
The Fifth Child, by Doris Lessing - 1998

Background information (from "The fifth Child, by Doris Lessing – C.Dumas – ellipses 2008)

1970s England

In 1964, the Labour Party is back in power. The Permissive society reaches its climax under Wilson's government. People tend to live in the suburbs (la banlieue) and commute to London for their work, thus partaking in the rat-race (métro-boulof-dodo)

I. The Permissive Society

During that period, a steady decrease in the birth rate (taux de natalité) could be noticed. In 1967, the Family Planning Act favoured contraception and the Pill. The composition of the family depended on voluntary planning of births, all the more so as the liberalization of abortion, from 1968 onwards, added to freedom of choice in this field. At the beginning of 1974, the rate of abortions doubled, since the law had been implemented (mise en application). For example, there were 15% abortions in the mid- 1970s.

- However, marriage was jeopardized (compromis), with freedom of choice to have children or not, with the legislation of divorce, although the marriage rate was higher.
- The disruption of the family was also a consequence of the generation gap: teenagers, to some extent, claiming social and economic autonomy on account of their tastes, needs, and leisures (**Youth culture, or Pop culture**).
- **The Swinging Sixties** and their aftermath (conséquences) highlighted a rejection of moral taboos (particularly sexual), of all kinds of censorship, and of political and economic institutions.
- Other changes: the development of gambling, (football pools, bingo halls).
- The crime rate increased with the Skinheads, in the 1970s, as a reaction to the Hippy movement.
- Decline in the influence of religion. Disappearance of Sunday Observance: opening of pubs, cinemas, even shops at "unsocial hours".

II. Towards more equality?

- Surprisingly enough, such changes in morals did not bring about upheavals (bouleversements) in the structure of society. British society was still dominated by class consciousness, illustrated by the famous distinction between "them" and "us"; "them" were those who governed and made decisions: government, red tape, (bureaucratie), and the establishment; and "us", were those for whom the decisions were made, ordinary citizens, who demanded from the government more attention to their needs in increasingly numerous fields (domaines).
- Equality between the sexes as concerned work: Equal Pay Act (1970), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975).
- Improvement in wealth: in 1974, the Royal Commission of the Distribution of Income and Wealth, i.e. the Diamond commission, under Wilson's government, pointed out less inequality.