

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**

**08 MAI 1945 UNIVERSITY-GUELMA
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Letters and English Language**

**جامعة 8 ماي 1945-قالمة
كلية الآداب و اللغات
قسم الآداب و اللغة الإنجليزية**



Option: Literature

Healing through Tales: Case Study of Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2011)

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture**

Board of Examiners

**Chairwoman: Mrs. BOURSACE Houda (MAA) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA
Supervisor: Miss MOUMENE Soumia (MAA) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA
Examiner: Mrs. BRAHMIA Lillia (MAA) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA**

Submitted by:

**DOGHMANE Rofaida Zahra
BELHAZZAR Amira Malek**

Supervised by:

Miss MOUMENE Soumia

June 2025

Dedication

To **Allah**. The source of all wisdom, the guide of my steps. When darkness loomed, your light led me.

To my parents, my foundation. **Mother** and **father**, your self-giving was the quiet prayer that lifted me. Your boundless love is my deepest source of inspiration.

To my beloved siblings and my precious nephew, my heart's companions. My **Ayoub**, **Youcef**, **Yousra**, and my **Zaid**. Your joy was my comfort, your faith sustained me. Today's achievement is a shared victory.

To my dissertation partner and lifelong friend, **Rofaida Zahra**. In every late-night struggle, you were the moonlight, transforming tangled drafts into polished work. Each page carries traces of your kindness. This success is sweeter for being won together.

To my friends, guardians of my sanity. **Maimouna**, **Rofaida**, **Nourhene**, **Zhiwa**, **Malak**, **Hala**, and **Djoumana**. For every late-night exhausted outburst, for pulling me back from my breaking point. I am endlessly grateful for you being my heart's reset button.

To my **North Star**. In every chaos, you were the clarity. What once seemed unbearable melted to attainable with you near. Let this moment honour you.

To **myself**. For every moment you stumbled yet rose again, you are more capable than your fears whispered. Rest now and feel this, dear heart, you did it!

For **all the independent souls**, may your fire never wane, and your way always find light.

FREE PALESTINE.

Dedication

I look around and love is all around... hope is all around.

And for that, I am most grateful to **Allah**, all almighty, most compassionate, who always hears the helpless prayers and whom I know is always near.

To my parents. My deeply thoughtful mother **Fatima Slami**, and my immensely hardworking father **Said**. The ones who taught me that religion, values, and kindness are far more important and treasured than any temporary earthly achievement.

To my siblings. The ones who cared for me and raised me, taking turns being my teacher as a kid. **Nadia, Ghania, Abdelkader**, and **Amina**. I had the privilege to grow up looking up to them and laughing at their endless jokes and anecdotes.

To the friends we made along the way. **Nourhene, Amira, Maimouna, Malak, Selsabil, Hala**, and **Djoumana**. I had the best university experience with you and because of you. As I sit and eat my lunch quietly, without the loud talks and silly disagreements, I always think about how true it is: all that time, the real academic comeback was you.

To my high school friends, who watched me begin a new chapter and are now watching me step to another. **Chaima, Lamis**, and **Amani**. May your presence always feel close.

To my childhood friends. **Rania** and **Melina**. Growing up with you has been one of the greatest blessings of my life. This is for you and for all the whimsical adventures we shared.

To the girl who made the first months of the Master's journey less lonely. My partner, **Amira Malek**. The quiet new beginnings, the hesitation, the feeling of being lost and confused... they all made sweet sense in the end, didn't they?

To **the colleagues** with whom I genuinely shared good moments and lighthearted days.

To **anyone** who was kind, taught me something, pushed me forward, and showed me hope.

May grace, patience, and enduring love continue to shape every journey beyond these pages.

Doghmane Rofaida Zahra

Acknowledgements

We deeply thank and appreciate our supervisor, Miss **MOUMENE Soumia**, with whom we felt honoured to work, for her guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the writing of this dissertation. Her advice and feedback were truly helpful, and we are grateful for her time and patience.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks to the jury members, Mrs. **BRAHMIA Lilia** and Mrs. **BOURSACE Houda**, for taking the time and effort to review our work. We extend our heartfelt appreciation.

Abstract

This study investigates the interaction between childhood trauma and storytelling as a therapeutic tool in Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2011). The plot follows the journey of Conor O'Malley, a 13-years-old boy struggling with the emotional complexities caused by his mother's terminal illness. The current study draws on trauma theory and narrative therapy to examine Conor's traumatic experience and his journey towards healing. Patrick Ness introduces storytelling as a healing method through a fantastical creature, the monster, who narrates tales to Conor that guide him to understand his enigma. This work aims to explore Conor's trauma and the influence of the monster's tales on his healing process. Furthermore, it analyses the mechanisms of narrative therapy in curing personal wounds and fostering Conor's psychological growth. Ness shifts the monster's image from nightmarish to a source of support so that by the end of the novel Conor is able to accept the loss of his mother. Through the case study of Patrick Ness, the dissertation sheds light on the significance of introducing heavy topics, such as trauma, loss, and grief, in children's literature. It also highlights the assistance of storytelling in processing difficult experiences and helping children overcome their emotional struggles and find hope in the midst of agony.

Keywords: Trauma, Healing, Narrative Therapy, Children's Literature, *A Monster Calls*, storytelling, fairy tales.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	I
Dedication.....	II
Acknowledgments.....	III
Abstract.....	IV
Table of Contents.....	V
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Writing for the Wounded Children: Discussing Trauma and Healing in Children’s Literature.....	6
I.1. Beyond Fairy Tales: Children’s Literature and its Dark Side.....	6
I.2. The Solace of Children’s Literature and a Look on Shared Themes.....	15
I.3. Understanding Childhood Trauma and Narrative Healing.....	24
Chapter Two: The Story of a Grieving Boy: Exploring Trauma in <i>A Monster Calls</i>.....	34
II.1. <i>A Monster Calls</i> : Author, Inspirations, and Story.....	34
II.2. Escaping the Truth: Trauma in the Novel.....	38
II.3. The Ancient Yew Tree: Roots of Trauma.....	55
Chapter Three: From Chaos to Healing: The Power of Storytelling.....	62
III.1. “Stories are wild creatures”: Untamed Narratives for Gentle Growth.....	62
III.2. Breaking the Silence and Serenity of Letting Go.....	71
III.3. The Emotional Impact of Words on Young Minds.....	76
Conclusion.....	83
Work Cited.....	86
Résumé.....	96
ملخص.....	97

Introduction

Trauma, like a scar on the skin, lingers and continues to live with the person immutably for the rest of their life. Even after healing, trauma continues to reside there as a reminder for its sufferer of the fear, anxiety, and horror they once went through. Trauma strikes not only adults but also children; as innocent as they are, they experience it for many different reasons. Hence, it is vital to shed light on children's psychological struggles, the ones who experience trauma from a young age. In one way or another, it affects their entire perception of the world. Even as they grow up unaware of its impact, it shapes them into adults who grapple with social, emotional, and cognitive complexities.

Children's literature is a great escape and a profound nourishment for wild and vast imaginations, discussing various bright themes such as courage, heroism, family, adventures, good and evil, loyalty, and self-discovery. These are stories where the good and the power of justice and friendship always win in the end. With this being the case, some writers have decided to go out of their way and unveil the truth. They tackled themes of trauma, death, injustice, oppression, fear, and horror. Topics that adults are usually afraid to bring up in front of the delicate beings. Their main aim is to voice the silent agonies, to spread awareness, and to help these children navigate through the complicated emotions they find difficult to comprehend on their own, for the world is not always gentle and ideal.

A Monster Calls is a compelling example of such works. Patrick Ness, the American-British author, writes the story of the thirteen-years-old boy, Conor O'Malley, who struggles emotionally with the idea of losing his mother as she becomes severely ill. Through Conor's perspective, Ness explores themes of loss, grief, and guilt, blending fantasy with reality through a monster that guides Conor in his healing journey. After all, the book is written for young readers with wild imaginations, complemented by dark illustrations that reflect the gloomy nature of the narrative.

What makes this story more interesting is its emphasis on an important therapeutic tool in the healing process: narrative therapy. The monster, in contrast of his frightening figure, acts as saviour, teaching Conor lessons through tales. In doing so, the monster also prepares him to tell his own tale; the truth which he denies and rejects. Conor learns that only by confronting the horrors of his mind and allowing himself to express his deepest emotions is he truly able to let go.

Hope as a theme is subtly presented throughout the book, certainly not in an overly optimistic way. What Ness wants these children to learn is that there is also hope in not clutching onto happy endings; accepting reality—as harsh as it may be—is a critical step towards healing. The writer sends a valuable message to young readers, granting them the chance to relate their own suffering to Conor's and to understand the importance of leaning into therapeutic methods in order to overcome their trauma.

Since the publication of *A Monster Calls* in 2011, it has initiated interesting discussions in both fields of literature and psychology. Many researchers have been utilizing the book as a model to explore realistic portrayals of childhood trauma and grief, as well as coping mechanisms, through the character of Conor O'Malley. Their studies apply psychoanalytical frameworks to examine Patrick Ness's blending of fantasy and reality, the role of the monster as a remedial figure, and the journey of healing and finding hope.

For instance, in her work "Intrusion Fantasy as a Cathartic Tool in Patrick Ness *A Monster Calls*," Shaima Hassan analyses the use of intrusion fantasy in aiding Conor to accept his mother's fate, and its overall contribution to his emotional growth by the end of the story. Furthermore, Hassan's study explores the four magical tales told by the monster and their role in sparing Conor from his pain.

From another perspective, Giskin Day's article, "Good Grief: bereavement literature for young adults and *A Monster Calls*," examines the techniques and the elements of children's

literature applied by Patrick Ness to narrate the story of Conor. Additionally, the article explores how the novel delivers and navigates the emotions of loss and grief due to the death of his mother, employing the Kübler-Ross Model to evaluate the emotional progression in the novel.

In the study titled, “A Monster Will Help You: Childhood Grief, Healing Nightmares, and Monstrous Wish-Fulfillment in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*,” Christine Jørgensen addresses the emotional landscapes of these works, exposing their broader psychological and thematic significance. It explores heavy topics in children’s literature, for example, monsters, death, grief, and trauma, to highlight the necessity of openness regarding these themes. The essential argument maintains that the monsters in the books provide more guidance to the protagonists than their caregivers. Moreover, it illustrates that dreams can function as a medium for navigating complex emotions.

Furthermore, the article by Nishan Ghoshal & Paul O. Wilkinson, “Narrative Matters: A Monster Calls- A Portrayal of Dissociation in Childhood Bereavement,” discusses how the monster is perceived as an illustration of child dissociation, serving as a coping mechanism amidst his mother’s illness. Their research also highlights how the novel delicately depicts the emotional struggles experienced by children dealing with loss and how dissociation may surface as a maladaptive response.

The present work takes into consideration these studies in order to investigate the importance of storytelling and the role that children’s literature plays in the healing process of children. It aims to analyze the depiction of trauma and healing in children’s literature, employing the case study of Patrick Ness’s *A Monster Calls*. Also, it attempts to assess the portrayal of trauma, loneliness, and grief through a child’s perspective and the impact of such stories when directed at a young audience. Moreover, this paper examines the representation of the monster as a potential manifestation of Conor’s trauma and subconscious. It analyses its role as a healer and how the complexity of its tales helps Conor make sense of the world and

of himself, particularly. Lastly, the current study explores the significance of providing a space for emotional and self-expression, highlighting how addressing Conor's fears and compelling him to confront the truth played a crucial role in his acceptance of his mother's passing.

This research seeks to answer the following questions: How are trauma and healing represented in children's literature? How are children's books used as a means to safely explore and express heavy emotions? How are childhood trauma and grief portrayed in Ness's *A Monster Calls*? How is the monster represented throughout the novel? How is narrative therapy applied in the book? How does it contribute to the healing process? To what extent does storytelling function as a therapeutic tool for psychological healing in the novel? And what influence this story might have on the young readers?

The present study undertakes an exploration of Ness's novel from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and narrative therapy. These different theories help articulate the various sides to Conor's agony, grasping his inner psychological struggles, the burden of trauma, and the bargaining power of stories. Together, they allow an all-encompassing study in which the novel's portrayal of grief, fear, and the creep of healing appears.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, "Writing for the Wounded Children: Discussing Trauma and Healing in Children's Literature," is theoretical since it provides a general overview of the theoretical framework: trauma theory, traumatic grief, attachment theory, and narrative therapy. It also offers a comprehensive overview of contemporary children's literature and the healing power that books hold. The remaining chapters are both analytical. Chapter two, "The Story of Grieving Boy: Exploring Trauma in *A Monster Calls*," is centered on discussing the shadows of trauma and the nightmare that binds Conor and haunts his dreams. It briefly explores how his relationship with his family members contributes in his vulnerability towards emotional struggles and also discusses the

roles of the yew tree monster as Conor's unconscious. Finally, the third chapter, entitled "From Chaos to Healing: The Power of Storytelling," deals with recovery through the lens of storytelling and narrative techniques. It observes how the monster's tales help Conor to re-author his own narrative and teach him that by telling the truth and shifting his perspective in a world full of contradictions, he can start to overcome his sorrow and find strength, ultimately paving his way towards healing.

Chapter One: Writing for the Wounded Children: Discussing Trauma and Healing in Children's Literature

This chapter examines the children's books that can genuinely resonate with young readers undergoing pain and guide them towards healing. Beginning with a historical perspective, it explores how children's literature has evolved—shifting from protecting young readers with simplified fantasies, to empowering them difficult topics that help them process real emotional weight. While critics might debate the suitability of such material for vulnerable children, these narratives are not just stories; they are proof that those children are not alone. Through a psychological framework, the chapter reveals how deeply trauma can rewire a child's perception of the world. Yet through storytelling, suffering transforms into solidarity, reminding readers that their pain matters.

I.1. Beyond Fairy Tales: Children's Literature and its Dark Side

Children's literature is far more than merely tales for young readers; it carries timeless wisdom that resonates with the audience at every stage of life. Peter Hunt asserts in *Understanding Children's Literature*, "Children's literature is worth reading, worth discussing, and worth thinking about for adults" (2). It embodies a living theoretical entity, woven from the complex interaction of cultural tales that constantly redraw its borders. Additionally, Hunt posits that this literary domain thrives with a dialectical framework where "children's books do not exist in a vacuum" but are crystallised by the dynamic interaction between "real, argumentative readers and visible, practical, consequential uses" (2). The ontological boundaries of the genre remain in a state of flux with M. O. Grenby's interrogation in "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity": "do we mean books read only by children? Or only books that children would have enjoyed?" (5). These categorizations surround the core of children's literature and expose epistemological gaps and

unresolved ambiguity. Children's literature is a tapestry of paradox, blending the didactic with the enchanting, where simplicity and profundity entwine. Works like John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* exemplify this duality, merging moral lessons in riddles and rhymes, combining "amusement and instruction" (Grenby 1, 4). The genre's power lies in transforming instructions into enchanting discoveries, blending moral maturity into a dynamic exchange between awe and insight.

From the dawn of civilization and long before the printed pages, children's literature has been upheld by the timeless oral tradition of fables, myths, and folklore, as Gillian Adams explains that fables were etched on "unbaked clay tablets" (qtd. in Grenby 11). Over centuries, these narrative roots grew deep, as children have been immersed in a diverse literary landscape. Throughout history, they "were reading fables, courtesy books, the *Gesta Romanorum* (a collection of legends, lives of saints and heroes, and stories), even chivalric romances and novels" (Grenby "Children's Literature: Birth" 3).

According to Hunt, literature has always absorbed "elements of folk, fairy tale, and the oral tradition" (4). The medieval world saw this heritage flourish through religious texts like John Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls, or, Country Rhimes for Children* (1686), later known as *Divine Emblems*. It comprised a series of spiritual lessons cleverly derived from 74 short poems on familiar subjects" (Grenby 2). Crafted to "entice" children "to mount their thoughts from what are childish toys" (Bunyan qtd. in Grenby 3). This blend of instruction and wisdom has forever defined the genre, casting a spell of enchantment that continues to capture readers hearts.

The Renaissance era infused children's literature with transformative alchemy, blending the pleasure of imagination with the depth of pedagogy. Works range from *Divine Song*, with its "amiable and sometimes whimsical verse," to François Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque fils d'Ulysse*, offering "a popular mix of Homeric adventure and moral

instruction “Even more, solemn texts, like James Janeway’s *A Token for Children*, empowered young readers by showing children “in full control of their lives” (Grenby 2-3). In “Theorising and Theories: How Does Children’s Literature Exist?” David Rudd explains that these early texts existed in “separate discursive spaces (books of manners, folk tales, children’s Bibles, nursery rhymes)” (20). Together, these works contribute to what Hunt calls literature’s “monological, authoritarian voice,” a perspective often amplified by the English book—the Bible (23). This narrative tradition has helped the genre to develop over time.

Nevertheless, Grenby reminds us that “texts have been produced for children since Roman times, and very probably before” (*Children’s Literature* 2). Young people embrace narratives wherever they find them, whether in the fantastical realms of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, which “came to be read by children soon after its publication,” or in the legendary and heroic stories of the *Gesta Romanorum* (*Children’s Literature* 160). This enduring legacy confirms Hunt’s observation that “children’s literature in its modern form is largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon” (*Understanding Children’s Literature* 5), built upon an ancient foundation.

The 17th century marked a turning point in literature as children, with their creativity turned adult books into their own books, as discussed in Anne Lundin’s *Constructing The Canon’s of Children’s Literature*, “children found delight by appropriating an adult book and reading the text as their own story” (13). Their imagination turned the formal texts into entertainment. Works such as *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Gulliver’s Travels* were re-envisioned through young eyes. This act birthed what F. J. Harvey Darton defines as “printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure” (qtd. in Lundin 5).

18th century children’s books served both, pleasure and a clear social purpose. Grenby notes that they were “fundamentally designed to enlist fiction and verse to expedite the secular, socio-economic advancement of their readers” (5). The true revolution in children’s

literature unfolded when printers began crafting works specifically for young minds, where “anthropomorphism...has formed a staple” and “picturebooks in the modern sense became popular” (Grenby 205, 211). Both anthropomorphism and pages of picturebooks were filled with animals and objects with human characteristics, marking the beginning of a new era in which stories served to both entertain and educate.

As the 19th century took shape, the so-called Golden Age of Children’s Literature emerged. According to Lundin, “The last third of the nineteenth century has long been considered “The Golden Age of Children’s Literature” (61)—a transformative period during which the fairy tales, which she declares “arguably the whole of children’s literature originates with” (82), transitioned from oral traditions to beautifully designed volumes. Educators, like Anna Hamel Wiekkel, played an important role in codifying this new canon of wonder. Indeed, Lundin notes, educators and critics often recommended so-called perfect, timeless classics such as “Mother Goose, myths, Hans Christian Andersen, Grimm Brothers...and *Alice in Wonderland*” (Lundin 14). Meanwhile, Salway nostalgically observes that Victorian children’s books were considered “part of the general body of literature” (qtd. in Lundin 61), before becoming segregated from adult literature.

As fantasy developed in the 19th century, the moral tale underwent a significant transformation. In *Growing and Knowing: A Selection Guide for Children’s Literature*, Mary Trim asserts that works, such as Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, have been adapted into stories that, as Field observes, possess a directness and simplicity of diction which goes straight to the heart (Field qtd. in Trim 127). During the course of the 19th century, children’s literature entered what Lundin terms the self-anointed Golden Age (47), a transformative era where it shook off its didactic past to embrace what F. J. Harvey Darton, describes as “printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure” (qtd. in Lundin 5). Librarians and publishers collaborated with “children’s libraries, creating a market, and children’s librarians

promoting the product” (49). The Caldecott Medal honoured books where illustrations became “very definitely the kind of thing where the interest was in the pictures” (qtd. in Lundin 50), taking the visual narrative to new dimensions. Fantasy originated as “an extension of the traditional fairytale form”, with Tolkien, Rowling, and others crafting “spells, dragons, and wizards” (Trim 84, 89) into sophisticated narratives that combined psychological depth with adventure.

As literature embarked on a journey through the fantastic domain, it retained its romantic soul. For Lundin, this method favours imaginative possibilities over literal representation, recalling the romantic idealism of Wordsworth and Blake (32). This era witnessed both technical and thematic revolutions, such as “film setting or photo composition” (Greenby 208), which reformed book production. Tales increasingly honoured children who were “loved and permitted freedom that leads to adventure, exploration, and leadership” (Trim 135). This was the era when young readers finally gained a voice in their literature. As Trim observes, it became “usual for children to share their view of books” (xxiii), completing the completion of transformation from moral instruction to writing “for pleasure in the twentieth century” (Sarland “Critical tradition and ideology” 32), while never using its enchanting spell.

21st century children's literature has radically transformed its approach to depicting childhood experiences. As Karen Coats observes in “Between Horror, Humour, and Hope,” how gothic narratives give shape to childhood's “dangerous impulses and aggressions,” providing the children a contained space to express their feelings safely. This psychological realism marks a shift from didactic literary traditions. The field's development reflects an unwavering effort to portray real-world challenges. In her book, *The Family in English Children's Literature*, Ann Alston illustrates how contemporary children's literature maintains a vital balance between imagination and reality, insisting that “young readers must live in the

real world” (135). This idea enables narratives to recognize childhood struggles and also provides healthy coping mechanisms. As Rachel Falconer argues in *The Crossover Novel Contemporary Children’s Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, the majority of works for children confront and engage with “the major issues of our time: the war of religion, the relativity of good and evil, the fragility of the natural world” (4-5). Such a transformation reflects a whole movement marked by new narratives that, according to Falconer, use “death’s smaller harbingers illness, failure, loss” so they will build emotional resilience (113). This idea is reflected by Ellen Howard in her work “Facing the Dark Side in Children's Books,” where she stated, “I decided I believe in telling children the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant...they cannot learn to recognize and rise above evil if they are not taught it exist” (9). Together these perspectives demonstrate how 21st century children's literature has developed into a field that directly engage with complex realities discussing dark themes to maintain emotional growth, and valuing honesty over paternalistic protection.

In today’s children's literature, scholars have shown how contemporary children’s books employ death as both a narrative catalyst and a vehicle for processing emotions. As Lois Rauch Gibson and Laura M. Zaidman establish in their study, “Death in Children's Literature: Taboo or Not Taboo?,” death serves as a plot device designed to place children in new, often precarious situations and as a tool to cultivate the “positive psychological development of the surviving child” (232). This representational transformation reflects modern children’s literature’s comfort in addressing mortality and death. Gibson and Zaidman observe, “the current frankness in discussing death in Children’s Books came only three decades ago” (232). Falconer’s analysis illuminates how grieving characters become “driven by grief to remember and haunt the lost past” (48), manifesting death’s role in narrative evolution. This emotional sophistication finds its deepest realization in what Maria Nikolajeva identifies in “Guilt, Empathy, and the Ethical Potential of Children's Literature” as the

“forgiveness and redemption arcs” (7). Through these emotional narratives, modern children’s literature transforms the harsh reality of mortality into opportunities for self-discovery and emotional growth.

Similar to how skilled master composers transform notes into symphonies, children’s literature converts fear into insight, sorrow into strength, and grief into growth. In this regard, P O Richards, D H Thatcher, M Shreeves, P Timmons, and S Barker, reveal that “rather than frightening children, scary books capture their attention and seem to provide vicarious opportunities for exploring and mastering their fears” (qtd. in Nicholson and Pearson 16). Such literature permits young readers to face the fear of the unknown within the secure boundaries of fantasy, where wolves and fairy tale witches serve as tangible allegories of life’s countless mysteries. Catherine Storr’s timeless wisdom resonates in her work, “Fear and Evil in Children’s Books,” where she argues, “all children ought to have moments of fear and moments of awe” (37-8), reminding us that for these twin flames, creativity and resilience are forged. The Gothic tales, enveloped in their velvet darkness, succeed in shaping childhood’s shapeless horrors into concrete realities, whether it is the fear of abandonment resonating through empty hallways or the creeping dread of fear of real-world dangers in urban streets—while preserving the ability. As David Whitley comments on, “Childhood and Modernity: Dark Themes in Carol Ann Duffy’s Poetry for Children,” the power of gothic tales to make readers feel more connected through encounters with darkness (107).

The field of children’s literature faces an essential tension: whether to preserve childhood innocence from uncomfortable truths or to use stories in order to prepare children for them. Historically, adults used horror as a “cruel and coercive” tool of social regulation (qtd. in McCort 18). However, today’s authors have transformed this legacy, where darkness is treated as punishment. Contemporary writers, like Adam Gidwitz, create narratives that serve as what McCort identifies as a pedagogical laboratory for “moral fortitude and courage”

(139). This change signals the field's deep engagement with children's psychology. In *Reading in The Dark*, Jessica R. McCort argues that contemporary horror provides young readers with a "space of symbolic release" (5), a safe imaginative world where they can manage their anxieties through literary allegory. A key point is that such stories train readers in ethical complexity, affirming McCort's observation that "one being can be both evil and good at once" (12). By embracing these complexities, the stories prepare young minds for the real world's moral ambiguities, while safe guarding literary imaginative wonder.

Safeguarding childhood's innocence from the darker aspects of life while recognizing the profound impact of the narrative is what society has struggled with for generations, in comparison to Victorian authors, who did not care or had so many regrets concerning frightening children. This is what Storr identifies as contemporary "squeamishness" (24). The 18th and 19th centuries saw moralistic censorship soften the sharp edges of Grimm's tales, even as Evelyn J. Swenson critiques Puritan death narratives in "The Treatment of Death in Children's Literature":

There is, to the contemporary reader, even a kind of grim humor to be found in the numerous detailed and pious narrations of the exemplary and holy deaths of young children that appear in the publications of the tract societies, in the Puritan and Quaker children's stories, and on into the tales of the Victorian period. These authors wrote in fictional vein, yet still met head-on the obligation to instruct and to edify the young reader at every turn. (401)

Fundamentally, the passage shows the inherent conflict between teaching morality and entertainment in early children's literature.

Today, this same legacy of control endures in modern censorship campaigns, revealing what Dale Townshend terms in "The Haunted Nursery: 1764-1830," "anti-Gothic imperatives" that continue to choose what tales are allowed and suitable for young minds

(*The Haunted Nursery: 1764-1830*). However, modern psychology dismantles anxieties, shedding light on the profound benefits of darker themes in literature and clearing away old fears, where critics are concerned about heavy themes in books causing “nightmares” (Storr 22) or depression. Storr’s assertion that compelling narratives demand “evil to come in” (24) mirrors contemporary understanding through Victorian-era “exemplary and holy deaths” (Swenson 401), equipping young minds to navigate reality’s complexities. The heart of this debate crystallises in Storr’s question: “You have to decide what’s permissible, what’s desirable” (24). Storr’s question gently navigating the tension between protection and the truth that the darkest chapters can provide the most profound lessons. In contrast to Swenson’s 19th-century children, who frequently encountered death, current readers experience metaphorical trials. As a result, literature remains the most secure arena for confronting horror and emerging wiser.

Children’s literature has developed beyond simple storytelling, transforming into a cognitive framework. As demonstrated in Mariana N. F Arruda-colli’s study, “Communication about Dying, Death, and Bereavement”, modern narratives facilitate what she terms “compassionate, brave conversations” regarding death and trauma. This therapeutic capacity represents just a single facet of children’s literature’s power.

The real power of this narrative transformation lies in its ability to balance between consolation and challenge. In this regard, McCrot insightfully asserts, dark themes “prepare adolescent readers for a future that might call on them to adopt political responsibilities” (13). Such reading highlights the genre’s unique capacity in converting fears and anxieties into a structured coping mechanism.

I.2. The Solace of Children's Literature and a Look on Shared Themes

Humans have always sought haven in arts, literature, writing, and all means of self-expression and emotional alleviation. Authors write to ease the struggles of their minds; they create worlds that reflect their insights and emotions, and people read to belong and find solace. Reading assures them that they are not alone in their personal feelings and that their experiences are universal, which helps them feel less isolated. Therefore, we can say that when writers express their affliction and anguish through fictional characters and stories, they help readers feel relieved. There is a term that is used for such idea, which is 'catharsis.' Aristotle first introduced the concept of catharsis in his *Poetics* around 335 BCE. According to Jacob Bernays, the word elucidates that "tragedy excites the emotions of pity and fear—kindred emotions that are in the breasts of all men—and by the act of excitation affords a pleasurable relief" (qtd. in Butcher 245). In this context, Aristotle characterizes tragedy as "an imitation of an action" that is "serious, complete" and holds a resonant emotional and philosophical meaning "in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament" (qtd. in Butcher 240). Subsequently, based on this theory, it was agreed that the arts, such as literature, can provide psychological healing, as it assuages the repressed emotions and trauma.

In the view of psychotherapy, books have always been considered a remedy for the soul. Many authors, psychologists, philosophers, and scholars were interested in its use in emotional development and the impact it has on overall mental health. Both Dawn De Veries et al.'s article, "Healing with Books," and Nick Canty's, "Bibliotherapy: Its Processes and Benefits," provide an insight into the use of books as a tool for healing. Although the concept has existed in practice for centuries, the term 'bibliotherapy' was not coined until 1916 by Samuel Crothers (qtd. in Canty 4). The word can be divided into two parts: "Greek *biblion* meaning Book and *oepatteid* meaning Healing" (Canty 2). This therapeutic process is

commonly defined as “a dynamic interaction between the reader and story,” supporting “the individual in coping with life changes, emotional issues, and behavioral challenges” (qtd. in De Vries et al. 49).

Beyond the beneficial outcomes of this healing method for adults, it also plays a major role in children’s treatment. De Vries et al. tackle this and cited multiple scholars regarding the role of such healing method. For instance, Rhonda Nilson and Alicia Pola assert that bibliotherapy helps the traumatized children establish healthier coping mechanisms (qtd. in 49). It particularly assists them socially and cognitively in navigating challenges, Melissa Heath et al. argue that it fosters social relationships, promotes respect and acceptance of others, decrease social withdrawal, and strengthen their relationships with family and peers. While Barbara Peo Early et al. affirm that it improves reading and problem-solving skills, expands their comprehension, and develops their patience (qtd. in 55). Additionally, James R. Allen et al. add emotional outcomes, such as enhancement in their self-identification and empathy (qtd. in 54). Moreover, Mary Katherine Waibel Duncan in her study, “Creating bibliotherapeutic libraries,” argues that with the use of bibliotherapy children learn that “the world is meaningful, but unpredictable events are a reality; others are benevolent, but not absolutely; and the self is competent at many things but feelings of helplessness are a reality” (26).

During the process of bibliotherapy, youths go through four stages, starting with the *identification* or *involvement* stage, a stage where the literature is picked carefully so that the children are able to discover characters who face similar struggles or experiences; thus, they relate, reflect, and identify with them (Canty 6; De Vries et al. 52). Next comes the *catharsis* stage. A moment of tension release and emotional purification happens as children develop a profound understanding for the characters to whom they related in the first stage, becoming emotionally tied to them (qtd. in Canty 6; qtd. in De Vries et al. 52). As a result, children gain

insight (the third stage) and attempt to make a list of solutions to help the characters solve their problems; therefore, they recognize that their own problems, too, can be changed (Canty 7; De Vries et al. 52). In the final stage of bibliotherapy, children experience *universalism*; they grasp a better comprehension of their struggles and understand that they are not the only ones going through dilemmas (De Vries et al. 52). They “move beyond the egocentric trap” (qtd. in De Vries et al. 52). Therapists praise bibliotherapy’s power in turning agonies into resilience.

Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin’s book *The Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies* is a perfect example of how books can be used therapeutically, closely resembling a doctor's visit when he prescribes medicine for healing. Berthoud and Elderkin prescribe a wide range of books of different genres and different periods for different kinds of inner turmoil and emotional afflictions. The writers recommended books for trauma, anxiety, heartbreak, loneliness, bereavement, and plenty more; they even addressed books for everyday moods and feelings, for instance, boredom. Berthoud and Elderkin remarked, “it helps enormously at times of stress to read about other people who are going through similar things; watching how other people cope or fail to cope will make you feel less alone and give you strength” (65).

With *The Novel Cure* being a detailed illustration of the use of books in emotional healing, when we discuss this transformative journey, it is not to be expected that all books entail bright narratives and happy endings. Some works—especially those directed at children and young adults—baldly rely on darker discourses. This raises the question: how can a child find solace in reading about grief, horror, or death? One must not neglect the fact that some children’s agonies call for literature with such dense topics and feelings; it ensures that they feel heard and seen. In light of this, two renowned novels in children’s literature that

explore themes of fear and loss will be briefly examined: *The Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman and *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson.

What if one day you started hearing “hustling,” “bustling,” “crinkling,” and “crackling” noises inside the walls of your house, but nobody would believe you when you say, “there are wolves in the walls”? (Gaiman). Once again, the author Neil Gaiman, well-known for his gothic writings in children’s literature, succeeds in writing another uncanny, dark fantasy story.

The comic book is about a young girl named Lucy, who hears strange noises inside the walls of their house. She suspects that these noises are from wolves inside the walls and tries to inform her family members about it. What adds suspense to the story is that no matter how many times she tries to tell them, nobody takes her seriously. Instead, they come up with other reasons: rats, mice, bats. Yet, there is no logical reason for wolves to be inside the walls. Still ironically, they all repeat the same saying which everybody knows about except Lucy: “‘If the wolves come out of the walls, then it’s all over.’ ‘What’s all over?’ Asked Lucy. ‘It,’ said her mother. ‘Everybody knows that’” (Gaiman). Eventually, as the story unfolds, the wolves do come out of the walls. In terror and fear, the family flees into the bottom of the garden, where they remain and sleep in the cold. After retrieving her pig-puppet which she left behind, Lucy convinces her parents and brother that they go and stay inside the walls of the house. They all creep there and peek through at the wolves taking over their house and behaving maniacally. As they watch in shock and growing angry, the family decides to confront the wolves and drive them outside their possession; the wolves escape shouting, “once the people come out of the walls, it’s all over!” (Gaiman). Everything goes back to its usual track, and you would think the story is ending on a peaceful note until Lucy begins to hear noises again. She sits and asks her pig-puppet if she should tell them about the elephants inside the walls. The puppet replies that they soon will find out by themselves.

With the help of Dave McKean, the illustrator of the book, the visuals in the book effectively depict the gothic elements of the story, evoking suspense and psychological horror in the reader. In addition, the fable also attracts the attention of adults, which is referred to as a dual audience; although the narrative is presented in a childlike manner, it includes aspects that engage mature readers as well (qtd. in Malilang 81).

The plot deals with the anxiety and fear that Lucy experiences, all whilst not being believed and dismissed by her family members. Numerous academics provide psychoanalytical readings for the novel. Sam Zuppari, in his article “From *Night Kitchen* to *Wolves in the Walls*,” states that the space inside walls imitates the unconscious, meaning the wolves are the dreads trapped in Lucy’s mind, which she fears their consequences if they were ever let free. Unlike her family, she is ready to confront the uncomfortable truth. The contradiction here lies in them acknowledging the destruction that will be caused “if the wolves come out of the walls” (161). In the same vein, Karen Coats’s essay in *The Gothic in Children's Literature* adds that the repetitive answers of “everyone” and “it” when Lucy asks “who says” and “what’s all over” affirm that once lost control over, the unconscious fears “will have the last word” (81). Nonetheless, they continue to deny Lucy’s warnings about their existence, Zuppari asserts, “it is a psychic denial that makes them vulnerable” (161). Coats further explains that Gaiman’s purpose of turning the wolves from an ambiguous anxiety into a reality, as they do come out of the walls and haunt the people, is to allow Lucy to manage the situation (80).

After the family escape the wolves and stay in the garden, they begin to suggest other places they could live in: a grass hut, a hot air balloon, a tree house. Lucy then suggests that they could just move back to their house. While they all look at her in startlement, “the story poses the question: can we return safely to our own minds once the unconscious has been unleashed?” The answer is yes. Once the family wins back their house, we learn that by

having the courage to face our fears, we are truly able to control them and make them disappear (Zuppari 162). Besides, Coats suggests that the idea of the wolves being equally afraid of humans results in a “release of psychic tension” from what once was creepy and menacing (82-83).

By the end of the book, Lucy once more is about to encounter a different creature: the elephants. The story’s ending suggests that the horrors of our minds are never-ending, and for that, Gaiman provides us with a valuable moral; just like Lucy, we should always be prepared to stand up to what is inside the walls and protect our home time and time again (Zuppari 162; Coats 81).

Several scholars argue about the ability of children to navigate through these kinds of gothic stories. Nevertheless, Coats asserts that engaging children with gothic narratives is helpful as it “validates the horror” which exists in their minds; then later on, controls it. She concludes, “these stories increase children’s emotional preparedness for the times when their own wolves come out of the walls” (83). In his book, *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children’s Literature*, Michael Howarth states that because children are already afraid and vulnerable, fear can be impactful in aiding them to achieve psychological growth. By observing characters in a book confront their dreads, it paves the way for them to overcome their own (164). Their solace can be found in knowing there are others, similar to them, feeling terrified and nervous, but are facing their anxieties fiercely. The importance of the gothic literature is displayed through the opportunities it offers for children to confront and manage their fears. Lastly, he poses the questions:

If these complex characters can immerse themselves in gothic landscapes
and then return home once more as refined individuals, then
shouldn’t we allow children to participate in similar experiences? Shouldn’t
children be given the freedom to set out on their own journeys, making

their own choices and learning from the consequences? (167)

Thus, children's literature functions as more than merely a reading during leisure time; it is one of the safest means of education and instruction for the young.

Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* beautifully captures the power of childhood friendship and the pain of unexpected loss. At its heart, the novel centers on a lonely ten-year-old boy in rural Virginia whose world changes after befriending a new girl in the town. Hand in hand, they built the imaginary, magical Kingdom of Terabithia—until the apocalypse knocked on their door. As Paterson writes, it's about "the life of a ten-year-old boy in rural Virginia expanding when he becomes friends with a newcomer who subsequently meets an untimely death trying to reach their hideaway, Terabithia, during a storm" (58). This brief synopsis perfectly distils the essence of Jess and Leslie's bond—a bond that turns their solidarity into a shared kingdom, only to make the loss even more tragic (Cowan 56). Imagination and grief in the story act as a reminder of how deeply childhood experiences mould us.

Historically, *Bridge to Terabithia* was not just a treasured children's tale; it became a landmark in literary tradition. After being published in 1977, it quickly earned the Newbery Medal for its excellence. As Diffrient observes, "once the 1978 Newbery Medal was given to author Katherine Paterson, the book seemed destined to become a staple of America's middle-school classrooms" (445). Transcending its awards, the book's emotional depth is firmly rooted in its autobiographical sources. The story is not from Paterson's imagination, but she lived it. After her son's best friend was struck by lightning and died, she turned her family's grief into something beautiful. As she reveals, "I wrote the book because my son David's best friend was struck and killed by lightning, and I had to make sense of that tragedy" (Cowan 56). That personal bond provides the story with its emotional weight, even decades later. The

magical world of Terabithia shows readers how children survive the hardest times and lessons, not by escaping but by facing them.

Bridge to Terabithia is not just a children's tale about a fantasy world; it is a deeper tale than any other childhood adventure story, with an in-depth analysis of trauma. Jess Arons, the story's protagonist, is nearly invisible and stuck in a family struggle. As Jaden Jenkins points it, he comes "from a poor family with a lot of familial issues regarding his treatment compared to his four sisters" (19), and the reader could sense that in every chapter. That is why Terabithia was his only safe place.

Jess's creative soul is drowning in a world that does not value creativity. Then Leslie arrives, and everything shifts. Paterson calls her a "catalyst". She becomes Jess's force, and their invented world, 'Terabithia', is not just a children's play; Jenkins stresses the "fantastical elements help Jess understand the world around him and its motives" (21). For two invisible strangers who do not fit anywhere, Terabithia becomes their lifeline: "For the children, not only is Terabithia itself a refuge from everyday life, but so are their memories and fantasies of it" (Cowan 59).

The peaceful world Jess and Leslie creates together is ruined by Leslie's accident; she meets an untimely end, trying to reach their hideaway during a storm. As mentioned in 'Triangulating Terabithia' by David Scott Diffrient, Jess is rendered by grief "momentarily speechless near the end of the story, unable to express his pent-up sadness" (445). His loss is too deep for tears, that kind of loss that locks away language. Diffrient describes the scene as "the nodal point around which the entire narrative pivots" (445). Diffrient insists that this moment is more than just a plot twist; it is Jess's feelings when he wakes up to a brutal world, carrying a weight of loss no child is prepared to bear.

Through Leslie's absence, the book offers a portrayal of grief, highlighting Jess's feelings while also illustrating how he gradually begins to rebuild his life. The title's bridge

serves as a metaphor, symbolizing the transition from heartbreak to hope. The “whole secret country” Terabithia (Paterson 57), a place where Jess finally can breathe, away from his family and the harsh world rules, gets to “recreate himself without witnesses” (Cowan 59), with Leslie by his side. They were two lonely kids transforming bullies into a battle against dark forces; it was their way to survive. Despite this, when Leslie is gone, the role of imagination shifts; beyond being a way to flee reality, it now serves as a mechanism for navigating the overwhelming grief. As Paterson reveals, grief does not mean “losing our sense of identity” (qtd. in Cowan 1). Slowly, Jess starts being a “reader” of his own life (Jenkins 21), flipping through memories as if they are pages; “no amount of literary exposure to death can prepare [him] for Leslie's loss” (Chaston 239). Still, the narratives they constructed together offer a guiding light on blackness. The painful truth is that Jess “was caught up in her” (Cowan 56). Now, he has learned how to “rebuild himself without her” (56). The boy who once retreated into fantasies now advances with them as evidence that love transcends mortality.

Jess's journey explains how grief is not about “getting over it” but knowing how to “push back the walls of his mind” (Chaston 241), making room for both the ache and the love. Katherine Paterson's novel shows something: stories do not fix our pain, but they are companions that illuminate the path through it. As Chaston puts it, the story “would not have provided [Jess] with pat solutions or wiped away his grief” (241), but it does not write to tie grief up with pretty words—she writes to stand alongside you in life's chaotic grief. Her story pictures childhood pain, offering comfort, space, and a feeling of being understood. In this way, *Bridge to Terabithia* becomes more than just a book—it is now a bridge for broken kids. This is the power of children's literature. *Bridge to Terabithia* proves that stories can be a lifeline; Jess's journey shows readers that narratives can help carry the deepest losses.

I.3. Understanding Childhood Trauma and Narrative Healing

“The past can tick away inside us for decades like a silent time bomb, until it sets off a cellular message that lets us know the body does not forget the past”

(Nakazawa).

Judith Herman explains in her book, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, how trauma takes place when a person is in their most powerless position. When faced with danger or a threat, the mind releases a rush of adrenaline, neglects hunger or pain, and ignites emotions of fear and anger as a part of a normal reaction aimed at self-defence, which involves either fighting or fleeing. But, when these two options are not available, “the human system becomes overwhelmed and disorganized” (33-34). Herman clarifies that after the body’s response loses its usefulness, those triggered arousals and changes continue to last even when the incident has ended. She goes on to state, “traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present” (35). As a result, they remain trapped in survival mode.

From another perspective, Cathy Caruth’s famous book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, discusses trauma as an unprocessed and lingering experience that alters the person’s life and perception forever. She describes it using the word ‘unclaimed,’ which refers to an overwhelming event that surpasses the mind’s comprehension. The tragedy occurs so suddenly that it does not allow the mind to fully understand what happened at the moment. As a result, it comes back later on as “uncontrolled,” “repetitive,” “intrusive phenomena” (11).

Frey-Rhon Liliane, in her book *From Freud to Jung: A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Unconscious*, further elaborates the Austrian neurologist definition of trauma, it is a “psychic shock which the subject was unable to handle because of its incompatibility with his conscious concepts” (7). These concepts are the worldviews and the

beliefs of which a person is mindful. Once a traumatic event occurs in a way that does not fit or find a place in between the conscious ideas, one is unable to process it. Thus, it gets “forced into the unconscious” (7).

A person’s lack of awareness of a tragic incident’s impact on their brain does not necessarily mean that the body has erased it; it proves its existence by resurfacing through symptoms that may appear afterwards (Caruth 59). In Herman’s discussion of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, she introduces three terms: *hyperarousal*, *constriction*, and *intrusion*. Hyperarousal is defined as an anxious state of consistently expecting a threat. Herman elaborates that a traumatized person is always concerned about the returning of danger at any given time. The traumatized also might show other signs, like becoming quick to startle, bursting out of anger over the smallest things, and having a restless sleep (35). In addition, constriction is a state of total numbness toward the situation. When a person is unable to physically do anything to help or protect themselves, their consciousness cope by emotionally detaching and deriving meaning from the event, which reduces the overwhelming impact of the situation. As a result, they respond with coldness that defies their usual behaviour (42). Lastly, intrusion refers to the memories that haunt the survivor, evoking emotions that intrude in their daily life. For instance, traumatic flashbacks while awake and nightmares while asleep (37), or what Freud named ‘the repetition compulsion’ (41). It is indeed puzzling how the mind would put itself in a vicious loop of tormenting images. Expanding on Freud’s ideas, Caruth argues that the mind typically displays certain neuroses to suppress unwanted emotions and avoid confronting complicated struggles. However, the recurrence of traumatic dreams could only imply that the mind is unable to escape what has not yet received a “psychic meaning” (59).

To have a profound understanding of trauma, we must understand first that the emotional conflicts resulting from it are not due to the experience of terror but to surviving

it—shaking hands with death and then walking right past it. Thus, while the body survives the injuries of the experience, the psyche is intangible. Caruth poses the following question:

“what does it mean for consciousness to survive?” In order to find an answer, it is necessary to recognize the role that consciousness plays in maintaining one’s sanity. Freud suggests that just like the body is protected by physical defenses—the immune system—the mind is protected by a psychic shield—the consciousness—which aids it in processing external and intense stimuli. Caruth elaborates further, “unlike the body, however, the barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organism by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time.” Hence, when a traumatic event occurs, the shock bypasses the protective shield of the mind and causes a temporal distortion (60-61).

This distortion freezes the mind in a passing moment. Building on this idea, Freud contradicts the old shock theory, which suggests that trauma is a heavy stimulus on the mind, injuring the nervous system. Instead, he claims that it is the consequence of a lack of readiness. When the mind is not forewarned about a frightening action, it will fail to experience it on set. This theory provides a logical explanation for why dreams keep replaying the same traumatic scenes; the mind is trying to master the emotions it missed because the event happened unexpectedly (62).

Indeed, trauma does not believe in age; it damages both adults and children. That being said, it is essential to emphasize the lasting scar it leaves on a child’s brain since they are in a process of developing a healthy consciousness. Once this process is interrupted by a traumatic event, it shifts their whole sense of self and damages their potential, turning them from who they could have been into a completely wounded adult who struggles in their everyday life.

David Trickey and Dora Black, in “Long-term Psychiatric Effects of Trauma on Children,” assert that regardless of being physically injured, trauma will weigh heavily on the

child's psyche just from experiencing powerlessness in the face of overpowering events, like witnessing a death or a serious injury, particularly of a person on whom a child relies (261). Grief would be a natural and proper response, yet in other cases when they lose their loved one in a tragic incident or witness their pain and suffering, trauma symptoms overlap with the grieving process and cause complicated consequences. This is known as 'traumatic grief' (Dyregrov et al. 1).

Within the lines of the book *An Introduction to Object Relations*, the psychotherapist Lavinia Gomez explains that "the differences between the mourning of adults and that of children lie predominantly in children's lesser experience and knowledge of what death means, and their lack of control over what they are told and how they are treated" (166). In "Childhood Traumatic Greif," Cohen et al. explain that several factors may lead the grief to be traumatic—beside the violence of the death—such as: a history of trauma or loss, the way the adults related to the child react to the death, the disruption of the child's identity, and lack of friendships or support (qtd. in 317). Irene S. McClatchey et. al's article "Traumatic and Complicated Grief Among Children" add that the trauma symptoms accompanying the grief inhibit children's ability for expression, preventing them from mourning in the right way (qtd. in 70). Throughout this interrupted process, youngsters may experience "unpleasant thoughts about how the person died," and illusions of seeing and hearing the deceased, as well as having a difficult time bonding with other people (McClatchey et al. 71). Aime Ferow explains in her article, "Childhood Grief and Loss," that that older adolescents facing loss may feel "shunned or isolated" as their classmates may not understand their struggle or may be too nervous to ask about it (qtd. in 2). Other symptoms of traumatic grief may include anger, denial, loss of trust, separation anxiety, nightmares, and guilt (Nader 19, 27). Herman mentions how individuals may develop a sense of false responsibility when losing someone close; they become trapped in an emotional pit of helplessness over an event, wonder about

what they could have done to save them, and feel as if the death is their fault. She also suggests that the experience could be more burdensome when one witnesses the torment; therefore, their guilt acts as a coping mechanism that offers them some control (53-54).

Caregivers are not only responsible for providing shelter and food; in his study “The Link between Types of Attachment and Childhood Trauma,” Altılgan Erozkın highlights that their role is more crucial than that. By being emotionally available, caregivers establish a strong barrier against mental health issues and trauma. In the case of inconsistency or loss during early childhood, it increases the risk of the child’s fragility (1072). John Bowlby was the first to theorize that bonds with caregivers during infancy supports the children’s development. Mary Ainsworth then continued the research, building on Bowlby’s work. Occasionally, the parents themselves are the primary source of trauma, which is why Bowlby and Ainsworth explore parent-child relationships in what is defined as ‘the attachment theory.’ Gomez provides a reading of this theory, highlighting the different types of attachment that emerge depending on the parents’ treatment of their child. According to this theory, three types of children exist; a child with a secure attachment loves themselves, enjoys interacting with others, and feels secure in their dependence. In contrast, an insecure-ambivalent child perceives themselves as unlovable and others as unpredictable, feeling the need to manipulate them to receive care. While the insecure-avoidant kid thinks they do not deserve to be cared for and that others do not care, and in order to keep people around, they suppress their needs and emotions, like anger (Gomez 161). Bowlby explains that a caregiver who responds positively to their children’s emotional needs raises a stable, secure kid. Meanwhile, an unreliable, controlling, or negligent caregiver instills a negative mental pattern, resulting in an insecure kid who fears rejection (qtd. in Yılmaz et al. 490). Moreover, Bowlby introduces a defense mechanism called ‘defensive exclusion,’ which an insecure child develops to seek safety and protection. They are so accustomed to the negligence of

caregivers that in the face of unbearable pain they experience “frozen blocks.” They numb their feelings of distress, unable to fully process any emotion. Over time, their sense of connectedness is disrupted, and if the dissociation continues, the emotional struggles can persist (Gomes 161). In the long run, the way parents treat their kids profoundly impairs their personality, psychological, and developmental capacities (Yılmaz et al. 489-490).

Trickey and Black in their study demonstrate the impact of trauma on multiple levels. Cognitively, they argue that traumatized children experience a recurrence of unwanted flashbacks and memories. Some become hypervigilant, which can ultimately cause them issues in concentration and memory, affecting their performance in school. Behaviorally, affected children may face problems controlling their anger and becomes more short-tempered. They may also “develop an exaggerated startle response” to loud or visual stimuli, and their sleep may be disrupted by problems like sleepwalking and nightmares. Additionally, trauma may hinder their developmental progress, causing them to regress and struggle with challenges they had previously mastered. While they may not experience detailed flashbacks of their trauma, they will involuntarily reenact its themes through a play. Emotionally, “children can become tearful, withdrawn, suffer mood swings and may even become clinically depressed.” (262). They may struggle with separation anxiety, and become intensely terrified that their caregiver would leave them alone. Moreover, they may develop panic attacks and various fears, as well as going out of their way to avoid any reminders of their trauma (262).

Trickey and Black explain that the way children react to trauma affects them in the long term, which results in serious problems in their adulthood. The researchers elaborate, using pre-school children as examples, that the “socially withdrawn” may hinder the important skill of ‘collaboration.’ In the future, they may end up having a limited capacity to make new friends or re-acquire social skills. Moreover, concentration problems do not only

impact their academic performance but also their acquisition of competencies and their future career path. Additionally, they clarify that children may already possess a tendency to develop a personality disorder, which can be triggered and activated by trauma or their reaction to it. For example, the children who isolate themselves may develop an avoidant personality disorder, while the children who resort to anger to fulfill their wants may grow up to be aggressive and headstrong, exhibiting “an underlying anti-social personality disorder” (264). Along the same lines, Herman illustrates in her book that disruptions in developmental stages during childhood—whether caused by trauma or the unavailability of caregivers—lead to a fragmented self-image. She argues, “conflicts over autonomy leave the person prone to shame and doubt,” while “conflicts over initiative and competence leave the person prone to guilt and inferiority” (53).

It is well understood now that trauma impact the healthy growth of children, creating different hurdles throughout the stages of their lives. Unless treated, it is not a psychological state that would disappear on its own. With the use of psychotherapy, it becomes easier to cure childhood wounds, offering a chance for mental and emotional maturity for those who were once deprived. This research will introduce and focus on ‘narrative therapy’ as a therapeutic solution. Alice Morgan’s book, *What Is Narrative Therapy?: An Easy-to-Read Introduction*, is used to provide a brief overview of ‘narrative therapy’ and the key features that will inform the analysis of the selected case study in the practical chapters that follow.

In everyday life, individuals encounter multiple kinds of situations, they tend to organize them in a preferred sequence and give it meaning, because people are “interpreting human beings,” as Morgan describes. These situations then are turned into stories about them and all the different aspects that shape their personalities, allowing them to make sense of who they are according to what interpretations they attributed to the ‘plot.’ The author explains that their story can be impacted by the world and people around them; their opinions

may alter visions of themselves. She also elaborates on how the dominant story impacts the course of their future and the decisions they make. But a single story cannot be the absolute truth, “our lives are multistoried,” Morgan declares. One can interpret one event into different narratives that contain unpredictable possibilities of their lives. Through this insight, one must always balance between their dominant and alternative stories, keeping in mind that they are constantly in a journey of reinterpreting and rewriting the narratives with every new experience (5-9).

When the stories are mal-constructed or center around negative events, they can result in distorted viewpoints about the world and one’s own identity. Perhaps children are the most affected by this process of ‘making sense of life,’ this is why they need guidance to reshape their perceptions. Narrative therapy works to untangle these complexities. In her book, Morgan outlines the major components of this therapeutic approach, among them, this research will concentrate on these three: *externalization*, *deconstruction*, and *unique outcomes*.

As the name suggests, externalization focuses on separating the problem from one’s identity. Externalization requires shifting the speech or the blame away from the person and directing it towards the problem itself. Morgan clarifies that people often fail to recognize an issue as external, which may create obstacles in their way. Rather they believe that it is within them and a part of who they are. For this reason, therapists use what Morgan calls, “personifying the problem.” They listen carefully to what a patient shares, then rephrase it, placing ‘the’ before every adjective that indicates a struggle. The author exemplifies, if a patient states, “I am a depressive sort of person,” the right response might be, “so the depression has made it hard for you to go out.” Other than naming, children can represent the problem through drawings. This helps patients to fixate on solving the problem; when they no

longer identify with it, it allows their attributes to step into the light. She adds, “externalizing conversations reduce guilt and blame and yet leave room for responsibility” (17-24).

Moving on to the next step which is deconstruction, Morgan explains that a problem would not persist if it was not reinforced or strengthened by specific ideologies, possibly rooted in one’s culture and environment. For instance, a patriarchal environment promotes ideas of male dominance, which lead to the abuse of women. During this stage, a therapist is asked to be as curious as possible, by asking questions and delving deeper into the history of these beliefs. Engaging in such conversations will aid to dissect other dominant stories and examine them from different angles, which in turn, will permit the patient to understand the origins of their hurdles and liberate from their influence (45, 50).

Lastly, unique outcomes—in a simple definition—are specific events that contradict the main narrative, also “known as ‘sparkling events’ as they are like events that shine or stand out.” They can include actions such as thoughts, feelings, dreams, or statements. Morgan provides examples from her clinical work: such as a patient with self-doubt who is able to voice her opinion during a meeting, or how a patient who struggles with drugs and alcohol dreams of a holiday with his family when he is finally clean from addiction. Once these variations are detected by a therapist during conversations, they attempt to dig deeper into their history, highlight them, “ground them,” and connect them to a new unfolding plot, ultimately leading to the emergence of an ‘alternative story.’ Alternative stories act as the “anti-problem,” holding a hope for healing and future transformation. As patients begin to be aware of their own competencies, they gain an opportunity to re-author their narrative and reclaim a sense of control over their lives (52-53, 59).

In conclusion, this chapter introduces the literature composed for young minds, its dark dimensions, the aims, and the debates. Exploring the healing power hidden within these works reveals how books carry much more than just lines, words, or letters—they carry depth,

cure, and solace. It also discusses the profound impact and usefulness of books in psychotherapy, supported by two study cases of children's literature that are briefly analysed to gain more insight. Finally, the last title shifts the focus to theory, explaining trauma and how it takes form from an early age, while emphasizing the importance of stable parental relationships. Among numerous psychotherapeutic methods, narrative therapy is highlighted, offering children an opportunity to re-author their story and still find a hopeful future despite the tough times.

Chapter Two: The Story of a Grieving Boy: Exploring Trauma in *A Monster Calls*

In this chapter, a general background of the book and its author is offered: his inspirations and intentions in presenting emotionally dense plots to young readers, and how this—from his perspective—helps them to understand their personal narratives. Additionally, it delves deeper into Conor's world and analyse his trauma through the lens of the theoretical framework, observing the successful portrayal of a grieving child's reality. Finally, the last section centres on examining the emotional bond and subconscious manifestations between Conor and the *monster*, exploring how they are, in essence, one and the same.

II. 1. *A Monster Calls*: Author, Inspirations, and Story

In the pure magic of children's stories, words are not just ink on paper but portals to new horizons. Here, the most talented writers in this field create stories not just for children, but alongside them. These writers transform sentences into wonder and sorrow into solace. These are the kind of tales that do not disappear when the last page turns; they resonate deeply, flowing like stars in the bones. Within the harmony of these voices, Patrick Ness forges his unique direction, a place where heartache meets wonder, leaving etchings on the spirit.

He is a British-American author, celebrated for his novels that artfully blend fantasy, science fiction, and deep exploration of emotional themes. Born on October 17th, 1972, in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. His journey towards literary recognition began without fanfare, starting his career writing corporate materials, followed by the release of his first adult novel, *The Crash of Hennington* (2003). With bestsellers such as the *Chaos Walking* trilogy: *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008), *The Ask and The Answer* (2009), and *Monsters of Men* (2010), and *A Monster Calls* (2011), Patrick Ness has made a splash and garnered a fandom

heaving with devotion. He is, in fact, one of only seven writers to have been awarded the Carnegie Medal twice, and only the second to win it consecutively. His books connect with readers on a very real emotional level and the experience of being a teenager (Ness). This heartfelt sensitivity and detailed comprehension of adolescence are perhaps most artfully exemplified in *A Monster Calls*.

A Monster Calls is about Conor O'Malley, a thirteen-year-old boy living in a quiet English village, who, night after night, battles a nightmare that claws its way into his sleep ever since his mother got seriously sick. One cold night, at 12:07 a.m., he was visited by a living yew tree behind his window. Not like the monster from the nightmare, the yew tree *monster* is as ancient as the earth, wild, and heavy with secrets. It strikes a deal and promises three visits with three tales, but in the end, there is a price: Conor must tell the truth he has been running from, the terror that chills him more than any nightmare ever could. With every day that goes by, another layer is added to the ache. Seeing his mother fading from his life, a grandmother with sharp discipline and distant grace, school turns into a daily torture of bullies. At night, struggling with loneliness, Conor lies awake in the silence of his house with the haunting terror of potentially losing his mother.

The *monster's* tales are not the gentle stories Conor wishes for; instead, they are tangled, puzzling lessons that force him to question all his beliefs. Sometimes good people cause harm, bad people can be right, and the hardest part of all is the fact that he is starting to recognize these contradictions as reflected in himself. The *monster's* stories are not fairytales, yet, through them, he learns that people are both kind and cruel; they are just broken souls making difficult decisions. Slowly, the *monster* pushes him towards the truth he has been trying to escape: that love can harbour anger beneath its surface, and that mercy begins when we set things free.

The nightmare came one last time, and Conor finally faces it: “I can’t stand it anymore... I just want it to be over” (Ness 220), he whispers. Surprisingly, the *monster* does not judge him; it calls him human. With morning lights creeping in, Conor sits vigil by his mother, ready to face his grief rather than pushing it aside. It is a hard-won knowledge; inside the cocoon of despair, we are softly remoulded (Ness, “The Fear of Losing Control”).

Patrick Ness poured his heart into his words to craft such a heart-touching story, exploring themes of fear of losing a parent and the anger of grief. Yet, he never claimed for the plot to be his own. It was always acknowledged that the idea originally belonged to the late author, Siobhan Dowd. Inspired by her own terminal illness, the author decided to turn her tragedy into something not only tangible but also sadly beautiful, like a last tide of emotions. And is not that the purpose of any writer?

Within John-Paul Flintoff’s online newspaper article “How Do You Tell a Child His Mother Is Dying?” and mentioned by the words of her sister, Denise Dowd, after Siobhan’s sickness had spread, doctors began treating her with medicines extracted from yew trees. This experience stirred her to decide, “a lot of people want to write about their cancer, but I want to write about a yew tree.” Unfortunately, death was too impatient to wait until she finished her book; it caught her suddenly and before she could fulfil what might have been her last legacy in children’s literature.

Although Dowd wrote only for youngsters, she never shunned the raw realities. She left four books discussing topics such as grief, political struggles, and identity. The fifth fell into the right arms of Patrick Ness, who embraced it and sought its depth and potential. For that, in “Interview with Patrick Ness,” Ness states, “I can’t write the story she would have written, but I can try to write a story she would have loved.” Both writers have written about different themes with different styles, however, they always shared a sympathetic ground for young adults and their complexities, shedding light on it and voicing it out.

It is explained in the interview of “How Patrick Ness Adopted *A Monster Calls*,” how during the process of taking the lead after Dowd, Ness realized that the power of the book lay in the lingering rage that had no place to settle. He further explains how this anger begins even before the loss occurs; it stems from the horror of losing itself, and the ghostly loneliness that would follow. The author talks about Conor saying, “he always knows what’s going to happen, he just doesn’t want to go through it by himself. That to me is the request of any child. ‘Take me seriously, take my pain seriously. I’m not asking you to take it away, I’m just asking to not be alone.’”

Shared in a 2017 blog interview entitled “An Interview with Patrick Ness,” the interviewer asks whether Ness’s purpose was to write a book that “would help people cope and grieve” or did he discover what the story served mid-writing. As simply as he put it, the author answered that he was only trying to write about the truth of it all. He repeatedly showed respect for the complicated world of adolescence, and in many interviews, he talked about the importance of writing for the young, emphasizing the authentic depiction of their situations.

If Ness wants to offer a gentle regard to anyone, he would start by his teenage-self, as he mentions how when he was young there were no books that depicted his emotional conflicts in a manner that he wished for or that satisfied him. For this reason and inspired by his own experience, rather than offering an idealized version of how the world should be, he attempts to portray the reality as it is, stating, “...hopefully they [the readers] recognize, that what is true for him [the main character of the book] is also true for them” (“Interview with Patrick Ness”).

In 2011, the blog interviewer of “Interview with Patrick Ness and Extract from *A Monster Calls*” describes Ness’s writings as undisguised and relatable. His openness to the human vagueness and imperfections makes it more interesting, which is uncommon in young

adults' literature. In Ness's perspective, humans are a collection of juxtapositions, it is nearly impossible to be defined by a singular thought or idea, and healing takes recognition and acceptance of this dilemma. He argues, "I think blind certainty kills us as a species. It's death to wisdom, it's death to growth, it can even be death to hope."

To justify the use of dark themes in his young adult fiction, he refers to what teenagers write themselves. Their world is crueller and tougher, and that is what adults fail to take notice of, "they write much darker stories than any young adult author would be allowed to publish." Similarly, in the interview "Q & A with Patrick Ness," Ness explains that being a teenager comes with a heavy emotional baggage only they can reflect on its darkest dimensions. It is a war of struggles to have the "responsibilities of an adult" while being deprived of the privileges. To neglect their challenges and "leave them to think about these things by themselves" is a direct act of injustice, as he further highlights that the benefit of being truthful about the fears is that it makes you trusted, so when you also talk honestly about hope and healing, you are still believed (Flintoff).

II. 2. Escaping the Truth: Trauma in the Novel

The story begins with Conor waking up from 'the' nightmare. The definite article is used by the author to emphasize that it is not any nightmare. It indicates a frequent visitor, the same one he has been seeing for a while, the one with which he is familiar and which he remembers vividly; the very first symptom of his trauma, captured in this passage:

The one with the darkness and the wind and the screaming. The one with the hands slipping from his grasp, no matter how hard he tried to hold on. The one that always ended with—

"Go away," Conor whispered into the darkness of his bedroom... (Ness 15)

With the wind roaring and the ground shaking and the hands holding tight but still

somehow slipping away, with Conor using all his strength but it still not being enough, with the grip losing itself, with the falling, with the *screaming*—

“NO!” Conor shouted... (Ness 64)

It is a trembling world inside his head. Ness’s description conveys a sense that for Conor everything has been crumbling down for a quite some time, since his mother first fell ill. What he is experiencing in dreams is a mere reflection of the agonies folded away in his unconscious.

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, according to Cathy Caruth’s book *Unclaimed Experience* and expanding from Freud’s theory, once the consciousness’s shield is evaded by a shocking event unexpectedly, the mind begins to play the same traumatic scenes repeatedly in order to fully grasp what it could not comprehend the first time (Caruth 60-61, 62). That is how trauma and dreams are interlinked. Conor is unable to process his mother’s terminal illness. The idea of her forever fading away is a frightening thought that seeps into his sleep, making him live what he is desperately trying to avoid. This ongoing cycle is defined by Freud as the ‘repetition compulsion’ in Judith Herman’s book *Trauma and Recovery*, where the mind involuntarily repeats the same images for the purpose of gaining control over what seems to be horrifying (41).

Yet, the nightmare is always incomplete and ends without any conclusions. It abruptly stops with Conor trying to roll back into reality—a reality that is less terrifying than what his mind conjures for the meantime. He momentarily escapes a truth which he carefully hides from the day: “...the terror following him into waking, gripping his chest so hard it felt as if he couldn’t breathe, his throat choking, his eyes filling with water” (Ness 64).

In “Psychoanalytic Reading of *A Monster Calls*,” Nathan Carlin explains further the Freudian concept of dreams. He argues that the mind has its own methods to convert “latent content,” which refers to the repressed wishes and fears, into “manifest content,” which is the

actual dream that was seen. He elaborates on how the “dream-work” implies one of those methods to conceal overwhelming thoughts. Nevertheless, there are times when the operation fails and the fears break through, urging the mind to wake the dreamer, similar to how Conor wakes up the moment he is about to lose his mother. Carlin explains, “in such cases, the repressed wish is too close to becoming fully conscious, so one wakes up instead of expressing the wish in the dream. Conor’s waking up from the recurring nightmare illustrates this nicely.”

But the nightmare’s claws did not visit only at night—they haunted him and left scars even during the day. The nightmare left him with emotions rising and falling like waves in his chest. This is illustrated when the narrator observes:

“They were making fun of Conor’s mother!”

This made everyone freeze again and the burning sun in Conor’s stomach grew hotter, ready to eat him alive.

(-and in his mind, he felt a flash of the nightmare, of the howling wind, of the burning blackness-). (Ness 36)

The nightmare feeling was raising in him, turning everything around him to darkness, making everything seem heavy and impossible, like he’d been asked to lift a mountain with his bare hands and no one would let him leave until he did. (Ness 67)

This is what Judith Herman introduces as ‘intrusion;’ a recurring vision of flashbacks and memories that might invade the waking life of a traumatized person, forcing itself on them, and evoking the same terrifying feelings in spaces that do not necessarily include a threat (37).

Taking a deeper look into his nightmare. Conor’s mother stands on the edge of a cliff as the ‘real’ monster appears:

There was a low sound from below the cliff. A rumbling, *booming* noise.

Like something big was moving down below.

Something bigger than the world.

And it was climbing up the cliff face. (Ness 210)

Ness's prose is simple, yet fiercely symbolic, creating a lively and intense image of the way Conor visualizes death. It is this vicious, soul-thirsty monster who is bigger than the world, bigger than his understanding, too big to be stopped or to be saved from. Quietly coming up, with a presence that is giant and devastating, exposing itself with a loud rumbling. Conveyed through these lines:

...the real, nightmare monster, formed of cloud and ash and dark flames, but with real muscle, real strength, real red eyes that glared back at him and flashing teeth that would eat his mother alive.

...

"Help me, Conor!" his mum yelled. "Don't let go!"

"I won't!" Conor yelled back. "I promise!"

The nightmare monster gave a roar and pulled harder, its fists straining around his mother's body. And she began to slip from Conor's grasp. (Ness 211-12)

The author perfectly illustrates Herman's theory of trauma and how it arises when one is most powerless (33). This scary scene of death stealing his mother away from him—generated by Conor's subconscious—summarizes the agony of feeling defeated against an inevitable force. Even though he is trying with all he has to hold on to her, he remains too weak. In these passages, Ness narrates Conor's trauma in a way that it is no longer an abstract concept; it is real. It represents the monster roaring, the darkness, the tension, the mother crying for help while slowly falling out of Conor's reach, all of which stir feelings of incapacity and helplessness.

The moment when Conor ordinarily wakes up terrified is when his mother falls into the abyss and is taken away. Conor has always known how it would end, ever since he was first told about her illness. Nevertheless, a hope has always dwelt within the depths of his heart that if he had held on a little tighter, she might not have slipped from his hand. This hope is a two-faced coin of longing and denial: his longing for her presence and desire for her to stay pushes him to turn his head away from the undeniable fact that her illness is terminal. This is evident in Conor's statement: "I've known forever she wasn't going to make it, almost from the beginning. She said she was getting better because that's what I wanted to hear. And I believed her. Except I didn't" (Ness 221).

In the same vein, Aghnia Kamilia Ulfa interprets Conor's nightmare, in her article "A Concept of Characteristics of Magical Realism in Patrick Ness' *A Monster Calls*," as a way of expressing his fear of loss and anger toward the cancer, transferring them into the figure of the monster. She explains, "Conor himself actually understands his mother's condition and knows that someday she will lose the battle, but he keeps denying the fact" (92). This interpretation is echoed in Natali Cavanagh's reading of the novel in her "Toxicity in Themes of Control," where she studies how Conor views the cancer as their "enemy." Similar to Ulfa's interpretation, Cavanagh sees the monster as a personification of Conor's painful helplessness against this powerful foe, one that alters his personal worldviews and beliefs, as well as forces him to confront his dreads and secret wishes. Cavanagh argues that Conor's desperate clinging to hope and trust in his mother's recovery is his way of "physically fighting and waging war." She concludes, "while the cancer is not a traditional monster, Conor sees it as the main antagonist he is battling" (6). These readings reinforce Caruth's idea of how the mind exhibits certain defence mechanisms to shun unbearable emotions (Caruth 59). Thus, instead of confronting his mother's tragic fate, Conor denies it and concedes a misplaced responsibility of saving his mother.

By the end of the nightmare, and after the moment when Conor's mother fades into the blackness, an ugly truth is unveiled. There is more to the scene than what Ness initially presents. Beneath it lies a shameful wish that Conor buried in the darkness of night—a hidden truth the yew tree *monster* has come to uncover. It is exposed in these lines:

You let her go, the monster said again.

Conor closed his eyes tightly.

But then he nodded.

You could have held on for longer, the monster said, but you let her fall. *You loosened your grip and let the nightmare take her*. (Ness 218)

...he cried out as the fire raged around him. "I can't stand knowing that she'll go! I just want it to be over! I want it to be *finished!*" (Ness 220)

Despite her agonized cry for him to hold on to her, Conor broke his promise and let go—or at least that is what he believes happened. He then drowns in oceans of guilt, as if the monster in his nightmare only rose up because of his unspoken desire, as if he were the monster all along. It is only after his secret is exposed that the depth of the blame he places on himself for his mother's death becomes clear: thinking he deserves a punishment for this horrible sin. This is revealed in the novel as follows:

He was still alive.

Which was the worst thing that could have happened.

"Why didn't it kill me?" he groaned, holding his face in his hands. "I deserve the worst."
(Ness 221)

"I didn't *mean* it, though!" Conor said, his voice raising. "I didn't mean to let her go! And now it's for real! Now she's going to die and it's my fault!" (Ness 222)

Alongside denial and hope, Conor's self-blame functions as another coping mechanism. Relying on Herman's theoretical explanation, some individuals tend to hold

themselves accountable when they lose someone close, mentally wandering through all the ways in which they could have saved or helped them. This wishful thinking offers a false sense of regained control; they pretend that they might have been able to change the outcome. The more they witness their loved one's torment, the more burdensome their guilt becomes (53-54). Conor believes that if he had been brave enough to endure more pain, if he had stood by and watched while his mother suffered and slowly vanish from his life, without wishing for the anguish to cease, without loosening his weary grip, then perhaps she would have survived.

From the moment Conor learned of his mother's sickness, he had been grieving her, perhaps not openly, but he already knew how the story would end. Atle Dyregrov, in his book *Grief in Children* (2008), mentions that youngsters grieve before the death occurs when they confirm the illness is fatal and notice the changes that follow. They start experiencing what is known as 'anticipatory grief' (69). Although mourning is a necessary psychological process that helps to accept the new reality, Conor's grief does not occur in the healthiest way. His overall emotional state throughout the book is composed of interweaved trauma symptoms and bereavement, his 'anticipatory grief' turns into what we defined in the previous chapter as 'traumatic grief.'

Traumatic grief, as defined in Dyregrov et al.'s article "Grief and Traumatic Grief in Children," mainly develops in children when they endure the affliction of violently losing a parent or witnessing their suffering (1). The same way Conor helplessly watches his mother grapple with not just the cancer but the hurtful treatments and their side effects, knowing a day will come when she will be defeated. His profound sense of guilt may be the major tell-tale and the core of this syndrome, from which other manifestations—such as denial, anger, self-blame, and emotional inhibition—may be derived.

Conor is a quiet, introverted kid who keeps everything he feels for himself. He spends much of his time inside his head contemplating rather than expressing his thoughts and emotions. For instance, he keeps the nightmare a secret, choosing to face its horrors alone. He also never tells anyone about being bullied in school, not even when Miss Kwan directly asks him. On a deeper level, these internalizations can stem from his burdening guilt. He believes he deserves the punishment and the bullies are simply fulfilling that job. Still, he refuses to confess what truly happens inside the nightmare. After all, who can dare to admit that they secretly wished for their mother to die? There is always a contradiction between what he feels internally and how he reacts externally. Like two parallel worlds, he stealthily shifts from one to another, as illustrated by the author:

Conor frowned, and for a second the whole room seemed to get darker, for a second it felt like the whole house was shaking, for a second it felt like he could reach down and tear the whole floor right out of the dark and loamy earth—

He blinked. His grandma was still waiting for a response. (Ness 61)

And for a moment, the sun seemed to go behind the clouds. For a moment, all Conor could see was sudden thunderstorms on the way, could *feel* them ready to explode in the sky and through his body and out of his fists. For a moment, he felt as if he could grab hold of the very air and twist it around Lily and rip her right in two—

...

He walked away from her, fast, leaving her behind. (Ness 88)

What feels like momentary dissociations is his way of silently testing his anger. Unlike where he is ashamed and controlled by guilt, in these passages his rage is caged, perhaps because he knows that if he let out such chaotic, almost monstrous fury, it could be as fantastically dramatic as Ness describes it.

His emotional suppression continues through his inability of articulating his deep fear and sorrow. He remains composed and acts strong for his mother, most importantly stays hopeful about her healing. He takes care of the house chores and of himself when his mother is too tired to do so, pays attention to her needs—like when he makes sure to record her favourite show—and is always ready to help her, especially in the first three days after her treatment when he believes she suffers the most before gradually starting to feel better. His mother's statement: "I wish you didn't have to be quite so good" (Ness 31), may be her way of seeing through him, of recognizing how difficult it must be to go through this and keep it all inside, locked with a secret key. She wishes that he would allow himself to be more expressive even if it meant causing a mess, without feeling the need to behave perfectly all the time.

On another note, Conor rejects those around him who try to lend a helping hand, insisting on his capability to handle it by himself. He resents Lily for defending him against his bullies, openly disapproves of his grandmother's move into their home, and declines his father's offer to keep him company. Expanding on Silvi Saxena's explanation in the website article "Hyper-Independence & Trauma," this hyper independence of his is nothing but another trauma response that can be viewed as a way of reclaiming power when trauma has left him powerless, feeling unworthy of support, and lacking trust in what others can actually do for him. Furthermore, Karena Mathis, in "Hyper Independence: Meaning, Signs, Causes, & Treatment," elaborates that one cause of hyper-independence is children growing up in an environment where they are unable to depend on their caregivers; having to fill their roles teaches them that they can only safely depend on themselves. Due to the absence of his father and his mother often being physically weak, Conor finds himself taking care of both the household tasks and his own, which leads him to not need anyone else.

His inability to be vulnerable or ask for help is not the sole reason that deepens his feelings of withdrawal and isolation, but also the treatment and the reactions he receives in school, from peers and teachers, after knowing about his misfortune. Ironically, as Ness points out, the sympathy from his peers and teachers backfires at Conor. Instead of making him feel less alone, it alienates him entirely, deepening his pain. This is captured in the following passage:

He'd catch people whispering as he walked by in the corridor or at lunch. Even teachers would get a different look on their faces when he put up his hand in lessons. So eventually he stopped going over to groups of friends, stopped looking up at the whispers, and even stopped putting up his hand.

Not that anyone seemed to notice. It was like he'd suddenly turned invisible. (Ness 89)

The teachers in his new year were even worse because they only knew him in terms of his mum and not who he was before. And the other kids still treated him like *he* was the one who was ill... (Ness 90)

As elaborated in the previous chapter by Aime Ferow in her research "Childhood Grief and Loss," bereaved adolescents often struggle socially and find it difficult to maintain friendships, it is because their peers demonstrate a poor understanding on how to talk openly about loss (qtd. in 2). In school, Conor's classmates think that it is better to avoid him rather than try to communicate with him, while they unintentionally intensify his sense of alienation and loneliness.

All of these factors contribute to his inability to reveal his inner afflictions. He has no friends, and the only friend he has grown up knowing betrayed him by letting everyone hear about his mother's illness, becoming the main cause of what is happening to him in school. He feels invisible, not truly seen for who he is; they merely see a grieving boy they are afraid to approach, and the only ones who do are not 'seeing' him; they are glaring at him. The only

person he feels safe around is slowly slipping from his grip with each passing moment. As though he is caught in a race, but he is not running at all, more accurately, his legs are paralyzed. Do we really have the right to blame Conor for enduring it all quietly; when there is no emotional space for him to voice out his agony? He has no choice but to swallow the whispers and pray he does not choke on his own pain. Mourning lies in one hand, and in the other one, the inability to untangle the complexities of his emotions which are blocking his grief from unfolding in a healthy way. It is noted in Irene McClatchey et al.'s article that in case of 'traumatic grief,' it is the accompanying trauma that further inhibits expression (qtd. in 70), leaving Conor trapped in a darkened room, failing to find the exit.

In the context of trauma, emotional repression resembles a stormy ocean of inner turmoil, which leads Conor to be caught in a constant state of irritability and restlessness—what Herman terms as 'hyperarousal.' If trauma has taught individuals anything, it is to always be on the lookout for danger; the mind's method of protecting itself from further harm (35).

Herman clarifies that hyperarousal could be displayed through an inability to regulate emotions and a persistent expectation of threat, so even during the night it becomes impossible to enjoy some rest as the traumatized sleep is disrupted by nightmares (35). Surely, Conor has long forgotten what a peaceful sleep feels like; the nightmare has become a habitual visitor. This is demonstrated by the author in the quote: "It came every time he slept now, and worse than before, if that was possible. He'd wake up shouting three or four times a night..." (Ness 189). Notably, throughout the book, Conor is always described as tense and bothered by the smallest of thoughts or actions—whether others are actually at fault or not, or are only trying to help—He is irritated by his grandmother's strange character, which he perceives unusual for an elderly woman, and by his father's American accent, because the more his British fades, the more his father becomes someone Conor no longer recognizes. He

is especially irritated by the *monster's* tales, which leave him more puzzled every time. A vivid example of Conor constant irritation appears in the following illustration: “*I know about you, Conor O’Malley*, the monster said. ‘No, you don’t,’ Conor said. ‘If you did, you’d know I don’t have time to listen to stupid, boring stories from some stupid, boring tree that isn’t even real—’” (Ness 66). He is even irritated by his mother, particularly when the new treatment she hoped would help ultimately did not. This is evident when the narrator describes the following exchange between Conor and his mother: “‘Hi, son,’ she said, and when she said it, her eyes filled and he could hear the thickness in her voice. Conor could feel himself slowly starting to get very, very angry” (Ness 194). He blames her for not telling him the truth, though he has always known it deep down. The reality behind each of his frustrations lies not in the people’s actions or intentions themselves, rather in the projection of truths and inward conflicts he cannot confront, just yet.

Moreover, his vigilance is illustrated through his anticipation of “the talk,” which began when his mother first spoke to him about the cancer. Since then, he has always seemed to know when bad news was about to be delivered. Ness writes: “...they’d spend some ‘father-son’ time together. Conor was almost certain this was code for another round of We Need To Have A Talk” (Ness 104). Normally, he would have been excited to know his father is coming to visit, especially since they have not met for so long. Yet, Conor cannot sit at ease with this unexpected information. He keeps wondering about all the possible reasons for his visit, reasons he hopes have nothing to do with the one he fears most. Furthermore, he has a tendency of catching signs and clues that suggest something dreadful is on its way. This is demonstrated in the passage:

“We need to have a talk,” she said before he even got the door shut, and there was a look on her face that made him stop. A look that made his stomach hurt. (Ness 96)

“Things are going a little faster than I’d hoped, sweetheart,” she said, and her voice was

thick, thick in a way that made Conor's stomach twist even harder." (Ness 155)

He had a sour feeling in his stomach at what he might find inside. They'd never pulled him out of school before, not in the middle of the day, not even when she was hospitalized last Easter.

Questions raced through his mind.

Questions he ignored. (Ness 193)

The recurring descriptions of pain in his stomach throughout these passages are depictions of physically felt anxiety, as if the body already senses the terror and is steeling him to face it.

As opposed to hyperarousal, Herman adds another symptom called 'constriction,' where the mind protects itself from trauma by dissociating or emotionally detaching. Once their consciousness gains the ability to take out meaning from the experience, the person learns to numb their pain, and their responses become paradoxically indifferent (42). Linking this to Conor's behaviours, it can be understood that his acceptance of punishment and bullying stems from his sense of guilt. Nonetheless, having the power to no longer feel pain despite the injuries and humiliation they cause him is the hallmark of total detachment. In this quote: "This time Harry's fist was in his stomach. Conor fell to the ground, scraping his knee on the concrete step, tearing a hole in his uniform trousers. The hole was the worst part of it. He was terrible at sewing" (Ness 90), Conor does not care about the punch nor the fall. Instead, he is more concerned about the hole because he cannot sew, keeping in mind he takes care of himself alone. Typically, in a fight, the mind enters a mode of a fight-or-flight, focusing only on defense or escape. However, Conor freezes and reacts coldly, as though he is devoid of any emotions towards the situation or, perhaps, that is not the worst thing that could happen to him.

Dissociation is exhibited through his interactions with the *monster*; he escapes his overwhelming reality by encountering an imaginary figure. Nishan Ghoshal and Paul O.

Wilkinson delve deeper into this idea, in their article “Narrative Matters: *A Monster Calls* – a portrayal of dissociation in childhood bereavement,” explaining how Conor disengages from reality as a means of coping with his trauma. His dissociative episodes are evidenced by his destruction of his grandmother’s sitting room and his violent outburst towards Harry, for which he blames it all on the *monster*, convinced that it is the one who acted “in his stead.” This notion is reinforced when Ness writes:

“Oh, my God,” he whispered.

He turned round to face the monster.

Which was no longer there.

“What did you *do*?” he shouted into the suddenly too quiet emptiness. (Ness 140)

“It wasn’t me,” Conor said, more clearly. “It was the monster who did it.”

“The monster,” the Headmistress said.

“I didn’t even touch Harry.” (Ness 184)

Conor is not merely attempting to escape a punishment or find an excuse for his actions, he genuinely believes he is not the one responsible. Ghoshal and Wilkinson state, “during these events Conor experiences feelings of dissociation – that he is not doing things himself; he describes the events as if he is watching from an outsider’s perspective, instead seeing the ‘monster’ perform his actions” (1).

The mother’s illness can be considered as the primary trigger of Conor’s trauma—a sudden surge that drowns him in emotional chaos, suggesting that his mental walls were fragile enough to let the flood in. That said and contemplating Conor’s primary relationships, the following question can be posed: Would Conor’s behaviours have been the same if he had individuals on whom he could chiefly rely and trust, aside from his mother? The answer can be found in Bowlby and Ainsworth’s ‘attachment theory.’

At the beginning of the novel, the reason for the father's absence is unclear, but it is later revealed that Conor's parents are divorced. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that Conor's father has left him and his mother to reside in America with his new wife. Even though the father might not be overtly cruel, he is negligent and unreliable. He left Conor at the age of seven and only reached out from behind a screen. He acknowledges that he has a son but is not ready to be present for him neither emotionally nor physically. Ness reinforces this idea: "That had been six years ago, so long now that Conor sometimes couldn't remember what it was like having a dad in the house. Didn't mean he still didn't think about it, though" (Ness 43).

Indeed, the quote illustrates Conor's relationship with his dad; being used to his father's absence does not fill the emotional void left by the lack of a male figure in the house. According to Lavinia Gomez's explanation in *An Introduction to Object Relations*, the type of attachment he has with his father is an 'avoidant-insecure' one, where the caregiver fails to be present and the child grows up believing they cannot depend on them (161). Kendra Cherry further explains, in the website article "4 Types of Attachment Styles," that children might not feel distressed when separated from the parent. Likewise, McLeod Saul, in "Attachment Theory in Psychology," mentions that the child's mind downplays the wish of intimacy as a coping mechanism. This passage: "He had hoped to talk to his father before he flew out, but what with the hospital visits and the time difference and the new wife's convenient migraines, he was just going to have to see him when he showed up" (Ness 109), highlights Conor's desire to communicate, yet the father somehow always has an excuse to be away. Conor recognizes his father's excuses are pretexts, so he waits patiently until his father is free to be available, instead of demanding his presence.

Conor wonders why he cannot come to live with his father, and before he is able to receive the answer, he changes the topic to the *monster* that comes and tells him stories,

perhaps to avoid the anticipated rejection, as if attempting to undo asking the question in the first place. Avoidant children often fear vulnerability and being open about their feelings (Gomez 161). Still, he eventually confesses that he hates living with his grandmother:

“You wouldn’t have that in America,” his father said. “We barely have room for the three of us, Con. Your grandma has a lot more money and space than we do. Plus, you’re in school here, your friends are here, your whole *life* is here. It would be unfair to take you out of all that.”

“Unfair to who?” Conor asked. (Ness 115)

Conor’s question highlights the contradiction in his father’s seemingly considerate reasoning. He convinces himself that it would be unfair to his son, all to justify not bringing him to America. But for Conor, it is unfair to live away from his father.

Examining his relationship with his grandmother, the first thing we detect is that he is in conflict with her character. In Conor’s perception, his grandmother has never been a typical grandmother; she is a misfit in the common concept of warmth and kindness. Her rigid mentality, strict rules, and busy schedule never allow Conor to feel comfortable around her. Unlike his father, his grandmother is more attentive and wants the best for him; however, her controlling, inconsistent, and indirect ways of showing it makes Conor hold resentment towards her. Their relationship is marked by an ‘insecure-ambivalent’ attachment (Gomez 161), where the caregiver is unpredictable—sometimes present, other times distant, sometimes caring, other times harsh (McLeod). In such dynamics, the child may reject closeness and may display aggressiveness (Cherry).

“I have a name, you know,” Conor said, pushing down on the bin. “And it’s not my boy.”

“Less of your cheek,” his grandmother said. She stood there, her arms folded. He stared at her for a minute. She stared back. Then she made a tutting sound. “I’m not your

enemy, Conor,”...

His grandma reached forward and snatched the cloth out of his hand. “I’m here because thirteen-year-old boys shouldn’t be wiping down counters without being asked to first.”

He glowered back at her. “Were *you* going to do it?” (Ness 59-60)

As stated by Gomez, the ambivalent-insecure child may internalize the belief that in order to get their caregiver to care, they must steer an emotional reaction (161). Conor’s destruction of his grandmother’s living room can be interpreted as an expression of emotional distress, in an unconscious attempt of seeking his grandmother’s attention, especially given that she leaves him alone in the house most of the time.

In both of his relationships with his father and grandmother, Conor is unable to rely on them. As a result, he tends to walk away from their comfort and help. His mother is his only secure base where he feels safe, loved, and nurtured. Once he senses a risk of losing her, he gets perturbed and overwhelmed, danger sirens start blaring inside him, thinking that no other relationship in his life can fulfil his needs. Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté, in their book *Hold On to Your Kids*, elaborate how attachments help children maintain a sense of alignment, they will not feel lost as long as they can trust their “compass point” and keep them close. They write, “what children fear more than anything, including physical harm, is getting lost. To them, being lost means losing contact with their compass point” (Skewed Attachments, Subverted Instincts). This is exactly why Conor begins to emotionally collapse at the idea of losing his mother. Moreover, as noted in the theoretical framework by Altılgan Erozkın in his article “The Link between Types of Attachment and Childhood Trauma,” attachments also provide a buffer against future mental health issues and traumas (1072). Conor has long dealt with his father’s absence and his grandmother’s emotional distance, what has made him more vulnerable to fall harshly to the first sign of psychological struggle.

Bowlby suggests a defensive mechanism in insecure children—like Conor—called ‘defensive exclusion’ (Gomez 161). Conor’s brain has been conditioned to negligence from a very young age; thus, it habitually excludes feelings of pain to protect itself. The reason why Conor is incapable of processing and combing through his muddled inner world, until the *monster* helps him to overcome this deeply anchored problem. The *monster* serves what Conor needs the most: someone to aid him regulate his emotions, someone to trust, and someone who remains by his side in the hardest time of his life.

After exploring Conor’s trauma and the psychological roots from which it may have stemmed, it is important to note that recognizing trauma symptoms in children is only an initial step, and without healing, suffering persists. Supressed pain will inevitably return as an amplified agony. Following up on the previous chapter, David Trickey and Dora Black highlight in their study, “Long-term Psychiatric Effects of Trauma on Children,” that trauma results in serious issues in adulthood: cognitively, behaviourally, and emotionally. They also add how the pre-existing vulnerability in children to develop personality disorders in the future can be triggered by trauma (262, 264). Had the *monster* not intervened to guide Conor, ensuring he takes the right steps into a healthier developmental process and a healthier mourning, he might have grown up to be a mentally endured adult, lacking some of the critical skills that would allow him to live with ease in the future. Nevertheless, those skills must eventually be completed. The longer their development is delayed, the harder it becomes to close their chapters and move forward in peace.

II. 3. The Ancient Yew Tree: Roots of Trauma

In Ness’s *A Monster Calls*, the yew tree looms as a paradox in life, rooted in graveyards yet praised for its therapeutic virtues, with Conor’s hands grasped tightly, carrying him gently through the storm of raw emotions into a place where pain is not denied but softened and healed. According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*,

“The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment - of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy”, he also adds “the monster’s body is pure culture” (4). The *monster* reflects a tangible echo of the grief, guilt, and anger that are buried with Conor, deep inside. It is not a real natural being, but shaped by human psychological states. Its poisonous leaves and nurturing bark entwine in the yew, mirroring the story’s haunting duality and the core tension, as it bears the weight of irrevocable loss alongside a tender glimmer of healing (Ness). In *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, David D. Gilmore’s argues that, “the *place* of monsters in the landscapes of the mind. In every cultural tradition, monsters are said to live in borderline places, inhabiting an “outside” dimension that is apart from, but parallel to and intersecting the human community” (12). This highlights a clearer picture of this tension. Monsters often arise from the dividing point between two realities—like the yew tree standing at the edge of Conor’s world—where the veil between life and afterlife, fact and illusion, is thinning slowly, into nothingness.

Speaking in a revealing interview, Ness shed light on a key fact of the *monster*’s nature: “I wanted him to be similar to an ancient pre-Roman myth called the Green Man, which has been in English history for thousands of years. The Green Man is the landscape personified,” (Ness “The Fear of Losing Control”) and true to this vision, the *monster* openly declares his name, connecting the realm of legend to the story with seamless poise when it says to Conor, “I am the eternal Green Man” (Ness 50). The yew tree is not just a *monster* but a force of nature, reflecting Conor’s dissociative state.

Within the course of the narratives, it is clear that Conor’s summoning of the *monster* is not a designed act. Still, rather it erupts from his buried sorrow and fury, conjuring the *monster* as a vivid metaphor for the unspoken pain—an explosion born from the liminal zones

of awareness where loss and hope merge. According to Cohen's *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return (20). Monsters are our own creation, awakening from the concealed fringes of consciousness, where long-hidden sentiments are unleashed. Ness explains that "the way I always thought about the book is that it is about loss, but it is fundamentally about fear of loss," which clings to Conor and takes a physical shape of the *monster*. At the liminal hour of 12:07, at the threshold between rejecting and embracing, the creature appears and states, "It is what you want from me" (Ness 48), reflecting Conor's unconscious plea to face his truth. The nightmarish, giant, and horrific figure is seen by Ghoshal Nishan and Paul O. Wilkinson in "Narrative Matters: *A Monster Calls* – a portrayal of dissociation in childhood bereavement" as a living symbol of Conor's fractured psyche—a vivid manifestation of his inner chaos, forged from self-loathing and silent fury (2).

The yew tree is not just a monster but a force of nature, reflecting Conor's dissociative state. Moreover, Ghoshal and Paul frame that "the emotional trauma he deals with...serves as a devastating impact on his day-to-day life" (1-2), and in order to cope with that trauma, Conor invented the *monster* (1). Hence, it stands as a manifestation of Conor's dissociative psych, a response to the trauma over his mother's illness. This vision is explored in Shaima F Hasan's "Intrusion Fantasy as a Cathartic Tool in Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*." Hassan examines the deep link between Conor's nightmare and the *monster*, a connection pushing Conor to confront his truth: "It appears clearly that the monster is invading the world of Conor and trying to communicate with him for a serious purpose" (24).

The novel starts with the *monster* showing up: "the *monster* showed up just after midnight. As they do" (Ness 15). This exemplifies Gilmore's position that monsters are

always “appearing in darkness or during storms” (13). Midnight represents darkness, and the storm is the mother’s terminal illness.

Far from a mere summoning, it is a destined battle with one’s own soul, where the *monster* emerges as both Conor’s buried emotions and the key to his emotional self-discovery. Serving as a fierce embodiment of Conor’s hidden turmoil, the *monster* emerges as a tangible vessel for the silent sorrow, buried guilt, and anger in his mind. The *monster* literalizes the inner conflict, becoming the “abjected fragment” (Cohen 19), unmasking the subtle weakness beneath his psychological defenses.

This process of forcing Conor to confront his hidden fears and his suppressed emotions is exemplified in the *monster*’s commands: “you must tell the truth or you will never leave this nightmare” (Ness 216), pushing Conor to reveal his rawest battle of truths: “I just want it to be over!” (Ness 221). At this moment, the *monster* turns into a reflection of Conor’s guilt, manifesting the direct loathing and his painful desire for his mother’s suffering to stop. These complex feelings are described as “the disgust Conor feels towards himself” (Ghoshal 2). Conor believes that this wish makes him a bad son; this belief feeds his shame since he feels like they are a betrayer of the love he must hold on to.

From Ness’s point of view, Conor’s battle with his impassioned attempts to balance both his deep love and his overwhelming fatigue is a normal behaviour. Ness observes, “he has those terrible feelings of guilt about his dying mother. That he wants it to finish, which is a really normal and genuine human reaction” (Ness), and the *monster* aids him in navigating by reexplaining the hard realities to him. The *monster*’s acts of destruction, like wrecking the grandmother’s living room, externalize Conor’s complex psychology, sadness because of his mom, and anger because of his grandmother, father, and the bullies. A reading for this is reflected in Hasan’s idea that “Conor is actually emptying his anger by breaking and knocking things down... acting aggressively can serve as an effective way to purge aggressive and

hostile feelings” (25). Still beneath this storm of violence lies a scream for understanding captured in his mother’s words, “you be as angry as you need to be...and if you need to break things, then by God, you break them good and hard” (Ness 198). Confronting him that she understands all his conflicts, “I know everything you need to tell me without you having to say it out loud” (199). This is explained by Ness as the child does not want to be alone, “take me seriously, take my pain seriously. I am not asking you to take it away; I am just asking to not be alone” (Ness). The concept of monsters as “vehicles for the expiation of guilt” (Gilmore 4), underscores how the *monster* functions in Conor’s emotional release. The *monster* serves as a tool for Conor to process his overwhelming guilt and hidden fear, building up to the final story, where he tells the truth and finally finds his freedom. According to Aghnia Kamilia Ulfa, the *monster* appears to be Conor’s therapist or psychologist to help him release his own emotions and feelings. It helps Conor to face the truth that his mother will die soon and that he does not want her to suffer anymore, even if it means losing her (93). In the climactic moment, the *monster* pushes him to face what he has been running from, saying: “It will kill you if you do not...you must say it” (Ness 219). This strong line shows how hurtful Conor’s buried feelings are, and only by speaking up the truth, the healing process starts. In the delicate dance between acts of devastation and moments of truth, the *monster* emerges as both Conor’s tormentor and healer, capturing the paradox of trauma and its slow journey toward acceptance.

Beyond this, the *monster* operates as the silent storm within Conor’s deepest emotions, giving form to his concealed grief, guilt, and rage into a living presence that drives him toward honest self-examination. The *monster*’s words, “you were merely wishing for the end of pain ... it is the most human wish of all (Ness 223), directly respond to Conor’s “I let her go; it’s my fault” (Ness 223). This scene resembles an intimate inner monologue within his mind where a silent clash between two voices occurs: one forceful and judgmental insists that

his feelings are flawed and shameful; the other, softer yet steadfast, strives to affirm that his emotions are real and necessary. Gilmore further illuminates Conor's psychological struggle by mentioning Freudian theory and positions the *monster* as Conor's id, according to the idea that the imagined *monster* is a projection of pent-up parts of the self: the id. The *monster* is the reflection of Conor's psyche. More than being an Other, the *monster* is a powerful manifestation of the suppressed emotions. This reinforces the notion that the "monster of the mind is always the familiar self-disguised as the alien Other" (16), disclosing that the *monster* and Conor are one. Hasan expands on the analysis by describing the *monster* as "abreaction" (22), a therapeutic release of buried trauma. This is exemplified in Conor's admission: "I did not mean to let her go! And now it's for real! Now she's going to die, and it is my fault!" and also, "I could have held on, but I let her go" (Ness 222). At that moment, Conor silently yearned for death to set him free from the unbearable weight. The *monster* is born in the raw corners of Conor's mind, a form of a shadow that exists when his sorrow is too much to bear alone. This tension is observed when Conor chooses to transform into the *monster*; first, when he demolishes his grandmother's room, "they merged together, making a single monster who was even bigger" (Ness 136), and then when he reacts angrily at the bullies, "Conor had felt what the *monster* was doing to Harry" (181). Together, these ideas frame the *monster* is not an invader; it is the reflection of everything Conor is trying to survive.

The wish of the mother, "wish I had a hundred years...A hundred years I could give to you" (Ness 200), mirrors the yew tree's endless life. This is not a true mercy because too much time turns brittle. When Conor insists on "I want to go home," "My home," "The one with the yew tree" (Ness 200), this indicates that the place transforms from a building to a feeling. For Conor, home symbolizes the security and stability of his life before his mother's illness. The yew tree changes everything; now it becomes a crossroads where centuries pass, and so does the *monster*. It peels back Conor's defenses to show that even shattered things can

endure. There, in the yew's shadow, it is finally clear that immortality and doom are never opposites, just different seasons in the same life.

This present chapter delves into Conor's fragile world and aching reality, as he drowns in the storm of his mother's terminal illness. As a conclusion, the chapter opens by exploring Ness's novel, its origins, narrative style, and its daring leap outside the safety of classic structures, before exposing how Conor's trauma twists into a nightmare, fractured connection with loved ones, and grief's thick and suffocating stages. The analysis then turns to the yew tree, a living reflection of Conor's repressed emotions and a symbol connecting the impermanence of life and the endless fight.

Chapter Three: From Chaos to Healing: The Power of Storytelling

This last chapter turns its focus toward the power of stories in curing emotional wounds. In it, the *monster*'s tales are examined: how do they assist Conor to navigate through his own contradictions and how is 'narrative therapy' integrated in the book. Furthermore, it explores the symbolic healing power of the yew tree in the novel and the way Conor is able to let go by confronting the truth and accepting that not all endings are happy. The conclusion of this chapter considers the book's impact on young minds and how it succeeds in portraying trauma and healing, carving a lasting legacy in the literature of children.

III. 1. "Stories are wild creatures": Untamed Narratives for Gentle Growth

The healing journey begins with the *monster* narrating three tales to Conor. One would expect these tales to entail moral lessons clear enough to teach Conor about grief and smooth his path towards acceptance, which is the case, but they only leave him confused and lost at first. The *monster* intends for his tales to be morally ambiguous so Conor can witness the vagueness of human emotions and their complexities. By grasping this idea, as he stands face to face with his own, he will be able to forgive his human weakness.

At the start of the two tales, the *monster* deceives Conor into believe that the stories reflect on his grandmother and father. The *monster* starts the two tales as follows: "*Let me tell you of the end of a wicked queen and how I made sure she was never seen again,*" and "*It is about a man who thought only of himself.*" The monster smiled again, looking even more wicked. *And he gets punished very, very badly indeed* (Ness 69, 124). As the stories unfold, apparent connections between the two characters and the events may or may not emerge. Yet, instead of claiming that the tales are direct projections, it is more fitting to interpret them as reflections of many aspects, and one is the relationship that Conor has with them. The *monster*

is mischievous, performing harmless tricks to catch his attention and to help him recognize that his main problem is not with the grandmother or the father. It is possible that he can also understand that they are not necessarily villains in his story. This can be evident through the *monster*'s response when Conor assumes that it is here to help him cast his grandmother out of his life: "*It is not **her** you need saving from*" (Ness 84), as if reconstructing his views about his family members and shifting his focus towards the real problem.

The first tale centers around a prince and his step-grandmother, the queen, who happens to be a witch and is ready to cling to power until the last day of her life. In an attempt to save the kingdom, the prince murders the innocent daughter of a farmer and accuses the queen for his own crime. In this way, the rage and hatred of the people will help him overthrow her and end her reign. When the *monster*—who was also present in the story—is called upon by the prince and listens to his reasoning, the *monster* goes on to save the queen from an inevitable death and keep her somewhere safe and unreachable. By the end of the fable Conor asks, "I don't understand. Who's the good guy here?" To which the *monster* answers: "*There is not a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere in between*" (Ness 84). The prince embraces the philosophy of 'the end justifies the means.' He sacrifices the daughter's farmer for the overall good of the kingdom, just like how his father had died for the same noble purpose. The queen, on the other hand, despite being a witch and a tyrant, is rescued by the *monster* "*because what she was **not**, was a murderer*" (Ness 83).

Within the lines of the tale, the *monster* highlights important traits that overlap with Conor's struggles, such as: "*Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all*" (Ness 81). According to Cavanagh's analysis in "Toxicity in Themes of Control," Conor lies to himself to lessen the weight of the guilt for wishing that his and his mother's pain would cease. She states, "he is evil because he desires his mother's death. So if he denies this desire

and instead tells himself to believe in a cure for her cancer, then he can find redemption” (11). What Conor does not yet know, and what the *monster* is trying to convey to him, is that his hurtful wish does not make him evil. It is within the nature of human beings. Moreover, when he complains about the story being “a cheat,” the *monster* says, “*it is a **true** story. Many things that are true feel like a cheat*” (Ness 84). When denial blurs reality, many things will seem false and like a trap. It is a fight between how the world works and what feels familiar. The *monster* clarifies for Conor that just because he does not understand these contradictions does not mean they are not real and cannot exist.

In the second tale, we explore the story of the apothecary, a disliked greedy man who makes medicines out of nature. In the same village, there was also a parson who was known to be a kind-hearted man, unlike the greedy apothecary. The parson forbids the apothecary from benefiting from the yew tree and preaches against his old-fashioned ways of healing. A day comes when the parson desperately seeks the help of the apothecary when his two daughters fall harshly sick; the apothecary becomes his last hope and resort. The parson was ready to give up everything he believed in and beg the apothecary who carelessly shut the door in his face, leaving the two innocent girls to their tragic fate. When the *monster* came walking, it wrecked the parson’s house.

In contrast to the previous story, the *monster* does not save but punishes. And always in the context of juxtapositions, the *monster* justifies that the parson “*was a man who lived on belief, but who sacrificed it at the first challenge,*” while the apothecary “*was greedy and rude and bitter, but he was still a healer*” (Ness 135). Conor is furious at how the tale ends; he justifies the parson’s act as helplessness. His sin can be committed by anyone in the same position. The *monster* stresses the value of belief in these situations: “*belief is half of all healings. Belief in the cure, belief in the future that awaits*” (Ness 135). Conor is also helpless because of his mother’s illness. He is too afraid to let her go, unable to face what might come

afterward when she would no longer exist in his world. The *monster* wants him to have faith, even when everything seems dark. Relatedly, at the beginning of the tale, the *monster* describes a utopian setting: “*trees fell, fields were up-ended, rivers blackened. The sky choked on smoke and ash,*” then, he ends: “*but there was still green, if you knew where to look*” (Ness 125). It all comes down to Conor’s own perception of what is around him: that even in the hardest of times, he can still find hope.

The last story is all about Conor himself, the invisible man “*who had grown tired of being unseen*” (Ness 175). It is told in parallel with Conor becoming exhausted of being avoided and ignored by everyone in school, particularly after Harry strikes the final blow: “Harry said, looking into Conor’s eyes. ‘I no longer see you.’” (Ness 173). The man in the story calls the *monster* to help him be visible again, and similarly, it is there to help Conor. He aggressively beats Harry, breaks his arm and nose, and makes everyone see him. The *monster* concludes, “*there are worse things than being invisible*” (Ness 187). It is true that Conor is no longer a ghost, he gets what he wants. However, Conor is now feared and seen as frightening, and is looked upon as if he is a monster. Worst of all, he is still not punished for what he did. At last, he knows that some wishes are better unfulfilled.

Before the purpose of the multifaceted narratives can be fully grasped, it is important to first consider the ambiguity of the monstrous figure telling these tales. Cavanagh suggests that the *monster* itself is “a complex beast,” combining both chaos and wildness with hope and healing. Closely resembling the characters of the tales, the *monster* cannot be easily categorized as either good or evil, and its intentions and actions remain obscure. Cavanagh summarizes, “he does not simply represent complexity in a certain societal norm or cultural trend, but he embodies the nature and fear of complexity itself” (9-10).

The presence of a monster in the book is certainly not coincidental. In *Embodying the Monster*, Margrit Shildrick argues that monsters are not wholly separated from human beings,

but rather a reflection of their internal flaws and weakness. She continues by clarifying how monsters, in the context of otherness, may represent something scary and unfamiliar, but their role is way more complex and serves a positive function. Only by recognizing this contrast between “self and other” can humans make sense of who they are. But since monsters are not truly detached entities from us, and instead they mirror dimensions of our identity, they evoke paradoxical reactions “of denial and recognition, disgust and empathy, exclusion and identification” (17).

What particularly stands out in last fable is the intertwining of the *monster* and Conor: “‘you *shut up*,’ Conor said. And he felt the monster’s voice say it with him” (Ness 179). It brings back what was initially discussed in the second chapter of them being one and the same. Conor’s desire to be seen is his profound wish to be accepted, he is unable to tell his story and speak the truth because no one sees him truly. At the same time, he thinks he deserves the worst punishment instead of understanding. The opposites that are grappling inside of him mirror that of a monster, which eventually becomes proven through his grotesque rage against Harry and the dread he instils in his peers. Cavanagh mentions, “the monster and his stories prepare Conor for the ultimate test of his strength: confronting his own fears of becoming a monster” (10). It attempts to aid him embrace this dilemma and the truth that lies within the core of mankind.

In her article, “Revising Fairy Tales for Children,” Danijela Petković describes the *monster*’s tales as “anti-fairy tales.” Although they include the typical fairy tale features, their endings and didactic morals always take a different turn from what readers and Conor are used to. Additionally, the noticeable absence of “black and white characters” and the indefiniteness of who is bad or good adds to the subversion of these stories (73).

This lack of clarity is not necessarily regarded as negative, as David Lewin explores in his article, “Between Horror and Boredom,” the point of using “unsettling paradoxes” in

moral education, and how fairy tales can move past the border of plain and simplicity to teach children about life. Expanding on Dewey's concept of progressive education, he clarifies that the teacher's role is not to simplify the world for children but to allow them to experience its enigma. Lewin continues, "simplistic interpretations risk avoiding sustained attention and reflection, while a story which has no simple moral has the capacity to hold us in a state of suspension which may itself be deeply educational and transformative" (13-14). In the interview entitled "The Fear of Losing Control," Patrick Ness similarly embraces the ambiguity in his statement, "...the analogy only goes up to a lesson and then the monster is taking it apart. And that, I think, is the overarching lesson." He specifically emphasizes that the purpose of multilayered tales lies in the notion that stories are open to limitless interpretations. Consequently, there are endless ways in which the world can be perceived.

The *monster* recounts the three tales, then he commands Conor to narrate the fourth one, which is the truth he dreads the most. In doing so, the author subtly introduces the concept of 'bibliotherapy.' As discussed in the first chapter, books and literature play an instrumental role in psychotherapy and contribute to healing, particularly for children, fostering their cognitive and emotional development along with numerous beneficial outcomes. In this sense, the *monster* functions as Conor's therapist. The *monster* tells him stories and grants him the chance to reflect, feel, and understand what is difficult to grasp at his young age. With the help of these fables, Conor gradually becomes able to open up, and the moment he tells his own story, the author transitions to the second—and most important—therapeutic process: narrative therapy.

In the fourth tale, Conor experiences his nightmare where the real monster appears and takes his mother away. He tries to hold on to her, but she slips from his grip and falls into the abyss. This is a recurring scene in his mind for a long time, a scene he can never adapt to. Except that this time, the *monster* is there to help him let go gracefully. Conor holds back the

truth with all his power: “It’ll kill me if I do,” until he eventually confesses that he let his mother fall: “I let her go. It’s my fault” (Ness 219, 223).

Tracing back to the theoretical part and according to Morgan’s explanation from her book, *What is Narrative Therapy?*, individuals tend to interpret events of their life and turn them into stories. Those stories shape their identity based on the way they made sense of the situations they have been through. She also elaborates on how one’s dominant story is powerful enough to control their future and worldviews, therefore if a story is told or seen from a wrong perspective, it is going to negatively impact the person’s life (5-9). Such interpretation provides a deep insight into Conor’s struggle; shedding light on the disruption in his dominant narrative. He believes that he is guilty for wanting everything to just come to an end. He knows his mother is not going to survive the terrifying monster and it is taking longer than he can bear—a longer time of sleepless nights, of insincere hope and aching anticipation. He cannot not hold on to her hand anymore: “I can’t stand knowing that she’ll just go! I just want it to be over! I want it to be *finished!*” (Ness 220). To guide him towards an easier release, the *monster* helps Conor re-write his narrative through ‘externalization’ and ‘deconstruction.’

As identified by Morgan, the deconstruction stage is about deciphering the origins of one’s beliefs—those that are taking hold of their perceptions and actions. The therapist attempts to dig deeper and deconstruct other dominant stories in order to break their influence (45-50). It is much like uprooting a plant to investigate where the problem originates, then carefully removing the harmful parts. This can be shown through the *monster*’s question to Conor: “*you let her go. Why?*” as well as the repetitive statements: “*You loosened your grip...*” “*You wanted her to go*” (Ness 218-9), as if urging him to refute and speak up. The *monster* already knows Conor’s truth, yet it wants him to utter it himself. When Conor says: “I deserve the worst,” the *monster* asks: “*Do you?*” (Ness 221), intentionally leading him to

voice everything he has been choking on; his false belief in her healing, his weariness from waiting, and his loneliness. The *monster* continues breaking it down with him: “*And a part of you wished it would just end...even if it meant losing her*” (Ness 222), the *monster* understands that Conor’s wish is coming from a desperate cry for peace after all the silent torment he endures, and it intends to guide him see through that lens. In this regard, Conor confesses: “I didn’t mean it, though!...Now she’s going to die and it’s my fault!” the *monster* steps in to cut away these mistaken thoughts, “*And that...is not the truth at all*” (Ness 222).

Through externalization, the therapist builds a wall between the person and the problem, liberating them from its control and the guilt. By personifying it and giving it a separate identity, they help them recognize that the issue they have been dealing with has never been a part of who they are (Morgan 17-24). In Conor’s case, his grief and trauma entangle with his sense of self to the point where guilt grows and wraps its leaves on him like an ivy, he keeps repeating: “It’s my fault.” The *monster* shifts the blame away from him by clarifying: “*You were merely wishing for the end of pain...Your own pain. And end to how it isolated you*” (Ness 223). Replacing the ‘it’ before pain indicates to Conor that even though it is related to him, it is not a facet of himself. He does not wish for his mother’s death, he wishes for the pain to cease, the thing which keeps him suffering all along.

Thereafter, Conor wonders how can he hold these contradictions within him; wanting his mother to stay but wishing it all ends. And to answer him, the *monster* finally reveals the aim behind his complex tales, explaining how Conor is not the only human being who faces this enigmatic equation of emotions. All the characters presented to him by the *monster* had a nature of paradox, yet no one was casted as purely good or evil. This is reinforced through the *monster*’s line: “*It does not matter what you think...because your mind will contradict itself a hundred times*” (Ness 224). The *monster* teaches Conor that his thoughts are nothing but

hollow whispers as long as he does not act upon them. It is illustrated through the following quote: “*You do not write your life with words... You write it with actions*” (Ness 225).

Hope for healing becomes evident when the “sparkling events”—as Morgan describes it—appear on sight. Those are the ‘unique outcomes,’ characteristics that oppose the main story, paving the way for an alternative story to emerge. Eventually resulting in a change of narrative (52-3, 59). Resembling a tiny bud on the verge of blooming, Conor’s ‘unique outcomes’ are seen through his emotional expression, after a great amount of inhibition and locked down tears. Also, the way the nightmare no longer tortures him. The author captures it by narrating: “...he wasn’t choking. The nightmare wasn’t filling him up, squeezing his chest, dragging him down” (Ness 226). Moreover, his quiet apology to his grandmother, followed by his final act of telling the truth as he holds his mother dearly in their last goodbye, all reveal that the *monster* has truly helped him release a heavy weight from his chest.

In his article “Fostering Posttraumatic Growth,” Robert A. Neimeyer highlights the role of ‘constructive; and ‘narrative therapy’ in aiding individuals find ways to thrive through their traumatic experiences. He emphasizes the use of narrative tools in processing grief and loss, as they help in developing a new meaning and acceptance by reflection on the trauma (57). Moreover, he elaborates on the power of ‘narrative therapy’ in altering the dominant story, which often distorts one’s self-perception. By separating between their identity and the problem with the help of a therapist, patients become more aware of the impact it has on their lives (qtd. in 58). Neimeyer adds, “clients are then in a better position to recognize and reinforce actions and attitudes that challenge the hegemony of a problem-saturated story of their identity” (58).

Therefore, it cannot be claimed that Conor has completely healed by the end of the book; rather this is merely the starting point of his healing journey. Narrative therapy not only

changes and clears the miswritten narrative in his mind, but also grants him a chance to re-author a gentler one, igniting a promising transformation for the future.

Through the *monster*'s tales, Ness does not intend to teach Conor or the readers a direct lesson; he wants them to navigate through the contradictions and reach the conclusion by themselves. He explains that the stories are not necessarily exact analogies with simple and clear morals, instead they reflect reality's hurtful paradoxes, offering multiple kinds of lessons. On that account, he reminds us that stories are flexible, they change depending on one's own viewpoint, and argues that this power can be used for personal growth:

A story is a useful thing, but it has limits and it changes depending on who is telling it.

So maybe if you can tell yourself a different story. Maybe if you change your perspective, you can live with that kind of situation, rather than letting it harm you.

It's a little shift, but those little shifts are what is really empowering us to live. ("The Fear of Losing Control")

The uncontrollable power of stories is further illustrated through the *monster*'s words to Conor: "*Stories are wild creatures*, the monster said. *When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?*" (Ness 69).

III. 2. Breaking the Silence and the Serenity of Letting Go

Far from being just wounds and leaves, the yew tree in *A Monster Calls* stands as a complex symbol of healing, offering restoration in both reality and metaphor. The *monster* is not just a creature; it is the embodiment of the ancient yew tree; it is a reflection of Conor's inner psychology, dragging him to externalise his repressed feelings. In "A Concept of Characteristics of Magical Realism in Patrick Ness' *A Monster Calls*: A Merger of Objective and Adolescent Psychological Approach analysis," Aghnia Kamilia Ulfa notes that the *monster* serves as "the main character's alter ego," giving form to what Conor can't express

(94), offering him a secure way to release feelings too dangerous to show in his daily life. This therapeutic bond strengthens when the *monster* morphs into what Ulfa describes as a “fantastical projection of Conor’s long-held anger” (93), driving him to acknowledge the hard truth about his mother’s health condition and his own mixed feelings, sadness, and resentment (92).

The yew tree’s impact is not limited to Conor’s personal growth; it affects other characters as well. The way his mother put all her faith in the idea of the tree’s “remedial qualities” (Yarova “I Am the Eternal Green Man”: Holistic Ecology in Reading Patrick Ness’s *A Monster Calls*” 470) demonstrates how hope can serve as medicine when actual recovery is not possible. Her heartfelt admission, “Looking at that yew tree every day, it felt like I had a friend out there who’d help me if things got to their worst” (Ness 197), shows how the tree stabilised her emotionally. This sentiment becomes even clearer when she confesses, “I did believe it would work...It’s probably what’s kept me here so long, Conor. Believing it so you would” (Ness 198), proving how their recovery is a shared effort and deeply tied together.

When the *monster* declares bluntly, “*I did not come to heal her...I came to heal you*” (Ness 205), it changes the narrative direction from physical recovery to achieving emotional catharsis. This healing takes a physical form after the fourth tale when “the *monster* changed the shape of its hands even further, making the nest of leaves Conor was lying on even more comfortable” (Ness 226), an act Hiroko Sasada interprets, in his “The Portrayal of Monsters in Illustrated Children’s Books: Catharsis in *A Monster Calls*”, as the yew tree’s ultimate caring gesture (76). The novel’s frequent message that “*belief is half of healing*” (Ness 156), comes full circle with the yew tree’s dual purpose: as a symbol of hope that supports the mother psychologically during her illness while guiding Conor to process his deepest fears.

A Monster Calls skilfully examines the mental conflict of confrontation with the painful truth, showing Conor's journey from denial to catharsis. At the heart of the story is Conor's divided mind: his subconscious awareness of his mother's approaching death, with his stubborn unwillingness to face the fact. As Ulfa explains, Conor is fully aware of the truth about his mother's situation, but he maintains denial as a psychological shield (92). This view is shared by Muhammad Fajr and Kurnia Ningsih in "Reality Denial in the novel of *A Monster Calls* (2011) by Patrick Ness", where they explain that "the reaction of the protagonist is called the mechanism of defense. The defense mechanism works when he is depressed and attempts to deny all the painful things" (226). His refusal to accept the truth plays out in Conor's nightmare, where a *monster* symbolising her sickness takes his mother into the void, reflecting his deepest fears and terror of losing her and fury at her condition (Ulfa 92). What makes the nightmare so horrifying and disturbing is not the *monster* but Conor's buried shame. When he says, "I could have held on, but I let her go" (Ness 222), he exposes his sense of responsibility. This key confession reveals his mentioned shame; part of him wanted his mother's ordeal to end, something unthinkable, he has hidden it from himself until the *monster* confronts him with it. According to Karima Mohsen in "Transcendence and Belief after Postmodernism: A Performatist Reading of Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2011)," "in the nightmare scene ... the reader can sense that he is more afraid of himself than the dark vortex;" she also asserts that Conor "ever allows the reader to get inside his mind and really know what he is afraid of or discover the reality of his nightmare until it is revealed by the monster" (87).

Acting as both challenger and counsellor (Ulfa 93), the *monster* walks Conor through the complicated truth and leads him to understand how contradictory emotions, love and anger, often live side by side. Mohsen notes that the *monster* reveals Conor's dilemma: he is fully aware of his mother's fate yet keeps pretending to believe she will survive (85). This

double truth is perfectly captured in Ness's line, "*your mind will believe confronting lies while also knowing the painful truths that make those lies necessary, and your mind will punish you for believing both*" (Ness 224). Conor collapses into tears, "I can't stand knowing that she'll go! I just want it to be over!" (Ness 220). It is his most honest moment when he stops denying the truth. This moment is interpreted by Hiroko as the *monster's* way of making him accept that humanity is flawed and complex (76). The *monster's* reassurance, "*It was not wrong... It was only a thought, one of a million. It was not an action*" (Ness 225), changes everything for the protagonist; what feels like selfishness and disloyalty is really just love facing impossible pain. Conor's journey reaches its emotional peak when he shifts from defiant denial, "there is nothing to be afraid of" (Ness 22), to raw honesty, "I'm afraid to" (Ness 234). This whole experience underscores Ness's core idea: that facing scary truths, no matter how hard they are, is the real way to heal.

The book explores how Conor O'Malley works through his trauma and understands that healing is not about fixing things but about confronting difficult realities and accepting what cannot be changed. When Conor finally hugs his dying mother, saying, "I don't want you to go" (Ness 236), this is his first honest admission of loss. This scene shows the hardest part of grieving, being haunted by it. When Conor "could finally let her go" (Ness 237), it proves that resisting reality just deepens the suffering. This aligns with Maria J. Becker's therapeutic approach in "Awareness-Acceptance and Transformation (AAT): Letting Go of Distress and Trauma": "Healing is about experiencing and transformation. Rather than 'getting rid' of a symptom or trauma, it is about allowing oneself to gently experience the body distress and moving towards the transformation of trauma" (03). This is where the *monster* leads Conor to the realisation that people are "*complicated beasts*" (Ness 223) and they are capable of holding opposite emotions at once—caught between praying for her recovery while wanting her suffering to end—two conflicting feelings that both come from

love. By pointing out that “*the answer is that it does not matter what you think...because your mind will contradict itself a hundred times each day*” (Ness 224), the *monster* normalises Conor’s guilt, letting him voice his real feelings.

Even the narrative structure reflects therapy. Early in the novel, Conor refuses the life-writing assignment, proving he is dodging his feelings. Little by little and with the *monster*’s help, he slowly starts opening up about his truth and hidden pain. Becker’s research shows this is how healing works: “When we fully accept the experience of distress, the body lets go rapidly and effortlessly of all emotions and fears. The body then reshapes thinking and transforms limiting beliefs attached to the distressing event. We feel a sense of relief and inner peace” (14). The *monster* keeps insisting to Conor, “*If you speak the truth...you will be able to face whatever comes*” (Ness 234); that is the book’s core message: healing starts when words replace silence. This transformative effect provides an empirical confirmation. Once Conor truly faces the truth, his nightmare fades away. Looking at Conor’s path from denial to acceptance matches Becker’s principle that trauma yields more easily when it is met with openness (15), putting *A Monster Calls* in the position of a powerful example of surrender’s hidden strength and how letting things be can actually set you free.

The novel reveals a key point, which is that healing does not require comfort but an environment where painful realities can be faced. Though scary at first, the *monster* ends up being Conor’s most honest companion. Not by cuddling him, but by forcing him out of his defensive bubble, which Barbara S. Stengel calls a tough but effective space for growth in “The Complex Case of Fear and Safe Space” (524). This proves her argument that “safe space is not an answer to a problem; it is not the antidote to fear. Rather, it is an invitation to interpret and respond” (Stengel 540). Nothing shows this better than Conor’s run-outburst, “I just want it to be over!” (220). With Conor’s father having failed him and left him alone, the *monster* becomes his protector and does what a good parent should, offering the guidance and

emotional support Conor lacks. Answering his desperate “You’ll stay?” when his mother lies dying with the promise “*I will stay*” (Ness 235). This parallels Kathryn’s experience in Brewster’s case study, “The Healing Power of Storytelling;” the nurse’s silent touch did not heal anything physically, but her presence made all the difference, showing how nonverbal support can matter most (The value of being heard).

The novel sharply shows how Conor’s family compounds his pain, especially through his grandmother’s coldness and his father’s neglect. These depictions aligning with the research article “The Role of Family in Trauma Recovery: A Review of the Literature” by Audifax Kpeno, Pratap Kumar Sahu, and Ernest Bagson, which finds that even though families are crucial in trauma recovery, they can sometimes prolong it by misunderstanding it (17). Similarly, Conor’s defensive “I’m fine” (Ness 95) to Miss Kwan’s question is not just teen angst; rather, it is a classic example of how the system teaches grieving kids to hide their pain. In contrast, the *monster*’s tales work like therapy. As Karen Capo et al.’s research, “Creating Safe Spaces for Children’s Voices to Be Heard: Supporting The Psychosocial Needs of Children in Times of Trauma”, shows, creating a safe space for children’s voices to be heard requires a trusting bond (22), enabling Conor to process tough feelings symbolically before literally. The *monster* does what fathers should: its physical care—“holding him up and letting him stand there” (Ness 234), and gentle direction, “guided him toward his mum” (Ness 234)—are generally from the father, but they are not, and that is what makes them both comforting and devastating. By the novel’s end, the *monster*’s final lesson is that real safe spaces do not hide you from reality; they give you the courage to face it head-on.

III. 3. The Emotional Impact of Words on Young Minds

Literature moves past the border of entertainment; it is a reflective practice that mirrors human feelings, thoughts, and inner experiences. For children and young adults

especially, it offers a sense of comfort, serving as both a source of emotional healing, growth, and an encouragement to feel deeply in a world that demands emotional restraint. Under this light, it is examined how *A Monster Calls* plays a healing part in children's literature through its honest depiction of trauma and reality of a broken child, permitting readers to project their own hurt onto Conor and find their way out. Within the lines of Sasada's article, "The Portrayal of Monsters in Illustrated Children's Books," she mentions how the novel profoundly impacted one of their judges, who had also faced loss and grief in childhood. Sasada quotes the judge, "[she] said she wished that she'd had *A Monster Calls* to read then, because while it describes the nature of grief with an extraordinary clarity it also fills the reader with a spirit of hopefulness and a love for life that is profound and lasting" (78). It becomes proven that Ness did not merely write a heartfelt story, but also offered children a remedy composed purely of words and emotions.

Fatemeh Farnia and Farideh Pourgiv explore in their article "Empowerment in *A Monster Calls*," how the novel immerses the young readers within its story lines. The readers navigate their own complexities along with Conor, as he gradually untangles his own. The two researchers identify four types of empowerments (41).

Starting with literary empowerment, they observe the writer's use of 'decentration' devices such, as the 'home-away-home,' where Conor transports from his world into the world of the tales told to him by the *monster*, 'gaps,' referring to the indirect references to cancer, readers are only able to know through subtle hints and signs, and the 'embedded narrative,' involving the three stories within the main plot. They also emphasize magical realism as an empowering genre and the significant role that fantasy plays in such contexts of loss and grief. In the final literary element, they highlight Ness's use of visual, auditory, and tactile imageries to convey a lively text and a vivid description (43-45)

Farnia and Pourgiv then move on to the second type; linguistic empowerment. They elaborate that the author encourages critical reading through ‘gaps’ and illustrations. Early in the book, Conor’s mother’s illness is never explicitly named, but Ness allows the reader to deduce it. Moreover, they suggest that the black and white illustrations steer the readers to reflect on the emotions of mourning, loss, and death, relating it to those colours (45-46).

In terms of psychological empowerment, the authors discuss storytelling as a means of emotional development and how the narrative deals with the universally lived experiences of serious illnesses, losing a dear one, loneliness, a child of divorce, and suppressed feelings, enabling the readers to empathize deeply with Conor and feel his agony. They highlight that Ness and Dowd’s purpose of being truthful towards the young audience provides them with the courage to not shy away from what they think and feel, adding that the book’s message successfully touches the adult audience as well (46-47).

Lastly, social empowerment is displayed through the moral lessons, values, and psychological information that the book teaches, such as: “Belief is half of all healing.” “There were worse things than being invisible...” “As incredible as it seemed, time kept moving forward for the rest of the world. The rest of the world that wasn’t waiting.” The article concludes, “...the reader and the character are made aware of some realities of life in order to come to terms with misfortunes and pain. They become empowered by adversity” (47).

Similarly, in “Good Grief,” Giskin Day explains that throughout the story Conor is never confronted with the truth by his family members and is even exempted from the life-writing assignment. Since the *monster* is the only one urging him to talk, this push encapsulates the moral of the book: unless spoken of, the wound will not be cured. He further analyzes the title, suggesting that the verb ‘calls’ reflects both the *monster*’s visits and its call upon Conor and the readers. Day adds, “the idea of it being imperative to tell a truthful story

is rooted in Aristotelian notions of the therapeutic value of catharsis” (118). As Conor moves from denial to acceptance, readers also heal through empathy. He extends this idea by referencing Lévi-Strauss’s notion that myths help individuals make sense of life’s anxieties by providing “a structural ahistorical, narrative.” For the same purpose, Ness uses fairy tales and folklore patterns as a way of creating a narrative that resonates universally (119).

In this sense, stories serve more than mere traditional narratives and lessons. They preserve the voices of those who came before us, voices that had something meaningful to say, voices that guide us through the maze of life. Storytelling has long been praised for the multitude of physical and psychological benefits it brought into people’s lives, particularly in the context of recovery and overcoming challenges. For instance, *The Healing Heart for Families* is a collection of essays in which many contributors discuss and share their insights on the effectiveness of stories and storytelling.

Gail Rosen, in her essay “Storytelling and bereavement,” explains how stories guide individuals through bereavement by finding a common ground with the characters and living through them vicariously. And while it “draws in” the reader to painful emotions and experiences, it simultaneously offers a safe distance from them. She explores the human need for connection and recognition, that when we share and receive pain with and from someone else, the true purpose would be to see and to hear each other quietly without judgment, and stories offer this experience of acknowledging both ourselves and others. Moreover, Rosen distinguishes between the two terms: “cure” and “to heal,” elaborating that—in her own interpretation—cure involves medical treatments, like surgery or medicines, to halt the growing of the illness, while healing is “an inner process.” Rosen particularly highlights the idea that without being supported with internal healing sources, cure may not occur. She clarifies that stories offer the “resources needed for healing” and opportunities of development and transformation. She argues, “Storytelling is an art form. I don’t believe that

it can be prescriptive: ‘Tell this particular story to a person with this illness or ‘problem’ and all will be cured’” (92-94).

Furthermore, in “Storytelling and Resiliency,” Linda Fredericks shifts the focus to children and discusses how storytelling assists them through life. Stories not only entertain but also carry depth and wisdom, showing children that there are many others navigating similar challenges. They also allow children to explore by offering a nonjudgmental and open space for their thoughts and emotions. She stresses the value of imagination in moving the child beyond the constraints of “individual experience,” and with the ability to put themselves in others’ shoes and immerse in different worlds, they learn to imagine and examine different possibilities and solutions to their situations, which in turn lower the chances of them resorting to violence. Drawing on Dr. Emmy Werner and Dr. Ruth Smith’s research, Fredericks lists four “basic internal characteristics” that contribute to the child’s development and resilience in face of trauma or hurdles: “A sense of purpose and of future, Problem-solving skills, Autonomy, Social competence,” emphasizing that the storytelling process specifically integrates these “‘self-righting’ tendencies.” Lastly, she points out that although stories teach children about relationships, encouraging honesty, respect, and care, they also promote self-discovery journeys and push them to go find their own identities (126-128).

Lastly, Rose Owens’s “Stories as Tools for Coping” elaborates that stories offer coping techniques to both adults and children who struggle to process difficult emotions resulting from loss, death, or abuse. She suggests that stories can provide the listeners with internal aids to navigate through the paradoxes of life, while also engagement with the narrative develops their imagination, inspiring them to perceive and feel things in new ways. With that being said, she emphasizes the importance of autonomy in interpretation—that one should not lecture through a story, but leave space for listeners to “choose what they receive and internalize.” Owens continues, illustrating how she helped her middle school students

make sense of a high school massacre by narrating tales to them with different morals, allowing them the chance to reflect by themselves. She concludes, “I believe the best stories are those that help us see the complexities faced by other people — tales that connect us with each other” (137, 139, 140).

In the same vein, in *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture*, Shirely Brice Heath and Jennifer Lynn Wolf argue that reading young adults’ literature is the safest way for young readers to explore the same actions, emotions and thoughts experienced by the literary characters. Through what they called “double exposure,” they are able to confront dangerous settings without the need to physically immerse themselves in them. The authors also draw on the work of the neuroscientist, Anthony Damasio, who found that emotional engagement enhances the memory, supports adaptation of different situations, and facilitates planning for future actions. Likewise, as young adults involve emotionally with what they read, they “make use of human resources for both reasoning and feeling their way through new tasks and new settings.” Thus, young adults’ literature functions as a ground of practicing and developing essential cognitive skills (146).

If the power of a literature genre that speaks directly and honestly to the minds and hearts of the young was truly understood, would adults begin to prescribe books to the wounded children—trusting that they will be cared for—instead of standing perplexed before their pain? Children and young adults do not need to be struck by the harshness of reality; they need to encounter it and learn about it through the poetic lens of literature and storytelling. That is the gentlest way to carry the truth. Just as Conor was able to process his pain through tales that revealed the truths of the world and its people.

In summary, chapter three “From Chaos to Healing,” analyses how stories can provide vital support to cope with loss. The *monster's* unpredictable tales are tough love that forces Conor to walk towards the fragile light of acceptance. The old yew tree is more than just a

tree; it is a living lesson and stands as a representation of how truth wounds us, while there is real courage in acceptance. By breaking the silence and offering conversation about pain, it changes the general view of children's literature, proving that young readers are capable of handling hard truths when they are well presented.

Conclusion

For generations, children's literature has held up a lens to young readers, offering a balance of entertainment and education. At its core, this dissertation examines how storytelling, such as fairy tales, empowers children, helping them navigate trauma, grief and emotional storms. The analysis of the therapeutic function of literature suggests that narratives serve as a bridge between distress and release, supporting traumatized children to construct self-knowledge and coping capacity. This study also reveals how stories acknowledge suffering, build emotional connection, and nurture psychological growth.

This paper examines *A Monster Calls* (2011), written by Patrick Ness and illustrated by Jim Kay. The story follows the life of Conor O'Malley, a young boy who is devastated by his mother's terminal illness. Conor is visited by a mysterious *monster* that compels him to confront his deepest fears and process his unspoken emotions. The narrative intertwines supernatural fantasy with harsh reality, leading to a powerful exploration of grief, loss, and healing. The novel's rich themes and psychological complexity make it an excellent work for examining trauma, narrative therapy and children's psychology.

Chapter one built a framework by mapping the evolution of children's literature, demonstrating its dual character as enchanting and didactic. It documented the genre's transformation from moralistic tales to courageous examination of life's darkest themes. The chapter introduced bibliotherapy as a therapeutic intervention through case studies of *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, and *Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman, where fictional worlds provide children with a concrete form of their fears and terrors. Finally, the discussion turned to the analysis of psychological impacts of trauma on young minds and how storytelling rebuilds destroyed souls.

Chapter two focused on *A Monster Calls*, examining Patrick Ness's unique treatment of childhood grief and guilt. Close reading demonstrated how Ness shifted suffering into embodied experience, shaped into Conor's nightmare, stifled emotions, and relational collapse, manifesting Judith Herman's framework of 'hyperarousal' and 'constriction'. The chapter also examined the yew tree monster's paradox: both a manifestation of Conor's buried pain and the necessary provocation for his confrontation. At the intersection of cultural symbolism and psychological realism, Ness's book shows how literature can materialize silent suffering, leading lost little hearts toward understanding and inner peace.

Chapter three investigated the relationship between storytelling and recovery, revealing how the monster's tales function as a kind of narrative medicine. Through ambiguity and purposeful story contradictions, the stories present life's complex emotions, allowing Conor to find a safe space to examine his guilt and reassemble himself. Moving beyond textual analysis, the chapter explored the novel's broader impact, showing how its unfiltered representation of trauma speaks directly to the young audience.

The outcomes of the study confirm children's literature's unique capacity to equip young minds with emotional and psychological recovery. Through courageous honesty, authors like Patrick Ness create a literary protected realm for child readers to unpack grief, dismount guilt, and become heroes of their stories. Here, research meets practice, sustaining how texts serve by first recognizing pain and then softening their edges. In addition to the interest they garner in academia, trauma narratives should be included in school curricula.

In a world where children's emotional burdens are too often met with ghosting, this dissertation affirms that literature can represent their inner wounds. As the yew tree symbolizes, true healing is not about pain's disappearance but having the courage to face it. In this act of courage, stories offer a lifeline for the rescue of the broken. This is storytelling's

gift to the young; they discover how to become writers of their tales, filling them with hope and resilience.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: With a Critical Text and Translation of The Poetics*. Translated and edited by S.H. Butcher, 4th ed., Macmillan and Co., 1932.
- Arruda-Colli, Marina N. F., et al. "Communication About Dying, Death, and Bereavement: A Systematic Review of Children's Literature." *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, vol. 20, no. 5, March 2017, pp. 548–59. Mary Ann Libert Inc. Publisher, <https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2016.0494>.
- Becker, Maria J. "AWARENESS-ACCEPTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION (AAT©): Letting-go of Distress and Trauma Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Expanding Consciousness." *The International Journal of Healing and Caring*, vol. 7, no. 03, Sep. 2007. <https://ijhc.org/2007/09/02/awareness-acceptance-and-transformation-aat-letting-go-of-distress-and-trauma-using-the-wisdom-of-your-body-and-expanding-consciousness/>.
- Berthoud, Ella, and Susan Elderkin. *The Novel Cure: An A to Z of Literary Remedies*. Canongate Books, 2013.
- Brewster, Annie, and Rachel Zimmerman. *The Healing Power of Storytelling: Using Personal Narrative to Navigate Illness, Trauma, and Loss*. North Atlantic Books, 2022.
- Canty, Nick. "Bibliotherapy: Its Processes and Benefits and Application in Clinical and Developmental Settings." *LOGOS: Journal of the World Book Community*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2017, pp. 32–40. BRILL, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1878-4712-11112133>.
- Carlin, Nathan. "A Psychoanalytic Reading of A Monster Calls: Biblical Congruencies and Theological Implications." *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 66, no. 6, Dec. 2017, pp. 1-19. SPRINGER NATURE Link, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0777-x>.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

- Cavanagh, Natali. "Toxicity in Themes of Control: An Analysis of the Anglo-Western Cancer Rhetoric in A Monster Calls." *Digital Literature Review*, vol. 4, Jan. 2017, pp. 117-129. <https://doi.org/10.33043/DLR.4.0.117-129>.
- Chaston, Joel D. and Marilyn Fain Apseloff. "The Other Deaths in Bridge to Terabithia." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, Apr. 1991, pp. 238-41. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0757>.
- Charry, Kendra. "4 Types of Attachment Styles." *Verywell Mind*, 14 Dec. 2023, <https://www.verywellmind.com/attachment-styles-2795344>. Accessed 15 May 2025.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 3-25.
- Cohen, Judith A., et al. "Childhood Traumatic Grief: Concepts and Controversies." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, vol. 3, no. 4, Oct. 2002, pp. 307-327. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26636294>.
- Coats, Karen. "Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic." *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, edited by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats, and Roderick McGillis, Routledge, 2008, pp. 77-92.
- Cowan, S. Leigh Ann. "One And One-Half Friends: A Laingian Approach to Katherine Paterson's Bridge to Terabithia." *New Literaria*, vol. 03, no. 02, Jan. 2022, pp. 56-67. <https://doi.org/10.48189/nl.2022.v03i2.008>.
- Duncan, Mary Katherine Waibel. "Creating bibliotherapeutic libraries for pediatric patients and their families: potential contributions of a cognitive theory of traumatic stress." *Journal of pediatric nursing*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2010, pp. 25-7. *PubMed. National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine*, [10.1016/j.pedn.2008.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2008.08.001).

Day, Giskin. "Good Grief: bereavement literature for young adults and *A Monster Calls*."

Med Humanities, vol. 38, no. 2, Nov. 2012, pp. 115-119. *BMJ Journals*,

<https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2012-010260>.

Delisle, Robert G., and Abigail S. Woods. "Death and Dying in Children's Literature: An

Analysis of Three Selected Works." *Language Arts*, vol. 53-53, no. 6, Sept. 1976, pp.

683-88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41404240.

De Vries, Dawn, et al. "Healing with Books: A Literature Review of Bibliotherapy Used with

Children and Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma." *Therapeutic Recreation*

Journal, vol. 51, no. 1, 2017, pp. 48-74,

<https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2017-V51-I1-7652>.

Diffrient, David Scott. "Triangulating Terabithia." *Journal of Children and Media*, vol. 5-4,

27 Oct. 2011, pp. 442-56. *Taylor & Franis Online*,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2011.599521>.

Dyregrov, Atle. *Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008.

Dyregrov, Atle, et al. "Grief and Traumatic Grief in Children in the Context of Mass

Trauma." *Current Psychiatry Reports*, vol. 17, no. 6, 2015, p. 48. *Springer*,

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-015-0577-x>.

Erozkan, Atilgan. "The Link between Types of Attachment and Childhood Trauma."

Universal Journal of Educational Research, vol. 4, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1071-1079.

<https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2016.040517>.

Fajar, Muhammad, and Kurnia Ningsih. "Reality Denial in the Novel *A Monster Calls* (2011)

by Patrick Ness." *E-Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2021,

pp. 223-234. <https://doi.org/10.24036/ell.v10i2.106782>.

- Farnia, Fatemeh, and Farideh Pourgiv. "Empowerment in *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness." Vol. 6, no. 2, Dec. 2017, pp. 41–49. *Linguistic and Literary Broad Research and Innovation*, <https://brain.edusoft.ro/index.php/libri/article/view/721>.
- Ferow, Aime. "Childhood Grief and Loss." *European Journal of Educational Sciences, Special Edition*, Oct. 2019, pp. 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.s.v6a1>.
- Flintoff, John-Paul. "How Do You Tell a Child His Mother Is Dying?" *The Guardian*, 10 Dec. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/10/monster-calls-film-mum-friend-siobhan-dowd-boy-talking-tree-book>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Fredericks, Linda. "Storytelling and Resiliency: Why Children Need Stories." *Healing Hearts: Stories of Healing, Loss, and Transformation*, edited by Allison M. Cox and David H. Albert, 2nd printing, New Society Publishers, 2005, pp. 126-134.
- Frey-Rhon, Liliane. *From Freud to Jung: A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Unconscious*. Translated by Fred E. Engreen and Evelyn K. Engreen, C.G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology, 1974.
- Gaiman, Neil. *The Wolves in the Walls*. Illustrated by Dave McKean, HarperCollins, 2003.
- Gallo, Jessica, et al. "Shining Light in Dark Corners: Choosing Heavy Books for the Classroom." *English Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 4, 01 Apr. 2020, pp. 7–8. *NCTE*, <https://doi.org/10.58680/elq202030605>.
- Ghoshal, Nishan, and Paul O. Wilkinson. "Narrative Matters: A Monster Calls – a Portrayal of Dissociation in Childhood Bereavement." *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, vol. 24, no. 1, June 2018, pp. 84–85. *The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12286>.
- Gibson, Lois Rauch, and Laura M. Zaidman. "Death in Children's Literature: Taboo or Not Taboo?" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, Dec. 1991, pp. 232–34. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0855>.

- Gilmore, David D. *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Gomez, Lavinia. *An Introduction to Object Relations*. New York University Press, 1997.
- Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature, 2008.
- Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity*. Maybin, Janet and Nicola J. Watson, editors. Palgrave Macmillan and Open University, 2008.
- Grenby, M. O. "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity." *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories*, edited by Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 39–56.
- Hassan, Shaima' F. "Intrusion Fantasy as a Cathartic Tool in Patrick Ness a Monster Calls." *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 1, June 2022, pp. 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.14500/kujhss.v5n1y2022.pp21-28>.
- Heath, Shirely Brice, and Jennifer Lynn Wolf. "Brain and Behaviour: The Coherence of Teenage Responses to Young Adult Literature." *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture: The Emergent Adult*, edited by Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva. Routledge, 2012, pp. 139-154.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. 2015 ed., Basic Books, 1992.
- Howard, Ellen. "Facing the Dark Side in Children's Books." *the Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 12, no. 1, June 1988, pp. 7–11. Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.0.0153>.
- Howarth, Michael. *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature*. McFarland, 2014.
- Hunt, Peter, et al. *Understanding Children's Literature*. Edited by Peter Hunt, 2th ed., Routledge, 2005.
- Hunt, Peter, and Millicent Lenz. *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*. Continuum

- International Publishing Group, 2001.
- Jenkins, Jaden. *Mortality Within Children's Literature: Fable Versus Realism in the Cases of Charlotte's Web and Bridge to Terabithia*. 2020. The University of North Carolina at Asheville, BA thesis.
- Kpeno, Audifax, Pratap Kumar Sahu, and Ernest Bagson. "The Role of Family in Trauma Recovery: A Review of the Literature." *Anatolian Journal of Mental Health*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2024, pp. 10–28. *Zenodo*, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11351299>.
- Lewin, David. "Between Horror and Boredom: Fairy Tales and Moral Education." *Ethics and Education*, vol. 15, no. 2, Feb. 2020, pp. 213-231. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2020.1731107>.
- Lundin, Anne. *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers*. Routledge, 2004.
- Malilang, Chrysogonus Siddha. "How Children Decode Visual Narrative in Gaiman's and McKean's *The Wolves in the Walls*." *Resital*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2013, pp. 81-90, <https://doi.org/10.24821/resital.v14i1.397>.
- Mathis, Karena. "Hyper Independence: Meaning, Signs, Causes, & Treatment." *Gratitude Lodge*, 21 Aug. 2024, <https://www.gritudelodge.com/mental-health/trauma/hyper-independence/>. Accessed 15 May 2025.
- McClatchey, Irene Searles, et al. "Traumatic and Complicated Grief Among Children: One or Two Constructs?" *Death Studies*, vol. 37, no. 9, 2013, pp. 786–793. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2012.725571>.
- McCort, Jessica R., editor. *Reading in the Dark: Horror in Children's Literature and Culture*. University Press of Mississippi, 2016.
- McLeod, Saul. "Attachment Theory in Psychology." *Simply Psychology*, 20 May 2025. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment.html>. Accessed 29 May 2025.

- Mohsen, Karima. "Transcendence and Belief After Postmodernism: A Performatist Reading of Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2011)." *TEXTUAL TURNINGS Journal of English and Comparative Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2023, pp. 78-92. *Textual Turnings: An International Peer Reviewed Journal in English Studies*, [10.21608/taip.2023.331310](https://doi.org/10.21608/taip.2023.331310).
- Moore, Timothy E., and Reet Mae. "Who Dies and Who Cries: Death and Bereavement in Children's Literature." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 37, no. 4, Dec. 1987, pp. 52–64. Oxford Academic, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1987.tb01008.x>.
- Morgan, Alice. *What Is Narrative Therapy?: An Easy-to-Read Introduction*. Dulwich Centre Publications, 2000.
- Nader, Kathleen O. "Childhood Traumatic Loss: The Interaction of Trauma and Grief." *Death and Trauma: The Traumatology of Grieving*, edited by Charles R. Figley, Brian E. Bride, and Nicholas Mazza, Taylor & Francis, 1997.
- Neimeyer, Robert A. "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth: A Narrative Elaboration." *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 53-59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447202>.
- Ness, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. Illustrated by Jim Kay, from an original idea by Siobhan Dowd, Walker Books, 2015.
- Ness, Patrick. "An Interview with Patrick Ness." Interview by Macky, *Alexa Loves Books*, 06 Jan. 2017, <http://www.alexalovesbooks.com/2017/01/an-interview-with-patrick-ness.html>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Ness, Patrick. "'The fear of losing control' – Interview with Patrick Ness." Interview by Martin Kulik, *Postmondaen*, 30 Apr. 2017, <https://postmondaen.net/the-fear-of-losing-control-interview-with-patrick-ness-a-monster-calls/>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.

- Ness, Patrick. "Interview: How Patrick Ness Adopted A Monster Calls." Interview by Jazz Tangcay, *Awards Daily*, <https://www.awardsdaily.com/2016/12/22/interview-patrick-ness-adapted-monster-calls/>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Ness, Patrick. "Interview with Patrick Ness and Extract of A Monster Calls." Interview by Splendibird. 04 May 2011, *The Mountains of Instead*, <https://mountainsofinstead.blogspot.com/2011/05/interview-with-patrick-ness-and-extract.html>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Ness, Patrick. "Interview with Patrick Ness: Author and Screenwriter of 'A Monster Calls'." Interviewed by David Rafailovich, *The Knight News*, 28 Feb. 2017, <https://www.theknightnews.com/2017/02/28/interview-with-patrick-ness-author-and-screenwriter-of-a-monster-calls/>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Ness, Patrick. "Q & A with Patrick Ness." Interview by Michael Levy, 08 Oct. 2009, *Publishers Weekly*, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/bytopic/authors/interviews/article/10556-q-a-with-patrick-ness.html>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2025.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. "Guilt, Empathy and the Ethical Potential of Children's Literature." *Barnboken*, vol. 35, no. 1, Jan. 2012. Taylor & Francis Online, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.14811/clr.v35i0.139>.
- Owens, Rose. "Stories as Tools for Coping." *Healing Hearts: Stories of Healing, Loss, and Transformation*, edited by Allison M. Cox and David H. Albert, 2nd printing, New Society Publishers, 2005, pp. 137-140.
- Petković, Danijela. "Revising Fairy Tales for Children: Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* and Terry Pratchett's *The Wee Free Men*." *Facta Universitatis, Series: Linguistics and Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2023, pp. 67-80. <https://doi.org/10.22190/FULL230330006P>.

- Paterson, Katherine, et al. *Bridge to Terabithia*. Illustrated by Donna Diamond, HarperCollins Publishers, 1977.
- Rosen, Gail. "Storytelling and Bereavement." *Healing Hearts: Stories of Healing, Loss, and Transformation*, edited by Allison M. Cox and David H. Albert, 2nd printing, New Society Publishers, 2005, pp. 92-98.
- Sasada, Hiroko. "The Portrayal of Monsters in Illustrated Children's Books: Catharsis in *A Monster Calls*." 清泉女子大学紀要 [Bulletin of Seisen Women's University], no. 61, Dec. 2013, pp. 67-79. *Seisen University Institutional Repository*, <https://seisen.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/599>.
- Saxena, Silvi. "Is Hyper Independence a Trauma Response?" *Choosing Therapy*, 25 Apr. 2024, <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/hyper-independence-trauma/>. Accessed 15 May 2025.
- Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. SAGE Publications, 2002.
- Stallcup, Jackie E. "Power, Fear, and Children's Picture Books." *Children's Literature*, vol. 30, 2002, pp. 125-158. *Project MUSE*, [10.1353/chl.0.0698](https://www.projectmuse.org/doc/10.1353/chl.0.0698).
- Stengel, Barbara S. "The Complex Case of Fear and Safe Space." *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 29, Sep. 2010, pp. 523-40. *SPRINGER NATURE Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9198-3>.
- Storr, Catherine. *Fear and Evil in Children Books*. Faber, 1958.
- Trim, Mary. *Growing and Knowing: A Selection Guide for Children's Literature*. K. G. Saur Verlag GmbH, 2004.
- Trickey, David, and Dora Black. "Long-Term Psychiatric Effects of Trauma on Children." *Trauma*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2000, pp. 261-268. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146040860000200403>.

- Ulfa, Aghnia Kamilia. "A Concept of Characteristics of Magical Realism in Patrick Ness' A Monster Calls: A Merger of Objective and Adolescent Psychological Approach." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 5, Jan. 2021, pp. 089–94. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.65.14>.
- Whitley, David. "Childhood and Modernity: Dark Themes in Carol Ann Duffy's Poetry for Children." *Children S Literature in Education*, vol. 38, no. 2, Mar. 2007, pp. 103–14. *SPRINGER NATURE Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-006-9036-y>.
- Yarova, Aliona. "'I Am the Eternal Green Man': Holistic Ecology in Reading Patrick Ness's a Monster Calls." *Children S Literature in Education*, vol. 51, no. 4, June 2019, pp. 466–79. *SPRINGER NATURE Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-019-09388-3>.
- Yilmaz, Hasan, et al. "The Effect of Traumatic Experiences on Attachment Styles." *Anales de Psicología / Annals of Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2022, pp. 489–498. *Horizon Research*, <https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.489601>.
- Zuppari, Sam. "From *Night Kitchen* to *Wolves in the Walls*: A Brief Psychoanalytic Look at Children's Picture Books." *Infant Observation: International Journal of Infant Observation and Its Applications*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2016, pp. 149–164, *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698036.2016.1228469>.

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'interaction entre le traumatisme vécu pendant l'enfance et le récit comme outil thérapeutique dans *A Monster Calls* (2011) de Patrick Ness. L'intrigue suit le parcours de Conor O'Malley, un garçon de 13 ans confronté à la complexité émotionnelle engendrée par la phase terminale de la maladie de sa mère. La présente étude s'appuie sur la théorie du traumatisme et la thérapie narrative pour analyser l'expérience traumatique de Conor et son chemin vers la guérison. Patrick Ness introduit le récit comme méthode de guérison à travers une créature fantastique, le monstre, qui raconte à Conor des histoires lui permettant de mieux comprendre son énigme intérieure. Ce travail vise à explorer le traumatisme de Conor ainsi que l'influence des récits du monstre sur son processus de guérison. En outre, cette recherche analyse les mécanismes de la thérapie narrative dans le traitement des blessures personnelles et dans le développement psychologique de Conor. Ness transforme l'image du monstre, passant de celle d'un cauchemar à une source de soutien, permettant ainsi à Conor d'accepter la perte de sa mère à la fin du roman. À travers l'étude de cas de Patrick Ness, ce mémoire met en lumière l'importance d'aborder des thèmes lourds dans la littérature d'enfance et jeunesse. Il souligne également le rôle du récit dans le traitement des expériences difficiles, aidant les enfants à surmonter leurs souffrances émotionnelles et à trouver de l'espoir au milieu de l'agonie.

Mots-clés: Traumatisme, Guérison, Thérapie Narrative, Littérature de jeunesse, *A Monster Calls*, Récit, Les contes de fées.

مُلخَص

تتحرى هذه الدراسة التداخل بين الصدمات النفسية في مرحلة الطفولة و سرد القصص كأداة علاجية في رواية *نداء الوحش* (2011) للكاتب باتريك نيس. تدور الحبكة حول كونر أومالي، فتى يبلغ من العمر 13 عامًا، يعاني من تعقيدات عاطفية ناتجة عن مرض والدته العضال. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نظرية الصدمة و العلاج بالسرد لتحليل تجربة كونر الصادمة و رحلته نحو الشفاء. يُقدم باتريك نيس سرد القصص كوسيلة للشفاء من خلال مخلوق خيالي، الوحش، الذي يروي لكونر حكايات تساعد على فهم ألمه المُعقّد. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف صدمة كونر و تأثير قصص الوحش في عملية تعافيه. علاوة على ذلك، تحلل هذه الدراسة آليات العلاج بالسرد في شفاء الجروح النفسية و تعزيز النمو النفسي لكونر. يقوم نيس بإعادة تشكيل صورة الوحش من كابوس مخيف إلى مصدر دعم، مما يُمكن كونر في نهاية الرواية من تقبّل فقدان والدته. من خلال دراسة رواية باتريك نيس، تسلط هذه الأطروحة الضوء على أهمية تقديم المواضيع الشائكة في أدب الأطفال، و تُبرز دور سرد القصص في معالجة التجارب الصعبة، و مساعدة الأطفال على تجاوز معاناتهم العاطفية و العثور على الأمل في وسط الألم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة النفسية، الشفاء، العلاج بالسرد، أدب الأطفال، *نداء الوحش*، سرد القصص، حكايات خرافية.