International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582–2160, Volume: 4, Issue: 4, July-August 2022

In Doris Lessing's Novel "The Fifth Child", a Father's Role is Explored

Narendra Kumar Singh

Ph.D. Research Scholar
C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract
The tale focuses on David and Harriet Lovatt and their ordinary existence as a family in the 1960s. They value family life and marriage more than job advancement and the sexual revolution of their day. The story is narrated by a woman who seems to be a feminist, and she isn't the only one in the book who does so. Sex relations resemble those between a parent and a kid when the male sex role during contact is compared to the female sex role. While it may seem that male and female sex roles are complementary in the context of sexuality, there is in reality a hierarchical link between them. He's dead set on seeing it through. When Ben, the fifth child, arrives home, things immediately go worse. The distance between them grows to unbridgeable proportions as Harriet withdraws from David and, in effect, pushes him away from her. After learning that Harriet is often angry, puts her own health before that of the newborn, and treats the child as if it were not fully human, David feels even more alone.

Keywords: Novel, Literature, The Fifth Child, Sex Relations, Doris Lessing

1. Introduction

The novel's characters, David and Harriet Lovatt, and their humdrum 1960s family life are the novel's focus. Successful careers and the sexual liberation of the period are less important to them than starting and raising a family. Harriet and Ben's ideal family life is shattered as they prepare for the arrival of their fifth child when Harriet suddenly becomes pregnant again. Harriet has worried about her unborn child's health the whole time she's been pregnant. Thus, she feels resentment and hatred towards the fetus she is carrying. After Ben is born, the family's harmony disintegrates because no one, not even Harriet, can relate to him. The book is presented in first-person from the mother's viewpoint and focuses on her personal and professional relationship with her son Ben. The book elaborates on the mother's inner thoughts and experiences, including the difficulties she encounters and the criticisms she must bear. Societies of the period represented in the story looked down on abnormal children and the mothers who gave birth to them. Harriet speculates, "I guess this was how they considered a woman who gave birth to a freak in previous, ancient civilizations." As if she were to take on the responsibility. But we should show more decency than that. Since this is a narrative written from the mother's point of view, I will be analyzing any subtextual feminist ideology that may be there. This is so because understanding the story's structure and the lack of a father figure depends on it. Since the tale is recounted from the mother's viewpoint, the protagonist's father, David, is consigned to the background and plays no meaningful part. Instead of focusing on making up with Ben, he tries to help the rest of the kids financially and emotionally but fails horribly at both. Family discord is exacerbated when males lose

their manhood and their sense of who they are. It's interesting to me that the author of a book about a woman who goes against societal standards doesn't give any thought to a male protagonist in a similar situation. David is at a loss for words whereas Harriet can convey her story and opinions in print. This prompts me to investigate the many causes for the striking resemblance between the book's treatment of the father and the treatment of women generally throughout that age. To do this, it will be necessary to compare and contrast the two cases. Due to this fact, the essay will center on David's role as a family man. I'd want to discuss the depiction of fathers and why David is ignored and silenced. To what extent does Harriet's perspective on the story determine David's role?

David's roles as a father and a spouse are connected because of the ripple effect their arguments have on his kids. The relationships between David and Harriet have changed now that he is a dad. Therefore, the status of David's marriage and the degradation of his relationship with his wife should be included in any analysis of his new approach to parenting.

Following that, I'll talk about how David's weakened feeling of masculinity, inability to financially support his family, and battle to keep the family together have all influenced and modified his parenting style. I'll also examine how these tests affect David's growth as a person.

1.1. **The Feminist Way of Thinking**

We've established that the mother's point of view dominates the narrative. Readers may associate Harriet's representation with a feminist viewpoint even though a book portrayed from a woman's point of view does not necessarily qualify as a feminist novel due to the story's wide theme. The narrator's unwavering attention to Harriet allows the reader to learn about her background, her drives, and her emotions.

Holmquist, who wrote about the "new feminist movement" a few years before The Fifth Child was published, claimed that this group was concerned less with "the legal aspect of marriage, as the old feminists did", and more with "the social and psychological limits confronted by women in the nuclear family". A primary focus of the "new feminist movement" is, thus, "the social and psychological challenges women confront inside the nuclear family". Since the tale is based on events from Harriet's life, it is clear that the narrator is using this technique. Due to her preference for a traditional family structure above what her peers value, she is subject to the societal pressures discussed below. She also has mental stress since her loved ones are concerned that anything is wrong with baby Ben. So she assumes there's a high probability the newborn will have some kind of issue.

Throughout the novel, there is a strong sense of a feminist voice, and the narrator isn't the only character who represents the new feminist movement. Holmquist cites Doris Lessing's portrayal of the character Krouse to demonstrate the misogyny that permeates her work.

> In a 1972 paper titled "The Feminism of Doris Lessing," the author investigated the subject of whether or not Doris Lessing is a feminist, and if so, what kind of feminism she represents. If you ask Krouse, Lessing's contribution to feminism in literature is more in the second, more "explicit" category than the first. While Lessing doesn't appear to care about women's discrimination in the

> workplace, schools, or politics, as Krouse points out, she does provide a critical examination of how traditional marriage hurts women's psyches.

Using Krouse's analysis as a springboard, it's simple to see how the events of The Fifth Child back up her assertion. Even though the story shows how the whole family is changed by Ben's arrival, it is told from Harriet's point of view throughout. Harriet is the narrator, and the reader learns nothing about the family other than how she thinks as the story continues. Based on what Krouse and Holmquist have stated, it is plausible to infer that Harriet's dislike of Ben stems from her dedication to the nuclear family ideal. But this is only one possible way of looking at what Krouse and Holmquist meant. This is the first visible symptom of the family's rift and is a direct result of the mental stress Mom endures while carrying Ben. She blames Ben even though her upbringing in the orthodox cult is hurting her mental health. A feminist undertone is present. Feminist theory, which formed the book's theoretical foundation, must be grasped first. Take the following as an example.

1.2. **The Conventional Husband and Wife**

This decade saw the birth of a new style of thinking that would eventually sweep over all of Western Europe by the 1960s. According to Szreter and Fisher, the 1960s marked a turning point when people began to feel liberated from decades of tyranny. It is clear from their discussion of the changes that happened in the UK in the 1960s and how they impacted people's sexual life that the kind of repression they are referring to is sexual.

> When studying British citizens' views and experiences with sexual behavior between 1920 and 1960, assumptions about the kinds of changes associated with the 1960s and beyond are inescapable. Despite popular belief, the studied era did not take place "before" the sexual revolution.

The period immediately before the sexual revolution was known as what? Thatcher was quoted by Aldgate as saying, "The movements of the sixties destroyed the Victorian qualities of self-discipline and control, and were the beginnings of the near-destruction from which I rescued Great Britain". Even though the Victorian era formally ended with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the ideals that Margaret Thatcher assigns to that period seem to have endured until the early 20th century. There is a lot of similarity between Margaret Thatcher's admired self-control and the repression of people described by Szreter and Fisher.

Lessing argues that the feverish want for attention shared by members of both sexes is what sets this new society apart in terms of how its members dress and behave. This is particularly apparent at parties when women often dress provocatively and dance not for their enjoyment but to catch the attention of the men and earn their approval. The current fad for creating one's pleasure may help explain this want for external approval. Donnelly claims that the '60s were a time when everyone was obsessed with themselves. Among them were "Self-Integrity", "Self-Adulation", "Contemplative Self" and "Self-fulfilment". The most apparent difference between the new attitude and the one that had been regarded as the standard in the past is that it is now normal and in some circumstances desirable to concentrate on one's person rather than making attempts to attain what had been the major purpose in the past, namely

family. Lessing's portrayal of the societal pressure David and Harriet experience from their families when they express a yearning for a conventional nuclear family rings true in light of Popenoe's study of the decline of the contemporary nuclear family as a cultural ideal throughout the 1960s.

Increased sexual liberty may be attributed to a shift in emphasis from the family unit to the "individual". According to Lewis, the general separation of sexuality and marriage was one of the most profound changes that happened during this period. The sexual activity of young people increased dramatically in the 1960s, and this trend was bolstered by the increased use of birth control pills in the early 1970s. Thus, it became the norm for the millennial generation to engage in sexual activity before marriage. This makes David and Harriet outliers, even in their day. As someone who is described as "conservative, old-fashioned, not to mention archaic", they stand out as unusual and unconventional. Both Harriet and David are opposed to birth control, and Harriet also believes that sexual activity before marriage is improper. To emphasize the difference between Harriet and David, "the educated ladies of today observed to one other, ‘There must have been something in her upbringing that made her this way’ ", the author writes. You miserable schmuck! This incident would have been handled quite differently even only five years ago. Harriet "sometimes felt unfortunate or deficient in some capacity" because "the men with whom she went out for dinner or to the movies would take her rejection as confirmation of a disordered outlook as much as they would an imprudent one". David is the lone exception; he understands her and is prepared to accept her choice, which forges a profound bond between them despite their mutual loneliness. Due to their self-perception and a general feeling of estrangement from society, they have a clearer vision of their life goals and are more motivated to achieve them. They want to prove to themselves and everyone around them that they can prevail over the obstacles that they believe society will place in their path. They have a strategy to make it happen. When discussing the couple's conservatism, Brock writes, "Despite the novel's two-decade era, Lessing's characters are in many ways the arch-Thatcherite couple, dedicated to the nuclear family and the home sphere as its inviolable fortress, and [...] their rejection and denial of society." (Despite a twenty-year time gap, Lessing's protagonists are, in many respects, the prototypical That cherite marriage, committed to conservatism. It is not difficult to understand why this viewpoint is correct: Even though their marriage and family life fall apart during the story, Harriet and David remain true to their conventional ideals from the very beginning of the novel. This makes sense and is easy to understand.

They are also prepared to challenge the claims of others in their local vicinity because of their fervent belief that they and their family are victims of social persecution.

1.3. **The Wedding**

After a short courtship, Harriet and David swiftly decided to tie the knot. They share a sense of being profoundly distinct from the standards of society, and this is one of the reasons why they are so close. As Popenoe notes, their ideas on marriage are reminiscent of the early 20th century. She goes on to explain that "true love was seen as a divinely provided gift, and it was believed to be [...] the cornerstone of a good marriage". This is a representation of all the Lovatts hope for in their future together. They believe that marital difficulties should be addressed together rather than as reasons for severing ties. Marriage, which was formerly seen as primarily a functional alliance, "grew more amicable", as Popenoe puts it. The family's collective emotional temperature soared. Although Harriet and David's perspective on

marriage and family life is considerably different from that which typifies the 1960s, it is easy to apply these themes to their circumstances because of the historical period. They want to start a family and expand it until they have enough kids to fill their ideal house. This is crucial to their ideal life, thus they must have it. They have to ask David's dad for help with the down payment if they want to purchase a house on a limited budget. David, who had a strained relationship with his dad from the start, had to swallow his pride and ask for the loan. If he did feel any guilt at all about asking for help, he pushed those feelings aside and reminded himself that "what mattered was the home and the life that would be lived in it".

Harriet and David's conceptions of the "ideal" family reflect the influences of their upbringings. Despite coming from distinct backgrounds, they arrived at the same marriage-related conclusions. In time, the extremes of their histories came to represent the best and worst that may happen in a family. One possible explanation for Harriet's happy upbringing is that she and her parents had a close and loving bond throughout her early years. As a result of their union, she began to believe that marital strife was a hindrance to marital love.

David, on the other hand, was brought up by their parents that he still harbors anger because of how they reared him in an unpleasant, secluded setting. He attributes all his misfortunes to them. The fact that David had a horrible childhood and Harriet had a fantastic one, and that David's parents divorced while Harriet's did not, suggests that both individuals equate a good upbringing with a harmonious household and a bad upbringing with strife between the parents. Why he was unable to be a successful father as Harriet was? They have decided that despite their marriage's difficulties, being together is better for their kids than divorcing, which would hurt all of their lives. The way they approach the difficulties in their marriage will be influenced by this.

Marwick has studied the development of divorce policies in the UK during the twentieth century. Because of financial constraints and cultural stigmas, the author finds, "divorce had been nearly inconceivable for the overwhelming majority". One's local surroundings, or society at large, may put pressure on them because they want them to fail, as the Lovatts discovered. Regardless, the fact that they were even discussing divorce would have given the impression that they had given up on ever realizing their ideal. Due to their low financial resources, Harriet and David would likely have to depend on David's father, which David considered the greatest possible source of disgrace.

Lewis claims that divorce was socially frowned upon in the 1960s. She rebuts this by presenting statistics indicating that, between 1960 and 1990, "the divorce rate grew more than sixfold", from 2 to 13 per 1,000 of the married population. It's impossible that Harriet and David, who were married when the divorce rate was at an all-time low, would ever contemplate filing for divorce. Even if divorce was widespread in the more accepting society of the 1960s, a married couple with more traditional views on the institution of marriage would undoubtedly feel it was morally wrong.

And Harriet and David were pleased that their obstinacy, which had been reviled and scorned by everyone, had achieved this miracle. Seven years later, the couple had realized their aim with the birth of

their first four children. In-text citations. They believe they have shown to the world that the hopes and dreams they once thought were unachievable were, in fact, hopeful and genuine.

Happiness and satisfaction are fleeting. After welcoming their fourth child into the world, Harriet and her husband find out they are expecting again. No one wanted or expected to be pregnant. The negative consequences of pregnancy on Harriet are different from those experienced by the other women. "at night, David heard her groan or scream, but now he did not calm her, since it looked like she did not find his arms around her in these days", he writes, describing the widening distance that has opened up between her and her loved ones. In his inability to comfort Harriet and his inability to empathize with the challenges she faces, David feels useless throughout her pregnancy (because "and nothing he said seemed to reach Harriet, who, he felt was possessed, had gone right away from him, in this battle with the fetus, which he could not share"). It's a new phenomenon that David can't understand Harriet when she's pregnant; before, the two of them were the only people in the world who could communicate with one other. Harriet is downtrodden because she was misunderstood, and David is downtrodden since he couldn't do much to assist her. When Ben joined the family, Harriet took up the role of caring for him, while David and Harriet's mother took care of the other children. Because Harriet has been spending so much time with Ben and so little with anybody else, David has observed a change in her character: "he could not tolerate her rage and venom". David fell in love with a happy, loving version of Harriet, so this is a significant shift for her.

The kids blame Ben entirely for their mother's departure, and as a result, they have developed a strong animosity and even terror of him. The children also blame Harriet since she let Ben wreck their lives and futures. The three older children have chosen to live with their grandparents, seeing their parents only on very rare occasions. Meanwhile, David starts working two jobs to help pay for the care of his four children, and he is seldom home while Harriet tends to Ben's needs. The cost of David's medical care has increased to the point that the family has to liquidate their most valuable asset, their home. This is undeniable evidence that they are still searching in vain for the ideal family and personal fulfilment that they so desperately want. Popenoe argues that the contemporary nuclear family has broken down for a variety of reasons, including an overemphasis on romantic love and the absence of fathers from a variety of household responsibilities. Look at the following illustrations: The overemphasis on romantic love [...] the lack of dads in many daily family activities. The reasons for the decline of the nuclear family model may be explained by reading The Fifth Child. Since they were married out of true love for one another, Harriet and David assume their problems would go away on their own. Since David goes to work every day instead of being home with the rest of the kids, the second possibility is also worth considering. In a short length of time, nobody will talk to anybody else about how they feel.

1.4. **Being a Father and Being a Man**

David and his obligations as a parent are, as said, the focal points of this paper. The next section will go into the topics discussed so far in more detail, with an emphasis on David's parenting style and his underlying motives.

In the early stages of their marriage and following the birth of their first child, David is shown as a loving and attentive father and husband. When it came to protecting anything, it wasn't Harriet or the

baby, but rather enjoyment. This was made quite evident when he bent down to kiss her farewell and gently stroke Luke on the head. Even though Harriet and David are traditionalists who adhere to the gendered roles of breadwinner and housewife, they want to take turns caring for their children. David does not want to become the kind of guy who values his career more than his loved ones. Instead, he wants to make enough money to take care of his loved ones, be there for them emotionally, ensure their physical well-being, and help them achieve their educational goals.

Harriet doesn't want to become pregnant for the fifth time, and she can tell from an away that something is wrong with this one. She claims the baby's wriggling is the cause of her extreme irritability and short temper. Not long after, she begins to see the fetus she is carrying as something alien and strange. She has to take medicines to get her through the day so the stomach ache doesn't render her helpless. She is embarrassed by the quantity she thinks the embryo needs, and she does not want to tell David about it. Harriet must keep this secret because she does not want David to criticize her for not being able to control her pregnancy, which is to be seen as a blessing adding to their dream. If Harriet and her husband wish to save their marriage from crumbling, they must hide this truth from one other.

It's important to the plot that David and Ben live together in the same home but have no other links to one other. It's intriguing to think about the impact that Harriet's actions throughout her pregnancy may have on David. She views the baby with skepticism and expresses concern to David that she won't be able to maintain her negative viewpoint during the pregnancy. He may feel fearful and at a loss for what to do if she conveys her worries to him without his ability to understand how she is feeling. In addition, "he had stopped placing his palm on her stomach in the typical companionable way since what he felt there was too much for him to absorb", which suggests that he had been unable to continue this gesture of affection. He stopped stroking her stomach because "what he felt there was too much for him to take". Harriet abandons her family early on because she "became quiet, morose, and dubious of them all and their expectations about her", as the novel puts it. Another sign that David is being driven away from the relationship is that Harriet is reluctant to express her thoughts and feelings with him since he does not understand her. Before the baby is even born, David does not care for the child because of his fear and the fact that he is, in a way, not permitted to build a bond with the kid while Harriet is pregnant. David is afraid that Harriet may start to doubt her faith if he bonds with the baby.

Harriet has been calling Ben monstrous and trollish ever since he was born, and she often laments the fact that, because of his superhuman strength, he will never be a "normal" child. She often describes Ben as a "monster" or "troll". David's opinion of the child, which he cannot establish on his own, is dependent on Harriet's background and viewpoint. This has been true throughout Ben's whole pregnancy and into the newborn stage. As a result, David and Ben never became friends.

Before, during, and after David's pregnancy, everyone knew that he and Ben would not have the same emotional connection that he had with his other children. After "emotional holes had been developed", Jeleniewski-Seidler argues, "it would be extraordinarily difficult to fill them" when discussing the dynamics between fathers and their offspring. Due to Harriet's unfavorable views about Ben and her inability to allow him to get close to her when she was pregnant, David endured emotional isolation

from the start. Given that this disparity has been maintained throughout the years, I think Seidler's Jeleniewski-theory applies.

David spends less time with Ben as the novel goes on since he has to work more to support his family and is more concerned with the other kids while he is at home. So, while David takes care of the rest of the kids at home, Harriet watches Ben. The already tense relationship between David and Ben takes a fall as a consequence of this. According to the males polled in Lupton and Barclay's parenting research, the most rewarding aspect of parenthood is watching your child's face light up when they see or hear you. Although Ben is familiar with David, he does not think of him as his father. To Ben, David is simply another roommate. Before David ever arrived, Ben had never shown any fondness for him. We may be able to deduce why David does not have a close relationship with his son Ben by extrapolating the findings from Lupton and Barclay's research. David may come to agree with Harriet's opinion that there is something wrong with him since Ben does not recognize him as his father or express affection for him as the pregnancy progresses.

To that end, David focuses almost entirely on his two older children. An important turning point in the story occurs when Harriet decides to get Ben from the facility where he has been incarcerated. David feels saddened by Harriet's choice since he was left out of the decision-making process. David strives even harder to avoid his obligations at home after realizing that he and Ben would accomplish nothing by going there. What is it, exactly, that elicits such a passionate reaction from David? Since Harriet disobeys his authority by bringing back Ben despite David's choice to take him away, he is probably worried about the kids' emotions and future. Both this and the fact that David's request to have Ben leave hasn't been followed out make him concerned. Holmquist, writing from a feminist point of view, discusses power dynamics between a male and a woman, saying that

> When the male sex role is compared to the female sex role during contact, the sex relationships mirror those of a father and a child. While the male and female sex roles may seem to complement one another at first appearance, there is a hierarchical connection between them. The male sex role behavior indicates control over the female, while the feminine sex role behavior implies accommodation and support for the male. The man takes the lead while the female provides emotional and physical support.

By expressing her disagreement with a decision David made as the family's leader, Harriet is adding fuel to the fire of speculation that she is challenging David's authority. Holmquist argues that a woman's place in society is to help her husband emotionally and financially while simultaneously recognizing and respecting his position as the breadwinner. Therefore, by deciding without consulting David, she can increase her power while decreasing his obligations as a man and father. David's sense of manhood would be diminished as a consequence.

David's possible neglect as a father is highlighted by his decision to have Ben institutionalized, yet his actions might be seen as another. David says of Ben, "he isn't mine", implying that he does not consider Ben to be his biological child, but he still loves and cares for his other children. Nelson delves deeply

into several aspects of the Victorian parent image, always referencing Craik's perspective on the link between paternity and masculinity.

> In particular, Craik suggested that men do not have the same "abstract mother instinct" as women do since their love for children is not shared by everyone but rather is personal. She replied it's a weakness, but one that's essential to being a guy: a man has to be selfish or self-centered, strong, and dominant to protect the people who depend on him.

This trait of the classic Victorian father provides validity to the concept that David was a protective, masculine father who watched out for Ben, as opposed to a cruel one who displayed his severe parenting by banishing his son. Craik and Nelson say that David can't love Ben since he doesn't see him as his child. This prevents David from expressing his affection for Ben. However, he feels an enormous desire to protect the individuals he considers his genuine children from Ben, whom he views as a threat to their happiness. To protect the ones he loves most, he decides to take on the role of the strong, authoritative, and compassionate dad he has always been. Craik argues that despite Harriet's lack of romantic feelings for Ben, she has an innate maternal instinct. She feels strongly that it was a mistake to send Ben away and is thus exerting additional effort to get him back.

Except for the one who needs intensive care, the other children will be living with their grandparents once Ben returns. David has an abnormal kid and a wife who has given up on their ideal life for the latter, so he spends most of his time at work to avoid facing his failure at home. Given this, he realizes "he was suddenly the type of guy he had pledged he would never be".

1.5. **Making a Living for One's Family**

Changes in David's outlook on the Lovatts' financial situation are evident. He unwillingly decides to seek his father for financial aid after realizing that he and Harriet won't be able to purchase the home of their dreams. This way, they may live the life he has always envisaged for them. No amount of money could be bestowed upon them that would enable them to buy a house and live happily ever after. Since David often borrows money from his father, here is where the change is most obvious. After having their second child, the couple unexpectedly shares their desire to grow their family by a factor of four with their friends and neighbors. "Well, it's a good thing I make so much money", David's father adds, prompting David to "flush and refuse to look at anybody". This is a remark from David's dad, who is mentioned throughout the book. This exchange, which exemplifies their deep and enduring relationship, bears consideration in discussions of power. It's obvious from their appearance that they are father and son. Holmquist says that men's sex roles may be categorized as either the authoritarian father or the repressed child. So, despite David's own beliefs, he has a duty-based bond with his father. His father is the head of the household since he is confident in his ability to provide for his family and is open with his son about money matters. The thoughtfulness of David's reply further cements his reputation as an exemplary dutiful son. Thus, it's possible that to care for his own family as a father would, he puts their needs ahead of his father's friends and neighbors. David, as the male of the relationship, will undoubtedly be held to a higher standard after he and Harriet made the decision that only one of them should work. It'll be very much like the pressures David's experiencing in his own life right now.

David's perspective on vulnerability and asking for help changes as the novel progresses. At the end of the story, he concludes that the original owner would not miss the money they received: "he added, 'James and Jessica have so much money, they wouldn't have missed three times as much' ". That is to say, if these two were given an extra $3 million, they wouldn't care. Despite that, they enjoyed themselves while doing it.

David can manage his parenting obligations emotionally, but he struggles to keep up with the financial demands of being a parent. However, he has no regrets or feelings of appreciation for his father's caring after the family has fallen apart. David's childhood anger toward his father and his wealth may be coming back to haunt him. There may be a connection between David's father's inability to make him happy as a youngster and his unwillingness to use his fortune to make his children happy. Another potential explanation is that David has seen his father's lack of agreement with his views on parenting obligations. David's concentration as a parent is on providing for his children monetarily, whereas his father is on being there emotionally and nurturing them. Atkinson and Blackwelder summarise the following fatherhood trends during the 20th century:

> Early in the 20th century, fathers' roles in their families often included providing for and even connecting with other members of the community. Providing financial and emotional support to one's children is now the standard, and dads are expected to take part in all aspects of their children's daily lives. Scholarly studies show that the conventional role of the father in society has changed from that of a provider to that of a nurturer.

In light of this information, it is possible to make an inference between David and his father's views on parenting and the historical events of the century. David's father must have grown up in the early 20th century since the events of The Fifth Child occur in the 1960s. The stereotype of the breadwinner was one in which he saw himself mirrored, and so he did all he could to support his nuclear family and the greater society by ensuring that his children had a good education. David spends a large chunk of his day away from his family and at work, but he values fatherhood for more than just the financial rewards. Even though he didn't grow up with it, he still appreciates his family and the love in his house, despite his mother's belief that "you can only appreciate something if you've experienced it". Reasoning from the premise that "one can only appreciate something after experiencing it", he has arrived at this conclusion. As a kid, he demonstrated his independence by claiming that his bedroom, rather than either of the two places he was residing at the time, was his home. David is shown as having a deep belief that providing for one's children is one of his key obligations as a parent.

As he faces the imminent loss of the family he has always valued, his perspective as a father changes dramatically, and he learns to consider his main job as that of a provider rather than a nurturer. Once Ben is freed from the mental hospital and the other children leave, David plans to focus all of his attention on the boy he sees as his duty. David is determined to pay for all of Paul's expensive medical care out of his pocket. Because of the high price of his medical care and education, he has no choice but to hold down two jobs. David may consider Paul his last, best chance to turn things around, and he may think he has the greatest chance to do so if he can provide for Paul financially on his own. David begins to take on his father's role, in that he can pay financially for Paul's upkeep and schooling but is

emotionally absent. David concedes that he has only stolen his father's college degree, but he has begun to take on his father's traits as a result.

With Ben there but his two older children absent, David is constantly reminded of the dreams he was unable to realize. Because of this, it serves as a constant reminder to David of his unrealized aspirations. The children he had always thought of as his own were taken away, and he was forced to take care of a child he did not believe to be his own. He had lost his sense of masculinity, which had been bolstered by his obligations as a husband and father, and so he made it his mission to find a new source of masculine fulfillment. Therefore, he can de-stress by dividing his time between two careers. To quote Jeleniewski-Seidler:

> Men will constantly profess they care about their families, but it doesn't necessarily translate into action. This is because most men's careers are the main place they can demonstrate their manliness and establish their value. Many men continue to say they love their families, but this may be a facade.

David seems to be attempting to fulfill his need for male affirmation by choosing to spend his time at work rather than with his family while they go through a difficult moment in their life. Before being married and having kids, he felt like a real man only while he was taking care of those obligations. His business was the only thing that mattered to him after his children had grown up and he had ceased caring about Harriet. However, even though he and Harriet and Ben still share a home, he is seldom recognized and is rarely seen. Despite how often his name is brought up, this is the situation. His employment is the only thing keeping him from quitting up and feeling like a complete loser as a human being.

He avoids thinking about how terrible a father he is by focusing on his professional life, where he is still able to grow and make a difference. David's dilemma is less about whether or not he will continue to be a parent altogether but whether or not he will be able to care for as many of his children as possible. Cornwall thinks that it's not fair to expect men to completely shed their masculine identities if "certain elements of being a man are culturally treasured". David has a deep connection to the role of a parent, and he cannot fathom abandoning this responsibility. This means he doesn't have to completely relinquish his role as a parent, albeit he will no longer have the option of hoping to provide emotional support for his kids in the future. Lewis provides an in-depth analysis of Britain's social policies that have always been built on the concept that males should offer the biggest financial contributions to families, therefore the obligation of fathers to support their children has gotten greater emphasis there. A lot of people are worried about how fatherlessness affects kids, yet discussions concerning child care are often relegated to the background. The policy has recognized fathers' responsibilities as breadwinners and caretakers, but usually only to the degree that it encourages dads to fulfill their obligation to provide financially for their families.

Lessing's experimental portrayal of the male character as a cynic, the societal expectation that fathers should prioritize their financial well-being, and the impact of a father's absence on his children (as

evidenced by the older children moving in with their grandparents and the fourth child requiring therapy due to neglect). These three elements are all present in the narrative.

We have established that David's only duty as a father is to provide for his family financially. For him, this is the whole world. To drive home this idea, he refers to himself as a nurse whenever he is sick and out of commission. His perspective on Harriet and their connection had changed. His work was the one area in his life where he could act like a man, so, logically, he would feel humiliated at the thought of losing it.

Conclusion

Observing David now that he is a father and married is easy. When he and Harriet first start, he is the selfless provider, ready to set his pride aside for the sake of his family's future.

Since he takes a more traditional view of the world, one of his key aims as a father is to provide his kids with a happy upbringing. He's dead set on making it work. Things start going worse once Ben, the fifth child, moves in. The distance between them widens to unfathomable dimensions as Harriet pulls away from David and, in effect, pushes him away from her. David feels even more alone after discovering that Harriet is often angered, puts her health before that of the baby, and treats the infant as if it were not entirely human. It's clear that he doesn't understand Harriet's situation and can't help with her concerns. David and Ben are never seen to have any kind of relationship, and neither of them ever expresses any sort of attachment to one another. Eventually, the strain on the family becomes too severe, and Ben is put in foster care when David ignores him in favor of his other children and Harriet takes on all of the responsibility for him. When Harriet brings Ben back over David's wishes, the situation swiftly worsens. Not only does David feel betrayed, but he also feels that his authority and, by implication, his masculinity, have been called into question. As David's need for reassurance at work is a direct result of his earlier emasculation, this remark takes on more significance. Providing for one's family is an important part of being a man and contributing to his feeling of self-worth and power. Because David's emasculation has made him feel insecure, he needs constant reassurance from his superiors at work. Despite David's ability to care for his family, he has been forced to relinquish custody of his four children to his parents, his doctor, and his doctor's parents. The fact that work has gotten in the way of their moving in with Harriet and Ben has caused tension amongst them. The story also helps David develop personally. It may appear at first that we are being told all there is to know about him by an omniscient narrator, but it quickly becomes evident that the story is being told from the limited viewpoint of Harriet, who is the only one in on the key details. David's dwindling presence throughout the plot just adds to the mystery surrounding his motivations and character. This phenomenon is most likely because Lessing inverts the typical gender roles of men and women in the book, as opposed to their real societal tasks. As a result of his terrible childhood, David is stuck in a cycle of self-loathing, remorse, and powerlessness.

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