is put in a cage like an animal as Lessing describes him: “*He was unclothed, this creature who had been clothed since he was born.*”⁹⁵ It means that Ben is captured in a cage and uncovered like an animal.

However, to claim the rights of the disabled people, Lessing condemns the negative representation of the disabled and employs integration as an important means to incorporate them within society and make them part within the range of normality. Bumiller asserts: “*it is crucial to affirm a conception of citizenship that fully incorporates people with autism and values their participation.*”⁹⁶ Said differently, Bumiller claims that it is important to integrate autistic people into society and consider them as complete citizens. Jenny Morris claims: “*Disabled people object to the way [they] are portrayed in charity advertisements. [They] object to words like suffer, condemned, confined, victim, and to negative images portraying disability.*”⁹⁷ Said differently, disabled people oppose how they are depicted negatively in advertisements. Therefore, in *The Fifth Child*, Lessing recounts both the story of the disabled Ben and that of his mother, Harriet as he stands for her. However, in *Ben, in the World*, Ben’s story is told by an omniscient voice which stands for some other female characters present in the novel. Thus, integrating the disabled into society implies transforming women’s concerns. In this context, Garland-Thomson embodies two main concepts in her theory that are known as “integration” and “transformation”. The former involves the complete inclusion of the disabled within society. The latter suggests the revision of the stereotypes attributed to women’s inferiority in society as well as those attributed to the disabled.

Therefore, in *The Fifth Child*, Lessing distinguishes between Ben's parents. One can notice that Harriet always tries to socialize and integrate him into society. However, David does not accept him as his proper child. In this context, Garland-Thomson asserts that the disabled are portrayed as subjects of "*neglect*."⁹⁸ In fact, Harriet is the only one who does everything to socialize him starting from the family. She always looks after him when the other children were absent. Lessing writes:

She did make a point of going to him every day when the other children were out of the way, and taking him to the big bed for a time of petting and play, as she had with all of them.⁹⁹

The statement above claims that Harriet does not differentiate between her four other children and Ben. On the contrary, she treats him as a normal child like the other ones. Therefore, Harriet assumes her responsibility as a mother by accepting her son's difference, educating, socializing, and integrating him into the family environment. In this concern, Andrea O'Reilly advances: "*the view that mothers can affect social change through the socialization of children, particularly, in terms of challenging traditional patterns of gender acculturation*."¹⁰⁰ With assuming their roles of mothers by socializing their children, women can accomplish social change and improve their positions in society. In addition, Landry Denys argues that Harriet decides to take care of Ben the sooner she notices that his siblings start to marginalize him. She writes: "*after overhearing her relatives denigrate Ben, Harriet decides to make a concerted effort to foster the mother-son connection*."¹⁰¹ Accordingly, Harriet has always been with him in the absence of the other children and always tries to equalize him to them. Lessing claims:

Harriet was alone with Ben during the day. She tried to be with him as she had with the others. She sat on the floor with building blocks and toys you could push about. She showed him colourful pictures. She sang him little rhymes.¹⁰²

It is her way to normalize him and integrate him into the family. Moreover, the only moment when the other family members think of Ben as a normal child is when he pronounces his first

words. Then, the children encourage him to speak again by saying “*That’s very good, Ben*”, “*Clever Ben!*”¹⁰³

Indeed, Harriet focuses all her attention on Ben when she brings him back home from the institution by reassuring him that he is no more in that horrible place but safely at home. Besides, she tries again to normalize and re-integrate him into the family life by educating him. The author claims that the institution has dissocialized Ben as he has lost all the social behaviors that he has acquired from his mother. However, once at home, his mother re-socializes him again by re-educating him for the sake of a normal family life. In this perspective, Lessing writes:

She talked quietly while he ate. “And now listen to me, Ben. You have to listen. You behave well and everything will be all right. You must eat properly. You must use the pot or go to the lavatory. And you mustn’t scream and fight.”¹⁰⁴

Said differently, to re-socialize Ben requires teaching him some of the social norms and how to behave well within the family’s atmosphere. Lessing adds: “*How she felt at this time was that she was shielding them from Ben while she re-educated him for family life.*”¹⁰⁵ In fact, Harriet’s reaction is a manner to contradict patriarchal authority and stereotypes of women’s inferiority. Therefore, Harriet’s decision is a metaphor for women’s concern in England. For Lessing, the socialization of the disabled is an important concept because it is a way of integrating them fully into the social milieu.

On the other hand, David does not undertake his role as a father because he does not accept Ben’s difference. He rather rejects, ignores, and disowns him. Such a reaction is directed only to Ben since he is different, for with the other children, he behaves as a lovely father who assumes his role of taking care of his family. Lessing argues:

When he bent to kiss her goodbye, and stroke Luke’s head, it was with a fierce possessiveness that Harriet liked and understood, for it was not herself being possessed, or the baby, but happiness. Hers and his.¹⁰⁶

The quotation above states that, at the beginning of the novel, David is described as an affectionate father towards his family. However, he changes with the birth of Ben. In this context, Frida Pöde maintains: “*Already during the pregnancy, it is clear that David does not feel an emotional bond with Ben, as he had done with the previous children.*”¹⁰⁷ Casablanca asserts: “*Harriet becomes the only parent to Ben, since David avoids this responsibility and concentrates on taking care of the other children.*”¹⁰⁸ It means that Harriet is the only one who takes care of Ben within the family since David ignores him and cares after the four other ones.

In addition, in *Ben, in the World*, Lessing differentiates between those who try to integrate Ben into society and those who take profit from his disability. Lessing uses “*the birth certificate*”¹⁰⁹ as Ben’s identity and a way of integrating him as a complete citizen within society. Therefore, Lessing embodies three main female characters who try to integrate Ben into society and socialize him. In fact, the old woman named Ellen Biggs cares of Ben and acts as a mother to him despite her old age. Lessing writes: “*Ben sat down, and his hands were already about to dig into the mounds of meat, when he saw the old woman shake her head at him.*”¹¹⁰ In other words, the old woman plays the role of Ben’s second mother as she reminds him how to behave well when eating. In this perspective, Björn Sundberg claims: “*She is old and alone but she is strong enough to care about others. She tries to help Ben by feeding him and directing his life.*”¹¹¹ In addition, Ellen Biggs makes efforts to integrate him when she sends him to the office to claim unemployment and then asks him to bring his birth certificate, which suggests his identity. It implies his existence as a human being and his full integration into society.

In addition to the old woman, Mary Grindly and Teresa Alves are other female characters who try to integrate Ben into society by looking after him as their brother. Mary Grindly tries to socialize Ben by offering him to work in her farm and does not make a

difference between him and her brothers. Similarly, Teresa Alves tries to socialize and integrate him into society by taking care of him and protecting him from Alex's film project. Lessing writes: "*But she was friendly, and helpful, making food for him, offering him juice, and when he sat silent and doleful included him in what she said.*"¹¹² It implies that Teresa acts as a sister to Ben. Besides, Teresa Alves plays the role of Ben's mother as she rescues him from 'the bad place' where he has been captured as an animal. She, then, protects him as his mother and calms him down by making him understand that he is safer with her. Therefore, each of Ellen Biggs, Mary Grindly, and Teresa Alves stand for women's concerns in England as they take care of Ben as a disabled person and react to men's patriarchal authority.

However, Lessing condemns the malicious way of integrating the disabled which implies taking advantages from their disabilities. The author portrays some characters who try to integrate Ben into society by taking profit from his disability. After departing from the Grindly farm, Ben worked in a building site where the workers took advantage from his disability and cheating him by stealing all his money. In addition, Johnston tries to integrate Ben into society by falsifying him a passport as a film actor to send him to France with the benefit of making him carry cocaine without knowing.

Besides, Alex is another character who takes profit from Ben as he wants to make a film with him about primitive societies. Lessing argues: "*Alex, with that vision or dream in his mind of the dwarfs, or whatever they were, was thinking that he would make a film with Ben.*"¹¹³ Moreover, Inez and the professor Gaumlach also take profit from Ben as they want to sacrifice him into science's hands and treat him like 'an animal'. Therefore, Lessing condemns the cruel treatment of the disabled by society and calls for the integration and protection of all the disabled despite their differences.

Lessing condemns the society's behaviors towards the disabled and claims the need to accept their difference and integrate them as normal humans. Integrating them into the social environment is a way of helping them to behave normally among other people. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben has learned some of the social imperatives that his mother taught him. It makes him a normal child since he has acquired how to behave well and how to ask for his daily needs and sometimes imitates his siblings' behaviors; Lessing writes:

He scrambled energetically onto a chair, and set himself to be like them. He knew he mustn't talk with his mouth full, for instance, or eat with his mouth open. He carefully obeyed such imperatives, the energetic animal movements of his jaws confined behind closed lips, waiting till his mouth was empty before saying, "Ben get down now. Ben wants go to bed."¹¹⁴

The quotation above suggests that Ben is a normal human being rather than a monster like everyone thinks about him. The fact that he learns some of the social norms makes him a normal person who needs to be accepted by everyone around him.

Schooling is another way of socializing hence integrating. Therefore, Lessing claims the need to integrate the disabled into society by schooling them. It implies the incorporation of the disabled children within society as they will be assimilated with other children and teachers. In this perspective, Bryan suggest: "*A goal of the legislation is to integrate students with disabilities, as much as possible, particularly those with developmental disabilities into the regular classroom with their nondisabled classmates.*"¹¹⁵ In other words, it is imperative to include and assimilate the disabled with the nondisabled as a way of affirming their whole social integration and socialization. In addition to teaching Ben some of the social norms, Harriet decides to school him. Thus, at the age of five, he is sent to school where he is described as a normal child but a slow learner by his teachers. Lessing argues: "*He's a good little chap. He tries so hard.*"¹¹⁶ However, the headmistress like Dr. Brett does not acknowledge that Ben is abnormal. She only assumes that "*he is hyperactive, perhaps?*" since he has "*this extraordinary energy.*"¹¹⁷

Besides schooling, Harriet tries to socialize Ben by making him face the world with John as his protector and his gang, with whom he spends all his time after school. Therefore, at the age of eleven, Ben went to the secondary school where he is also perceived as a normal child by the headmaster, who also refuses to admit that he is different from the others. She only says “*Ben Lovatt is not an academic child, but... He tries hard... He still tried to fit in, to copy others.*”¹¹⁸ Moreover, he quickly finds another gang with whom he spends all his time after school. Ben’s new friends are described as “*a group of youths, large, or thin, or plump, dark, fair, or redheaded.*”¹¹⁹ The fact that Ben is quickly integrated into that gang of youth makes him a normal child. He is rather abnormal in the eyes of his family with whom he does not fit. In fact, Ben is not the only one who is marginalized and ill-treated by society, but the members of his gang are also considered as social ‘marginals’ without any place to live in. Indeed, Ben spends much of his time with his new gang since he fits to their life-style until he finally decides to leave his home to go away with his elderly school friends.

In addition to Ben, Lessing portrays two other disabled characters in the two novels. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing presents Amy as another disabled child. However, Amy’s disability is different from that of Ben because she is born with Down syndrome. Harriet describes Amy as “*the mongol child*”, “*Genghis Khan*”, “*A baby Genghis Khan with her squashed little face and the slitty eyes?*”¹²⁰ However, she feels regretful as she becomes deeply involved with the issue of disability after giving birth to Ben. As soon as she has a disabled child, she questions the nature of his disability. Therefore, she thinks about ‘Down Syndrome’, but never uses the word ‘mongol’: “*What is wrong with him?*” [...] *No one calls it mongol now.*”¹²¹ Amy’s mother Sarah always protects her daughter from people’s looks and thoughts. Lessing writes: “*She gently puts her hand over the sleeping Amy’s head, covered in a shawl, holding it safe from the world.*”¹²² In this way, Sarah resembles Harriet when protecting her daughter as she assumes her role of a mother.

Furthermore, Lessing claims the need to protect and integrate the disabled despite their disability since they are all human beings. Therefore, Lessing distinguishes between Ben's and Amy's treatment by the family. While Ben is rejected and marginalized by his family and society except his mother, Amy is fully integrated and loved by all her family members, even Ben's siblings. Lessing cites: "*Her head was too big, her body too squat, but she was full of love and kisses and everyone adored her. Helen, who had longed to make a pet of Ben, was now able to love Amy.*"¹²³ Yet, at the beginning Amy is rejected by Ben's siblings just like they have done with him. Lessing claims: "*The children, the way they did these days, were looking at each other, excluding her [Amy].*"¹²⁴ Arumugam asserts: "*one cannot miss noticing the difference in the treatment between Ben 'a monster' and Amy, the child with Down's syndrome, when both fall under the same paradigm of 'disability'.*"¹²⁵ The fact that Amy is adored by everyone while Ben is not does not mean that people's views and treatments are unjust since they make the difference between Amy and Ben. It can be explained by the difference in their disabilities. Indeed, Lessing incites people to change their behaviors over the disabled as they all need to be protected and integrated into society.

Moreover, Lessing shows the difference between autistic and Down syndrome's children. Contrary to Ben's agitated character due to his autism, Amy is always calm and tries to play with the other children or with the dog that she likes too much. Lessing argues: "*Sarah said this dog was like a nursemaid to Amy.*"¹²⁶ In this context, Becky L. Spivey claims: "*Children with Down syndrome are known for their happy attitudes, loving spirits, and playfulness.*"¹²⁷ In other words, children with Down's syndrome are quiet and peaceful contrary to other disabled children. Hung, Shu-Ming argues: "*Compared to Amy, the child suffering from Down's syndrome, who looks different but is accepted because she is affectionate and attaches herself to people, Ben is simply seen as defective and violent.*"¹²⁸ In

other words, because of the difference of their disabilities Amy and Ben are treated differently by the family.

In *Ben, in the World*, Lessing depicts Matthew Grindly as another disabled person in addition to Ben. However, Matthew's disability also differs from that of Ben as he suffers from physical impairment. Lessing writes: "*Matthew [...] the half-crippled coughing man.*"¹²⁹ Therefore, the difference in their disabilities makes the difference in their treatments by society. Lessing portrays Ben as he is marginalized by his family except his mother and some female characters that claim their rights as women and call for the protection of the disabled in society. However, Matthew as a crippled man is treated as a normal person since he is cared by his sister, who plays the role of his mother. Thus, Lessing claims the need to integrate and protect all the disabled people in society without differentiating between them.

Endnotes

⁴⁵Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 18.

⁴⁶Doris Lessing, *The Fifth Child* (New York: Vintage International, 1988), 35.

⁴⁷Ibid, 38.

⁴⁸Ibid, 49.

⁴⁹G. Esposito, S. de Falco and P. Venuti, 'Expression of Distress in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the First Two Years of Life', in *Contemporary Issues in Intellectual Disabilities*, ed. Prasher V. P. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 183-85.

⁵⁰Eric Zander, 'An introduction to autism', *Autism Forum*, trans. Scott Spellerberg (2004). Viewed on 15 March 2014.

http://www.autismforum.se/gn/export/download/af_oversattningar/Introduktion_om_autism_engelska.pdf

⁵¹Emily Clark, 'Voiceless Bodies: Feminism, Disability, Posthumanism' (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013).

⁵²Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 89.

⁵³Ibid, 56.

⁵⁴Mark Osteen, *Autism and Representation: A Comprehensive Introduction*, ed. Mark Osteen (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

⁵⁵Zander, *Autism*, 1, 2.

⁵⁶Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 68.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Zander, *Autism*, 2.

⁵⁹Kristin Bumiller, 'Quick Citizens: Autism and the Anti-Normalization of Politics', *The American Political Science Association*, 1-4 September 2005, 4. Viewed on 5 April 2014.

http://www.asnz.exofire.net/web_documents/quirky_citizens_autism_gender_and_reimagining_disability.pdf

- ⁶⁰ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 51.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 63.
- ⁶² Ibid, 63, 64.
- ⁶³ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 18.
- ⁶⁴ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 48.
- ⁶⁵ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 22.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, 13.
- ⁶⁷ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 48.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 56.
- ⁶⁹ Barbara Almond, *The Monster within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (California: University of California Press, 2010), 113.
- ⁷⁰ Shu-Ming, 'Intersubjectivity'.
- ⁷¹ Garland- Thomson, 18.
- ⁷² Arumugam, 'Monster, Anxiety'.
- ⁷³ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 49, 50.
- ⁷⁴ Arumugam, 'Monster, Anxiety'.
- ⁷⁵ Doris Lessing, *Ben, in the World* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 1.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, 6.
- ⁷⁷ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 18.
- ⁷⁸ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 39.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 50.
- ⁸⁰ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 21.
- ⁸¹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*: 58.
- ⁸² Anna Casablancas, Creating Oneself as a Mother: Dreams, Reality and Identity in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988), (UniversitatAutonoma de Barcelona). Viewed on 13 April 2014.
<http://www.forumjournal.org/article/view/653>
- ⁸³ Ibid, 5.
- ⁸⁴ Bryan, Willie V., ed. d., *Sociopolitical Aspects of Disabilities* (New York: Charles C Thomas, 2010), 209.
- ⁸⁵ Arumugam, 'Monster, Anxiety'.
- ⁸⁶ Bumiller, 'Autism and the Anti-Normalization', 4.
- ⁸⁷ Peter Blank, 'U. S. Society and Laws Protect the Rights of persons with Disabilities', *Society and values: Disability and Ability* 11 (2006): 5-8.
- ⁸⁸ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 59.
- ⁸⁹ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 12.
- ⁹⁰ Casablancas, 'Dreams, Reality and Identity', 7.
- ⁹¹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 74.
- ⁹² Helen Meekosha, Gender and Disability: Draft Entry for the Forthcoming Sage Encyclopedia of Disability (university of New South Wales, 2004), 2. Viewed on 13 March 2014.
<http://socialwork.arts.unsw.edu.au/>
- ⁹³ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 81.
- ⁹⁴ Lessing, *Ben in the World*, 131.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, 146.
- ⁹⁶ Bumiller, 'Autism and the Anti-Normalization', 4.
- ⁹⁷ Jenny Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability* (London: The Women's Press, 1991), 73.
- ⁹⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 21.
- ⁹⁹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 56.

- ¹⁰⁰ Andrea O'Reilly, ed., *From Motherhood to Mothering: the Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Women Born* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 160.
- ¹⁰¹ Denys Landry, 'Maternal Blitz: Harriet Lovatt as Postpartum Sufferer in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child*', in *Textual Mothers/ Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, Edrs. Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 157-68.
- ¹⁰² Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 67.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, 68.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 89.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 17, 18.
- ¹⁰⁷ Frida Pöde, Fatherhood in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (Bachelor's Degree Essay, Lund University, 2010).
- ¹⁰⁸ Casablancas, 'Dreams, Reality and Identity', 7.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 4.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid, 6.
- ¹¹¹ Sundberg, 'Patriarchy and Masculinity'.
- ¹¹² Lessing, *Ben in the World*, 94.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 80.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid, 95.
- ¹¹⁵ Bryan, *Aspects of Disabilities*, 260.
- ¹¹⁶ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 99.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid, 100.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid, 120.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid, 121.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid, 22.
- ¹²¹ Ibid, 61.
- ¹²² Ibid, 27.
- ¹²³ Ibid, 66.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid.
- ¹²⁵ Arumugam, 'Monster, Anxiety'.
- ¹²⁶ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 71.
- ¹²⁷ Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed. 'What Is Down Syndrome?' *Super Duper Publication* 116 (2006): 2. Viewed on 2 March 2014. http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/116_Down_Syndrome.pdf
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2. Feminist Concern

This part of my work deals with the feminist concern in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. It involves the celebration of mothering and maternity, the changes of the body, including pregnancies as real marks of difference between women and men, and women's resistance to oppose patriarchal stereotypes of women's inferiority. These four prominent factors are portrayed by the female characters of the two novels including Harriet Lovatt, Mrs. Biggs, Mary Grindly and Teresa Alves.

In fact, the feminist concepts used by Lessing in her two novels depict women's concerns in contemporary England as they differ from those of the past decades when women called for their emancipation and proclaimed the right to vote and participate in the public sphere of power and influence. Feminism has, indeed, moved forward throughout the recent years as women celebrate their femininity through the states of womanhood, mothering and maternity and demonstrate their feminine differences from men. In this concern, Lessing in *The Fifth Child* demonstrates that her female character, Harriet, accomplishes her role as a mother and a powerful woman. Therefore, her decision to go to the institution and bring her son back is a real mark of achieving her responsibility. Lessing writes: "*Then one morning she started up out of sleep, out of a bad dream, though she did not know what, and she said, 'I'm going to see what they are doing to Ben.'*"¹³⁰ It means that her instinct as mother persuades her to react and attain her mothering's role. In this concern, Emily Jeremiah reports: "*Mothering, in Rich's view, is an activity that involves change and contradiction, 'anger and tenderness.'*"¹³¹ In other words, 'mothering' is a real mark of change for women's status and contradicts males' superiority to them.

Andrea O'Reilly states that Adrienne Rich distinguishes between the notions of 'motherhood' and 'mothering' and claims:

The term *motherhood* refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the

word *mothering* refers to women's experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women.¹³²

Said differently, 'motherhood' is used as a patriarchal institution in which men exhibit their oppression over women. However, 'mothering' depicts women's practices as mothers such as maternity through which their empowerment is proclaimed.

Therefore, to call for social change, feminists identify some features as key concepts to counter patriarchal authority and oppression in society. In fact, as a way to affirm their sexist discourse, men always consider themselves superior to women in all the spheres of life. However, feminists always struggle to save their places as women and mothers in society. Thus, '*Mothering*' becomes a central feminist issue of women's resistance and concern to reform society and confirm that patriarchal representations are untrue. In this sense, Podnieks and O'Reilly theorize upon the emergence of a genre of narratives that focuses on mothers: "*emphasizing matrifocal narratives, it unearths maternal themes, perspectives, and texts, and thereby contributes to the archaeology of maternity.*"¹³³ In this perspective, O'Reilly adds: "*mothering, freed from motherhood, could be experienced as a site of empowerment, a location of social change.*"¹³⁴ Said differently, 'mothering' is a crucial issue of social change and women's resistance in society. Thus, Harriet's reaction can be considered as a crucial step towards social change for women's concern in contemporary England. In addition, O'Reilly uses the term '*mothering against motherhood*'¹³⁵ to condemn the patriarchal institution of motherhood. She claims: "*Feminist theorists on motherhood call for the eradication of the institution of motherhood so as to make mothering less oppressive to women.*"¹³⁶ In fact, feminist scholars claim the need to abolish the patriarchal institution of motherhood as a dominating tool over women.

Lessing uses 'mothering and maternity' in *The Fifth Child* as real marks of difference between women and men to advocate women's civil and social rights. In fact, women take the responsibility of mothering in addition to their working outside home. The fact that they are

responsible and take care of their children means that they assume their roles of mothering. Thus, ‘mothering and maternity’ are highlighted throughout Harriet and Sara as mothers of disabled children. Harriet takes the responsibility of a mother of five children at home and a worker to help in the needs of the household outside home as she is a bread-winner like her husband. As a mother, Harriet tries to assume perfectly her role by nursing, educating, and taking care of her children. Furthermore, after Ben’s birth, Harriet continues to accomplish her mothering responsibility as she has done with the four other children. Therefore, she nurses Ben even though he sucks her when breast-feeding him. She always considers him a normal child and spends her time and plays with him as she has done with the others. Lessing writes:

She did make the point of going to him every day when the other children were out of the way, and taking him to the big bed for a time of petting and play, as she had with all of them.¹³⁷

The above quote suggests that Harriet is assuming her maternal and mother’s roles as she had done with the four other children even though this one is different from the others.

Furthermore, Lessing depicts the idea of ‘*motherhood as an institution*’ with David as a patriarchal father and attacks it with Harriet’s reactions to him. David’s patriarchal authority is revealed when he decides to take his own son to the institution without consulting his wife. Lessing says:

David went upstairs, and brought down suitcases and holdalls that he had packed quietly while she was giving the children breakfast [...] he picked Ben up from where he sat on the floor in the living-room, carried him to the van, and put him in. Then he came fast to Harriet, [...] turned her away from the sight of the van, which was already on its way.¹³⁸

The quotation above claims that David is a patriarchal father who takes the responsibility of the fate of his son alone without discussing with his wife. Therefore, Harriet blames him of “*taking all the responsibility.*”¹³⁹ However, Lessing counters the idea of ‘patriarchal motherhood’ through Harriet, who affirms her ‘*empowerment*’¹⁴⁰ and plays her role of

'mothering against motherhood'¹⁴¹ by affirming herself as a mother when she brings back her son home. O'Reilly adds: "*Empowered mothering thus calls into question the dictates of patriarchal motherhood.*"¹⁴² In other words, women claim the need to contradict 'patriarchal motherhood' by assuming their mothering's roles.

Besides, O'Reilly writes: "*to use Rich's words, women became "outlaws from the institution of motherhood."*"¹⁴³ In other words, women become criminals in the eyes of men who maintain them in the patriarchal institution of motherhood. As an illustration, in *The Fifth Child*, Harriet's decision to take back her son from the institution makes her a kind of criminal and outlaw in the eyes of her husband and her children, who would never forgive her for that reaction. Harriet says: "*All right, I'm a criminal. But they were killing him.*"¹⁴⁴ Therefore, as she could not tolerate what is happening to Ben, she decides to save him from the horrible conditions of the institution. Sara is another female character portrayed in *The Fifth Child*, assuming her mothering's role. In fact, her mothering practices are illustrated when protecting her Down syndrome daughter, Amy, from people's looks. Lessing states: "*Amy's head, covered in a shawl, holding it safe from the world.*"¹⁴⁵ In this sense, Sara resembles Harriet as they both assume their mothering's responsibilities by protecting and taking care of their disabled children.

Besides mothering and maternity, Lessing presents other major feminist elements, which consist of playing mothering and sisterhood's roles, reflected by three female characters in *Ben, in the World*. Ellen Biggs, the old woman, is a prominent female character depicted in the novel as she acts as a mother for Ben by integrating him into society despite his disability. Lessing argues: "*The old woman came back, and said, 'Now Ben,' [...] 'Do sit down,' [...] He shut his eyes, and with his teeth bared, this time in a grin of resignation, he let her wash him.*"¹⁴⁶ It means that the old woman considers Ben as her own son since she washes him and gives him a bath as she would have done to her proper son. In addition,

Lessing claims: “*She said, ‘Ben, I want you to go to the bathroom, take off your clothes and wash yourself. ‘You don’t smell good.’*”¹⁴⁷ In other words, the old woman orders Ben and acts as his second mother. Thus, the previous sentence implies the old woman’s social integration of Ben. In this perspective, Björn Sundberg claims: “*she strengthens her motherly caring identity by taking care of Ben without seeing much of his inner feelings of fear or of sentimentality.*”¹⁴⁸ In addition, Mary Grindly is another female character who plays the role of a mother and a sister to Ben. In fact, Mary takes care of her brothers as their mother and gives them imperatives to manage the farm. Lessing argues:

It was she who ran the farm. She told her brothers what to do: mend that fence...clean out and byre...take the sheep for shearing... plant the vegetables. She was at them all the day and bitter because she had to be.¹⁴⁹

The quotation above claims that Mary Grindly acts as a mother to her brothers. Therefore, she assumes her responsibility to her brothers as a woman. Similarly, Mary Grindly acts as a sister to Ben despite his difference. Lessing asserts: “*She mended his clothes, bought him a new thick jersey for the winter, and gave him plenty of meat to eat.*”¹⁵⁰ In other words, Mary takes care of Ben and does not distinguish him from her brothers. Likewise, Teresa Alves looks after Ben as a sister and a mother as she tries to integrate him into society. Lessing argues:

Teresa took Ben to the bathroom and- as the old woman had done- took gently what remained of his clothes, without embarrassment, talking gently to him. ‘It’s all right, you’re safe now, don’t be frightened, poor Ben, stand in the shower, that’s right.’¹⁵¹

The statement above claims that Teresa Alves takes care of Ben and acts as a mother to him like the old woman. Therefore, through her four female characters, Lessing opposes the patriarchal view that women are inferior, weak and incapable. It affirms that women are capable of assuming their mothering’s responsibilities and their status in society as they are more relational than men.

Another feminist concept depicted in Lessing's *The Fifth Child* is bodily differences with pregnancies as real marks that differentiate women from men. In the novel, Harriet's body is described as deformed because of her pregnancies. Lessing argues that her first pregnancy made of her "*an enormous, flushed, clumsily moving woman [...] she had been sick a lot, slept badly from indigestion.*"¹⁵² Because of her pregnancy, Harriet's body undergoes changes, and she always feels ill. Lessing adds: "*Harriet was not very well: her pregnancies had continued uncomfortable and full of minor problems—nothing serious, but she was tired.*"¹⁵³ It affirms that Harriet has always been made ill because of her pregnancies. Therefore, all her pregnancies were difficult especially her fifth one, which renders her exceedingly tired and sick. Lessing claims: "*this new foetus was poisoning her.*"¹⁵⁴ In this context, Clark affirms: "*Significantly, it is only with the fifth child that Harriet's pregnant body seems to violently turn against her.*"¹⁵⁵ Said differently, it is with her fifth pregnancy that Harriet suffers a lot. Lessing adds reporting Harriet: "*Just look at that,*" *she said as her stomach heaved up, convulsed, subsided. "Five months."*¹⁵⁶ Society has created an ideal woman which is known as the beautiful and standard body as what Garland-Thomson calls "*the normate.*"¹⁵⁷ In her work *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), Garland-Thomson writes:

The term normate usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.¹⁵⁸

The quotation above states that the 'normate' is a culturally constructed word, identifying people who see themselves distinct and superior from those who have bodily difficulties, according to their societal position of life. In this context, Garland-Thomson adds: "*Such culturally generated and perpetuated standards as "beauty," "independence," "fitness," "competence" and "normalcy" exclude and disable many human bodies while validating and affirming others.*"¹⁵⁹ To carry on the idea of "*normalcy*", Robert McRuer says:

The most successful able-bodied subject is the one whose ability is not compromised by queerness [metaphorized as disability]. This consolidation occurs through complex processes of conflation and stereotype: people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer..., while queer are often understood as disabled.¹⁶⁰

Said differently, the normal body is that able-body which is not affected by any strange appearance, whereas disability is always associated with queerness and vice versa. In this context, Robert McRuer refers to “*able-bodied identity*”¹⁶¹ and “*compulsory ablebodiedness*”¹⁶² as an imposed characteristic to women in order to appear as ideal normal persons in society. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing describes Harriet’s breasts as not beautiful ones because of breast-feeding. Lessing asserts: “*They were bruised black all around the nipples [...] poor breast*”.¹⁶³ It implies that Harriet’s body does not belong to the beautiful and standard one that is constructed by society. In this perspective, Garland-Thomson states that culture has created ‘*cosmetic surgery*’¹⁶⁴ in order to permit women to have beautiful and able-bodied bodies. Garland-Thomson writes: “*Cosmetic surgery driven by gender ideology and market demand, now enforces feminine body ideals and standardizes female bodies toward what I call “the normate.”*”¹⁶⁵ It implies that society wants to reform women’s bodies by their industrially created cure. However, women were against that cultural creation because it excludes many categories such as pregnant and disabled women. In fact, pregnancy is a situation known only by women. They are the only ones who endure the sufferings and the difficulties of the situation. However, men perceive pregnant women as disabled and abnormal with their bodily changes, and they do not support them during their difficult moments. Therefore, the changes that women’s bodies undergo during pregnancies mark their difference from men. Lessing portrays the changes that occurred to Harriet’s body during her pregnancies, especially her fifth one. She is always described as “*enormous*”¹⁶⁶ at each of her pregnancies. Thus, the word “*enormous*” suggests the deformity of her body. Garland-Thomson claims: “*women and the disabled are portrayed as helpless, dependent, weak,*

vulnerable, and incapable bodies.”¹⁶⁷ In this way, women are considered in the same position of inferiority either in their bodily difference or in their position in the society.

In addition to pregnancy, Lessing exploits the concept of ‘sexuality’ in *The Fifth Child* to denounce the ‘institutionalized heterosexuality’ which views that women were “*not passionate,*” *frigid*, [and] *sexually passive.*”¹⁶⁸ In this concern, Garland-Thomson writes: “*women, for example, are considered castrated [...] they are thought to be hysterical or have overactive hormones.*”¹⁶⁹ Besides, Mary Eagleton argues that such representation as “*lack and castration [...] are assigned to femininity.*”¹⁷⁰ In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing describes Harriet in the beginning of the novel as a woman with sexual difficulties related to her complexity in seducing men. Thus, her sexual difficulty can be understood as a deficiency of her body. Lessing claims about Harriet:

She had sometimes felt herself unfortunate or deficient in some way, because the men with whom she went out for a meal or the cinema would take her refusal as much as evidence of a pathological outlook as an ungenerous one.¹⁷¹

The statement above claims that Harriet has some troubles with her sexual behaviors as she refuses to offer to the men she meets what they desire. Thus, they consider her refusal as a disease. In this way, Garland-Thomson identifies that a woman who has sexual difficulties is considered as a ‘disabled’ as she is medically nicknamed a “*love deficient*” woman [and falls into] “*the cultural stereotype of the ugly woman or perhaps the lesbian, [which] suggests how sexuality and appearance slide into the terms of disability.*”¹⁷²

Besides pregnancy and sexuality, aging is another mark of bodily difference that can be noticed in women’s bodies. However, aging concerns both women and men’s bodies. In this sense, all aged people are considered similarly inferior as the disabled and women. Lessing describes Mrs. Ellen Biggs in *Ben, in the World* as an eighty-year old woman who is always tired and ill because of her ageing. Lessing writes: “*She wasn’t well. Her heart hurt. And she was tired.*”¹⁷³ Similarly, Harriet suffers from tiredness and exhaustion during her

pregnancies as she is always described as sick. Lessing argues: “*she had felt a tapping in her belly, demanding attention. Disbelieving, she had half sat up, looking down at her still flat, if soft, stomach, and felt the imperative beat, like a small drum.*”¹⁷⁴ In other words, her fifth pregnancy appears different and difficult as Harriet distinguishes it from the four other ones by saying “*the new being, unlike anything she had known before.*”¹⁷⁵

In his work ‘*Docile Bodies*’, Foucault portrays the body “*as object and target of power*”¹⁷⁶ throughout history. In other words, in the past decades, the body has been considered as the purpose of order and subjection. In this perspective, he adds: “*A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.*”¹⁷⁷ In other words, a body is submissive when it is easily controlled, manipulated and dominated by others. Therefore, subjected bodies are always represented as weak, vulnerable and deficient. Garland-Thomson claims in her theory: “*Subjected bodies are pictured as either deficient or as profligate.*”¹⁷⁸ In this context, she adds: “*In this economy of visual differences, those bodies deemed inferior become spectacles of otherness while the unmarked are sheltered in the neutral space of normalcy.*”¹⁷⁹ In addition, Meekosha writes: “*In the 1970s feminists attempted to differentiate gender from sex (the social from the biological) to counter the argument of women being naturally inferior and weak.*”¹⁸⁰ In fact, feminists work to dissociate gender from sex in order to contradict males’ views about women’s inferiority.

Furthermore, sexist discourse still prevails on the part of men as they always consider women as inferior to them even in contemporary England. For that reason, women have to rebel and affirm their power. Therefore, women’s resistance is another prominent feminist concept used in Lessing’s novels to depict their rights and concerns. In fact, self-affirmation and the imposition of one’s own role and opinions are fundamental elements that portray women’s resistance in society and make them keep their places in all the domains.

In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing depicts Harriet as a strong and powerful woman because of her reactions, resistance and self-affirmation. These elements show that women affirm their right, place and views to be heard in society as a way of overturning male's stereotypes over women's weakness. Harriet's resistance is portrayed from the beginning of the novel where she opposes the conventions of her time. Lessing states: "*I am sorry, I don't like all this sleeping around, it's not for me.*"¹⁸¹ Even though she knows that she is criticized by the girls working with her and made of her "*an always interesting subject, usually unkindly*"¹⁸², she keeps on her conservative values. It implies that women determine the manner they want to lead their lives.

The most important point which shows Harriet's power is when she is against taking Ben to the institution. Sundberg states: "*Motherly feelings makes Harriet go against David's and the rest of the family's decision to send Ben into an institution.*"¹⁸³ Even though David took Ben to the institution, Harriet's instinct and self-affirmation encourages her to react and bring him back home. Her reaction, then, is a kind of rebellion against both her family's and society's treatment of her son. Even if no one accepts Ben in the family, Harriet struggles to maintain her role of mother by imposing him to the family. Therefore, her decision to take back her son from the institution intersects with her responsibility as a mother. It implies that she affirms her status of a woman by assuming her mothering role. Thus, she defends both her roles as a woman and as a mother.

In addition, when she visited Ben in the institution, she imposes her opinion and determination to see him and bring him back. She counters the working man of the institution by imposing her own opinion. Lessing claims: "*I'm sick of being told I don't understand this and that. I'm the child's mother. I'm Ben Lovatt's mother. Do you understand that?*"¹⁸⁴ Harriet's reaction implies that she has her voice to be heard inside and outside the family's atmosphere. In fact, bringing Ben back home suggests his integration, which in return implies

the transformation of his mother's and women's conditions in general. Besides, When Harriet takes Ben to Dr. Gilly, she wants to affirm herself and get acknowledgement that something is wrong with him. Lessing argues: "*What she wanted, she decided, was that at last someone would use the right words, share the burden [...] She wanted to be acknowledged, her predicament given its value.*"¹⁸⁵ However, Dr. Gilly like Dr. Brett does not approve Ben's difference.

In addition to Harriet, Lessing portrays another female character, who is Teresa Alves, in *Ben, in the World* to depict women's resistance. In fact, Teresa Alves's reaction over saving Ben from Alex's hand on his film project, and the "bad place" or the institution implies her power as a woman to contradict men's views that women have not their rights to impose their roles in society. Sundberg writes:

She really tries to resist masculine power in patriarchy by preventing Alex to use Ben's queer appearance in one of his film-projects, and by trying to prevent the American professor Gaumlach from using Ben as a guinea pig.¹⁸⁶

The quotation above states that Teresa Alves's reaction of saving Ben stands for her power as a resistant woman who contradicts patriarchal authority and stereotypes of women's weakness and incapability.

All these female characters stand for women's conditions in England either by imposing their roles and opinions as their sole power to resist male patriarchy within society, or assuming their responsibilities as family members to counter male views that women are inferior to them. In this context, Sundberg assumes: "*The description of the strong female characters in the novels suggests that they can be both oppressed and oppressors in society due to their positions in complex social hierarchies.*"¹⁸⁷ The female characters stated above are presented as both dominated and resistant at the same time; they try to keep their places as strong women in society.

From all what has been said in the previous sections, one can conclude that both disability concern and feminism are intersected in Lessing's novels *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. It is reflected in her insistence on the common fates of the disabled people and women. It means that both the disabled and women are marginalized and excluded from society, and both of them have difficulties and disabilities in their bodies. It is also illustrated through the sympathy of women over the disabled, for the female characters look after the disabled Ben.

Endnotes

¹³⁰ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 77.

¹³¹ Emily Jeremiah, 'Murderous Mothers: Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' in *Motherhood to Mothering: the Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Women Born*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly ((New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 61-71.

¹³² O'Reilly, Andrea, ed., Introduction to *Feminist Mothering*, by Andrea O'Reilly (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 3.

¹³³ Podnieks Elizabeth and O'Reilly Andrea, 'Maternal Literatures in Text and Tradition: Daughter-Centric, Matrilineal, and Matrifocal Perspectives' in *Textual Mothers/ Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, Edrs. Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 1-27.

¹³⁴ O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹³⁶ Andrea O'Reilly, 'Mothering Against Motherhood and the Possibility of Empowered Maternity for Mothers and Their Children' in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, Ed. Andrea O'Reilly (New York: State University of New York, 2004), 159-74.

¹³⁷ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 56.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 76.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴² Ibid, 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴⁶ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 33.

¹⁴⁸ Sundberg, 'Patriarchy and Masculinity'.

¹⁴⁹ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 18.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 103.

¹⁵² Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 17.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 22, 23.

- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 32.
- ¹⁵⁵ Clark, 'Voiceless Bodies'.
- ¹⁵⁶ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 39.
- ¹⁵⁷ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 23.
- ¹⁵⁸ Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 7.
- ¹⁶⁰ Robert McRuer 'Compulsory Ablebodiedness and Queer/ Disabled Existence' in *Critical Theory: A reader For Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 358.
- ¹⁶¹ Ibid, 355.
- ¹⁶² Ibid, 356.
- ¹⁶³ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 54.
- ¹⁶⁴ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 23.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁶ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 19.
- ¹⁶⁷ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 8.
- ¹⁶⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 42.
- ¹⁶⁹ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 19.
- ¹⁷⁰ Chow, Rey. 'Sexuality' in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 99.
- ¹⁷¹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 5, 6.
- ¹⁷² Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 20.
- ¹⁷³ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 32.
- ¹⁷⁴ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 36.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 36.
- ¹⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 136.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 21.
- ¹⁷⁹ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 8.
- ¹⁸⁰ Meekosha, *Gender and Disability*, 2.
- ¹⁸¹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 5.
- ¹⁸² Ibid.
- ¹⁸³ Sundberg, 'Patriarchy and Masculinity'.
- ¹⁸⁴ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 80.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 103.
- ¹⁸⁶ Sundberg, 'Patriarchy and Masculinity'.
- ¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

3. Intersectionality and the Interaction between Disability and Feminist Issues

The previous two sections have demonstrated that *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World* have both disability concern and feminist ideas. Lessing calls for the integration of the disabled into society and struggles to put an end to their oppression and marginalization. Similarly, she celebrates femininity and calls for the transformation of patriarchal views of women's inferiority. In this sense, the author states that the two issues intersect. She, therefore, develops the notion of the "intersectionality"¹⁸⁸ of gender and other categories especially the disabled as described by Garland-Thomson. Lessing does not deal with these two issues separately. Throughout the novels, there are many statements and scenes that depict the intersectionality of the two issues. Therefore, in this section, I intend to present how both disability concern and feminism intersect in the two novels and how Lessing insists on the common fates of the disabled and women as they both endure marginalization by society and difficulties in their bodies. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's mother identifies with her son's marginalization and his need to be recognized and integrated as a complete citizen in society. In *Ben, in the World*, Ben as an adult stands for other women, who try to help and integrate him and, in return, affirming their positions as women in society.

As a matter of fact, Lessing insists on the shared fates of women and the disabled as they identify with the disabled's lack of recognition and marginalization. In this context, Garland-Thomson states: "*analyses of [...] gender intersectionality take into consideration what I call the ability/ disability system—along with race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class.*"¹⁸⁹ The notion of intersectionality relates not only the concepts of gender and disability but also race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class. The term "intersectionality" is defined by Kathy Davis as:

The interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.¹⁹⁰

The statement above suggests that intersectionality is the relation between the submissive groups of society as they share the same oppressions in their daily lives. In fact, the disabled stand for women since they are similarly represented as submissive bodies or what Garland-Thomson calls in her theory “*subjugated bodies*.”¹⁹¹

Moreover, in *The Fifth Child* Lessing describes the simultaneous link between Ben when he was sent to the institution and his mother as she decides to rebel by bringing him back home. Lessing claims: “*As if I were ill, she decided rebelliously. Of course she thought all the time of Ben, who was a prisoner somewhere. What kind of prison? [...] she could not banish Ben from her mind.*”¹⁹² It indicates the relationship between Harriet as a mother towards her son Ben. Besides, the fact that her husband considers her as diseased due to her protection of Ben intersects with the disabled Ben and his marginalization. The word ‘rebelliously’ denotes that she draws a link between her representation as a mother and her son as a disabled and aims at acting for their rights.

Lessing illustrates that both women and the disabled have the same destiny and inferiority position in society. They are both considered as “*the other*” and constitute what Garland-Thomson calls “*the freaks*” of society.¹⁹³ Morris admits: “*Disabilism is the ideological part of our oppression.*”¹⁹⁴ In this sense, Willie V. Bryan claims: “*persons with disabilities have always been treated as special people; in too many instances they have been treated as deviants and freaks.*”¹⁹⁵ In sum, disabled people are always considered as ‘others’. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing portrays simultaneously Harriet and Ben as they are perceived as ‘others’ by the family and society. Lessing writes:

David went up to the other room away from her. How she felt at this moment was that she was shielding them from Ben while she re-educated him for family life. But, how they felt it, she knew, was that she had turned her back on them all and chosen to go off into this alien country, with Ben.¹⁹⁶

The passage implies that Harriet and Ben are similarly viewed as outsiders to the social norm: Ben because of his disability, and Harriet because she assumes her role of ‘mothering’

struggling against patriarchal domination. They are, thus, considered as “*others*” by the society.

In this sense, Meekosha claims: “*Disabled people have often been represented as without gender, as asexual creatures, as freaks of nature, monstrous, the ‘Other’ to the social norm.*”¹⁹⁷ In other words, the disabled are considered as ‘abnormal’ to the social norm of society. They are always represented as the ‘others’, ‘monsters’, and ‘freaks’ in society. Similarly, women are often portrayed in the same stereotypical views such as “*the primal freaks in Western history.*”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, both of the disabled and women are thought to be “*similarly incompetent*” and “*inherently inferior*” in the western culture.¹⁹⁹ In this context, Emily Clark argues: “*both child and mother are indicted in their otherness, and it is ultimately impossible to separate one from the other.*”²⁰⁰

In addition to their otherness, some women and the disabled are similarly condemned by the family and society. They both constitute the victimized categories that are subordinated by society. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing portrays how both Harriet and Ben are condemned and seen as criminals. She states:

Harriet felt that these two women, these two elderly, though, seasoned survivors, were condemning her, Harriet, out of their vast experience of life. She glanced to David, and saw he felt the same. Condemnation, and criticism, and dislike: Ben seemed to cause these emotions, bring them forth out of people into the light...²⁰¹

The excerpt asserts that both Harriet and Ben are condemned by their family members, Harriet because she gives birth to Ben and Ben for having disturbed the family’s previous happiness. In addition, Harriet and Ben are always portrayed as criminals. Lessing claims: “*I feel like a criminal. I’ve always been made to feel like a criminal.*”²⁰² Therefore, Harriet is always accused because of giving birth to Ben as a different child from the other ones. Similarly, Ben is seen as a danger and a threat by his family members except his mother. Lessing adds: “*He could silence a room full of people just by being there, or disperse them:*

they went off making excuses.”²⁰³ In other words, Ben is always associated with such aggressive sights as hatred and fear. In this way, Hung, Shu-Ming asserts: “*The hostile reaction towards both Ben and herself from their family and friends makes Harriet feel as if she is guilty for giving birth to this special child.*”²⁰⁴ Harriet is identified with Ben’s otherness and indifferent visions. In addition, Lessing comments on Harriet: “*She knew when they had seen him, because of the way they looked at her afterwards. As if I were a criminal! She raged to herself. [...] Even David, she believed, condemned her.*”²⁰⁵ In other words, Harriet always feels condemned by everyone of the family especially by her husband.

Besides, both women and the disabled experience isolation and marginalization by society. In *The Fifth Child*, the author portrays how Harriet feels marginalized by her husband even before Ben’s birth. She claims: “*At night, David heard her moan, or whimper, but now he did not offer comfort, for it seemed that these days she did not find his arms around her any help.*”²⁰⁶ In other words, Harriet feels rejected by her husband as he does not relieve her from her pains. In addition, the author describes Harriet as she feels marginalized by her children. Lessing writes: “*The children, the way they did these days, were looking at each other, excluding her, in some understanding of their own. They went off without looking at her.*”²⁰⁷

Moreover, Harriet’s isolation is indicated when David plots with his parents to take Ben to the institution without consulting her. Lessing argues: “*A doctor who had not even seen Ben? She said all this to David, and knew from his manner that a good deal had gone on behind her back. [...] you’ll have to be firm with Harriet.*”²⁰⁸ It affirms that David excludes Harriet from matters concerning Ben. Consequently, she becomes a stranger in her family. In the same way, Ben is rejected and marginalized by his family members. He is always marginalized during eating-time and isolated in his room during the celebration of Christmas festivities. He is often confined as a prisoner. It implies that the author compares Ben to a

prisoner as he is jailed for his deeds, and is locked up for his difference and his misunderstood violent acts. In this sense, Harriet's exclusion by her husband in taking the sole decision of throwing Ben away to the institution intersects with Ben's isolation from the family's atmosphere. In this context, Meekosha declares:

Gender stereotypes interact with disability stereotypes to constitute a deep matrix of gendered disability in every culture, developed within specific historical contexts, and affecting those contexts over time.²⁰⁹

Said differently, both feminist and disability misrepresentations intermingle to form a kind of a feminist disability category in each culture and society. In this way, Harriet and Ben present an example of misrepresented humans due to their differences.

In this sense, both Harriet and Ben are stereotyped as primitive people besides their representation as 'criminals' and 'others'. Lessing claims: "*I suppose in the old times, in primitive societies, this was how they treated a woman who'd given birth to a freak. As if it was her fault. But we are supposed to be civilized.*"²¹⁰ Said differently, both Harriet and Ben are associated to the primitive people due to their differences and difficulties. Therefore, Harriet is treated like a primitive woman because she gives birth to the disabled Ben and assumes her mothering role. Similarly, Ben is considered as a primitive man, because of his unknown disability. In this perspective, Lessing adds: "*Harriet watched Ben with his followers and tried to imagine him among a group of his own kind, squatting in the mouth of a cave around roaring flames.*"²¹¹ In other words, Harriet imagines Ben as a primitive man in a cave with his own population. Ben is also represented as a "*savage*"²¹² when he ate an uncooked chicken. Therefore, the words "cave" and "savage" denote that Ben is considered as a primitive man like those people of the earliest societies who are always linked to 'savageness' and 'freakliness'. In this way, Harriet is identified with Ben as she is always guilty for giving birth to him as a different child. It implies that women and the disabled

people's representations relate as they are both linked to the stereotype of 'primitiveness' of the earliest societies.

In addition to what has been said before, Lessing states that both women and the disabled have difficulties in their bodies. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing portrays the common bodied difficulties of both Harriet and Ben. In fact, Harriet's difficulties are reflected through the changes her body endures during her pregnancies and when she gave birth to Ben. Each time she becomes pregnant, Harriet's body becomes "*enormous*"²¹³ resulting in deformation because of the difficulties she undergoes. However, Ben's difficulties are caused by his disability as an autistic child. Thus, Harriet's bodily changes can be related to Ben's disability. In this perspective, Garland-Thomson argues that subjugated bodies are portrayed "*not only as inadequate or unrestrained but at the same time as redundant and expendable.*"²¹⁴ In other words, dominated bodies including women and the disabled are described as insufficient, uncontrolled, unnecessary, and easily sacrificed.

Moreover, in *Ben, in the World*, Lessing depicts "the intersection" in terms of the difficulties of the old woman's and Ben's bodies. In fact, the difficulties that Ellen Biggs's body undergoes can be related to what Garland-Thomson calls in her theory "*the effects of aging.*"²¹⁵ In this concern, Morris claims: "*segregation occurs because of the association of disability with old age.*"²¹⁶ The old persons are always regarded as disabled. Therefore, this association makes their isolation within society. In addition, Ben is affected by bodily changes that make him appear as a man of forty even though he is only eighteen. In this way, Ben's bodily changes can be intersected with the old woman's changes affected by aging. Lessing writes: "*he was wearing a jacket too big for him- who must be at least forty.*"²¹⁷ Ben appears as a man of forty because of his disability, which results in the deformity of his body. However, "*she, Ellen Biggs, was eighty.*"²¹⁸ It means that Ellen Biggs as an old woman is considered as 'disabled' because of her ageing.

Moreover, women and the disabled are similarly thought to be hormonally incomplete. Garland-Thomson states in her theory: “*Women, for example, are considered castrated, [...] they are thought to be hysterical or have overactive hormones... Similarly, disabled people have supposedly extra chromosomes or limb deficiencies.*”²¹⁹ In other words, both women and the disabled are seen as hormonally deficient because of their differences and difficulties. I have already stated that Harriet is described as ‘sexually deficient’ because of her sexual refusal to the men she already met. Similarly, Ben as an adult is considered as a ‘deviant’ being because of his sexual behaviors. Lessing writes: “*She had told him it hadn’t been like being with a man, more like an animal. ‘You know, like dogs.’*”²²⁰ Ben is considered as an abnormal being due to his sexual attitudes. In this perspective, Hall argues: “*The assumption that the disabled people cannot be sexual beings is a feature of disability oppression.*”²²¹ It implies that the idea that the disabled are considered as sexually deficient beings is part of their repression and subjugation.

The Fifth Child is narrated in an omniscient point of view recounting two interrelated stories: that of Ben struggling against society’s reactions towards his disability and that of Harriet rebelling against patriarchy. Kun Zhao argues: “*An omniscient narrator moves at will from one character to another [...] The Fifth Child belongs to this type.*”²²² In this sense, the two stories intersect since both Ben and Harriet struggle to put an end to their oppression and domination by the society. Therefore, Lessing relates Ben’s and Harriet’s stories to claim the disabled and women’s social rights. In addition, if we read *The Fifth Child* as “*a morality tale*”²²³ as Almond states, we conclude that she wants to reform people’s attitudes towards the disabled people and sexist opinions towards women. In this sense, one can understand that Lessing’s novel has a pedagogical and activist aim to improve society for a better treatment of the disabled and women.

Besides women's and the disabled's common fates, Lessing illustrates the sympathy of women over the disabled people since they identify themselves with them. Therefore, the sympathy of women which is reflected through their integration and care of the disabled can be understood as a metaphor for the transformation of women's concern in society. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben stands for Harriet as she plays her role of 'mothering' by integrating, socializing, and educating him. In addition, her integration of Ben suggests the transformation of her status as a woman in society as she reacts and rebels against the patriarchal society. Furthermore, in *Ben, in the World*, Ben represents other women such as Ellen Biggs, Mary Grindly, and Teresa Alves, as each one of them plays her part of integration and help Ben as a disabled and different person. Thus, even though he is different, all the women sympathize with him and take care of him. Similarly, their integration of Ben implies the transformation of their concerns in society as some of them like Harriet and Teresa Alves challenge the patriarchal society and counter the view of women's inferiority.

The above section has served as a synthesis to confirm the intersection and relation between both the disabled people and women as they share similar fates of marginalization and otherness by society and difficulties in their bodies. In this way, Lessing calls for the integration and the recognition of the disabled people as complete citizens, which, in return, will transform women's conditions within society.

Endnotes

¹⁸⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Kathy Davis, (2008) *Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful*, Viewed on 10 April 2014.

<http://fty.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/1/67>

¹⁹¹ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 21.

¹⁹² Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 77.

¹⁹³ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 78.

¹⁹⁵ Willie V., *Sociopolitical Aspects*, 69.

¹⁹⁶ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 89.

- ¹⁹⁷ Meekosha, 'Gender and Disability', 3, 4.
- ¹⁹⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 18.
- ¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 19.
- ²⁰⁰ Clark, 'Voiceless Bodies'.
- ²⁰¹ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 58, 59.
- ²⁰² Ibid, 104.
- ²⁰³ Ibid, 61.
- ²⁰⁴ Shu-Ming, 'Intersubjectivity'.
- ²⁰⁵ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 60.
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid, 39.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid, 66.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid, 74.
- ²⁰⁹ Meekosha, 'Gender and Disability', 9.
- ²¹⁰ Lessing, *Fifth Child*, 60.
- ²¹¹ Ibid, 122.
- ²¹² Ibid, 97.
- ²¹³ Ibid, 19.
- ²¹⁴ Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 21.
- ²¹⁵ Ibid, 24.
- ²¹⁶ Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 78.
- ²¹⁷ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 1.
- ²¹⁸ Ibid, 13.
- ²¹⁹ Thomson, *Integrating Disability*, 19.
- ²²⁰ Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, 39.
- ²²¹ Kim Q. Hall, 'Reimagining Disability and Gender Through Feminist Studies: An Introduction', in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1-10.
- ²²² Kun Zhao, *A Narrative Analysis of Lessing's The Fifth Child*, (Jinan, Academy Publisher, 2012), Viewed on 22 May 2014.
<http://ojs.academypublisher.com/index.php/tpls/article/viewFile/tpls020714981502/5065>
- ²²³ Almond, *Side of Motherhood*, 109.

IV. Conclusion

The present study shows the intersection of disability concern and feminism in two prominent novels of Doris Lessing *The Fifth Child* (1988) and its sequel *Ben, in the World* (2000). Throughout the analysis of both novels, it is apparent that her works are very significant to British literature and the contemporary world in general as they tackle new areas of public interest such as disability concern and contemporary feminism. Indeed, in her works, Lessing favors the integration of the disabled people and the transformation of women's conditions within society. In this sense, in *The Fifth Child*, Ben as a disabled child stands for his mother, Harriet, as it is through her that Lessing supports her call for the integration of the disabled. However, in *Ben, in the World*, Ben as a disabled adult stands for other women, including: the old woman, Mrs. Ellen Biggs, Mary Grindly, and Teresa Alves. The first section portrays the disability and its perception in society. The second section highlights the celebration of femininity through contemporary feminist elements. The final section includes the interaction of both issues that of disability concern and feminism.

After studying Lessing's novels, I come to the conclusion that Lessing calls for the integration of the disabled within society and struggles to put an end to their marginalization the same way she claims the transformation of women's conditions by countering patriarchal views of inferiority over women. Therefore, Lessing vindicates the social and civil rights of both the disabled and women as complete citizens belonging to the whole social norms.

In her novels, Lessing displays an example of intersection between disability concern and feminism. She defends the rights of both the disabled people and women within society by seeking their whole integration and the transformation of their rights and statuses in all social spheres. In addition, she advocates a kind of recognition, freedom, and liberty for women to do whatever they want with their bodies. This is my modest way of analyzing and looking at this very interesting topic of disability and feminist issues and I would like to

advise more students to tackle it with other perspectives and hypotheses. However, Lessing study is not limited only to the presentation of such social subjected categories as the disabled people and women. It also investigates other categories such as class and race since she focuses on the class issue in the beginning of *The Fifth Child* by emphasizing on poverty and richness and presents Ben as he is associated with the primitive man in *Ben, in the World*.

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